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THE FALL OF MR. RATCLIFF!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story of Tom Merry and Co., the chums of St. Jim's.

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

A Shock for Figgins & Co.

"MY HAT!"
It was George Figgins, of the New House at St. Jim's, who uttered that remark. And George Figgins did not sound very pleased.

He was at the cupboard in his study. The door was open, and Figgins was staring inside. In the study itself were Kerr, the junior from Scotland, and Wynn, commonly called "Fatty."

Kerr looked at his leader in surprise. "What's the matter, Figgy?" he asked.

Figgins turned round, and glared at Fatty Wynn.

"Wynn, you chump," he exclaimed, "where's that giddy cake I put in the cupboard?"

"What do I know about it?" demanded Fatty Wynn wrathfully.

"A fat lot, I should say!" growled Figgins.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Kerr. "Don't say that the cake has gone, Figgy!"

"It has!" said Figgins grimly. "And there's a fat, gormandising chump going, too!"

Fatty Wynn rose hastily to his feet, and backed towards the door. Kerr watched him, his expression as grim as that of his leader.

"Fatty Wynn," said Figgins dramatically, "where did you last see that cake?"

"I say, you know!" said Wynn hastily. "You're making a great mistake if you think I pinched the cake!"

Figgins looked at Kerr, and the Scotch junior nodded.

"Honour bright—you haven't touched it?" asked Figgins.

"Honour bright!" said Fatty Wynn firmly.

Figgins looked distressed.

"Then I suppose that's all right," he said slowly. "But look here, you chaps! This is rotten! There's half the School

House chaps coming over to tea—and there's not a giddy sardine left!" Kerr started.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Have the sardines gone, too? And the sosses?"

"Oh dear!" said Fatty Wynn dismally. "Don't say everything's gone, Figgy!"

Figgins pointed to the cupboard. "There you are!" he said grimly.

"Look for yourselves! Everything eatable has been scoffed!"

"My hat!"

Fatty Wynn was almost beyond speech. He had been looking forward to the feed that was to be held in the New House study that evening. But there could not be a feed without food, and it certainly looked very much as if the School House juniors would be disappointed when they arrived.

"I wonder who it was?" said Kerr. "Redfern—a rag perhaps?"

Fatty Wynn jumped. "M-m-my stars!"

"What's biting you now, Fatty?" demanded Kerr and Figgins.

"Trumble—the School House rotter!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn angrily. "Here, come on, you chaps! We'll give him scuff our grub!"

"Are you sure?" asked Figgins angrily.

"Certain!" said Fatty hastily. "I saw the rotter coming out of the House as I came in from classes. Here, come on!"

Figgins and Kerr needed no further bidding. Their grim expressions boded ill for the fat sneak of the Fourth.

Baggy Trimble was found in Study No. 2 of the School House. The New House juniors had no need to question him. He jumped to his feet and denied having been in the New House before they spoke. He was seized in a moment, and borne to the ground.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yow-ow-ow! Ow!" he yelled. "Oh dear! Rescue! Fire!"

"Bump him again!" said George Figgins grimly.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yow! Groogh! Yoop!" yelled Baggy Trimble.

He began to feel very sorry he had left classes early and raided Figgins & Co.'s study!

Bump, bump, bump!

Figgins and Kerr and Wynn bumped the fat junior until they could bump him no more. They were panting for breath as they dropped him to the ground for the last time. But Trimble did not stop howling at the same moment.

"Yow! Oh dear!" he gasped. "Yow! You've busted my collar-bone, you silly chumps!"

"We'll bust you altogether if you pinch our cake again!" said Figgins darkly. And the New House Co. returned to their study.

Two minutes later the door was thrown open, and a number of juniors trooped into the study.

Tom Merry, the junior captain, came in first. He was followed by a junior who wore a monocle in his eye, and who was dressed neatly in an Eton suit. His waistcoat was white—as white as his collar, which meant that it was as white as white could be.

This was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, second son of the Earl of Eastwood, known to his intimates as Gussy.

"Bat Jove, Figgy!" he said. "Can I smell cookin'?"

"You can't!" said Figgins grimly.

"And I'm sorry to tell you chaps that the cake I spoke about has gone, nor—"

All the juniors from the School House looked at Fatty Wynn.

"Good old Fatty!" murmured Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell. "I suppose you have a biscuit we can share between us?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't suppose he has left one," said Jack Blake, leader of Study No. 6 of the School House. "If there is one little biscuit left, Figgy, you

ought to stick it in a glass case and exhibit it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It wasn't Fatty," said Kerr quietly. "It was Trimble—we've just come back from bumping him!"

"But we're in funds, as it happens," said Figgins. "I think we'll send Fatty down to the tuckshop to buy some more tuck!"

"That's the stuff, Figgie, old man!" said Fatty Wynn enthusiastically. "I'll go with pleasure!"

"You'll bring it all back—honour bright!" asked Kerr cautiously.

"Every crumb!" said Fatty eagerly. "What shall we have? Sosses, ham, eggs, tomatoes, and perhaps a few cakes?"

"Here's a giddy quidlet, my son!" interrupted Figgins. "Hop it!"

Fatty "hopped it" quickly enough. The prospect of a good feed was about the only thing that would make Fatty hurry—with the possible exception of occasions when Fatty Wynn played between the goalposts.

"Sit down, you chaps!" said Figgins hospitably. "Manners, there's a new photograph-album which might interest you in the bookcase."

"Good!" said Manners instantly.

The juniors managed to find room to sit down round the fire. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who moved rather languidly, found there was only the coal-box left a minute after Figgins had invited them to be seated.

He stood up, surveying the coal-box doubtfully through his monocle.

"It's all right, Gussy!" said Figgins, with a chuckle. "It was dusted only a fortnight ago!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Figgie, pway don't think me wude, deah boy!" said Gussy hastily. "I was thinkin' of my twounahs—"

"Sit down!" growled Jack Blake.

By way of helping his noble chum, Blake gave Gussy a push. The Swell of St. Jim's sat down hurriedly.

"Ow! Weally, Blake," he began hotly, and jumped to his feet.

"Now, don't make a fuss in another chap's study, Gussy!" said Blake warningly. "I wouldn't have brought you up if I thought you were going to let down the House—"

"Bai Jove, Blake!" exclaimed D'Arcy hastily. "I didn't mean—"

"That's all right!" broke in Blake magnanimously. "Sit down!"

"Very well, Blake," said Gussy loftily. "But I weally think I shall have to administrah coewction when we wurn—"

"Oh dear!" sighed Tom Merry. "Isn't there any stopping that dummy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gazed witheringly through his eyeglasses at the leader of the Shell, but refrained from passing any remark. That look, in D'Arcy's opinion, was quite enough.

Tom Merry chuckled, and winked at Blake.

Fatty Wynn arrived at that moment, laden with bags and parcels.

"Here you are, Figgie," he said eagerly. "Haven't been long, have I?"

"You haven't!" said Figgins, with a grin. "But it will be some time before you get anything for it."

"Oh! Really, I— You're not going to bear malice, are you, Figgie?" said Fatty Wynn disingenuously.

Fatty's prospects of sharing in the feed disappeared with Figgins' remark. But he noticed the wink that Figgins exchanged with Kerr, and his heart beat again.

But he was wise enough not to let

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his leader know that he had seen the wink, and proceeded to lay the table.

But that feed was destined not to be eaten—at least, not by the School House juniors.

The study door was suddenly flung open, and there appeared the New House master, Mr. Ratcliff. That gentleman was undoubtedly the most unpopular master at St. Jim's, mainly on account of his bullying ways.

There was a frown on his brow when he walked in; but when he saw the feed that was being prepared the juniors could not see his eyes at all. The master's brows almost completely covered them.

"Figgins!" he rapped out at last.

The juniors had jumped to their feet as Mr. Ratcliff entered the study, and they stood surveying him nervously. There was always trouble when Mr. Ratcliff visited a junior's study.

"Y-y-yes, sir!" said Figgins slowly.

"I came to see you about the two hundred lines I gave you yesterday morning," said Mr. Ratcliff, lifting his brows a little.

"Oh, sir! I—I-I'd forgotten them, sir!" stammered Figgins.

"But I don't think!" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff. "Have you done them?"

"N-n-no, sir—"

"No, of course you haven't, Figgins!" interrupted the master sarcastically. "Instead of doing what you are told you prefer to waste your time overeating—"

"We're not, sir—" began Kerr quietly.

"Silence, Kerr! Don't dare to talk to me when I'm speaking to Figgins!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I said overeating, Figgins! And I presume these juniors have come to accompany you in your gluttonous habits—"

"Bai Jove, sir—" murmured D'Arcy indignantly.

"Hold your tongue, sir!" barked the master. "I was speaking to Figgins! I know you cannot be expected to be anything else but disrespectful in the School House. I'll have you understand that I am master of the New House!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy flushed and bit his lip. He knew, as did all the other juniors, that Mr. Ratcliff was referring to the manner in which their Housemaster, Mr. Railton, had always treated them.

Mr. Ratcliff believed very firmly that to spare the rod meant spoiling the child—or junior, as the case might be. Mr. Railton, on the other hand, treated his juniors in a just manner. Needless to say, the two Housemasters were not friends.

But Tom Merry was not going to let Mr. Ratcliff have matters all his own way.

"Excuse me, sir," he said politely.

"D'Arcy did not mean to be disrespectful. He couldn't be if he tried!"

Mr. Ratcliff smiled ironically.

"The School House notion of what is meant by the word 'respectful' is not my notion!" he said, with a sneer. "I have said enough, Figgins!"

"Y-y-yes, sir?" said Figgins.

"You will proceed to do the lines I ordered you to write immediately!" rapped out the master. "You will not be allowed to hold this disgusting orgy!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy hotly.

"Silence! I forbid you juniors to stay here whilst one of my juniors is under punishment!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "You will go to your own House at once!"

Tom Merry felt like answering the Housemaster back. But that only meant

that Mr. Ratcliff's wrath would descend upon Figgins & Co.

He led the School House juniors out of the study without a word. But D'Arcy could not resist turning round and gazing coldly at the Housemaster through his monocle.

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip angrily, and opened his mouth as if to speak. But he thought better of it, and turned to Figgins & Co. Mr. Ratcliff was not anxious to rub shoulders with Mr. Railton if he could help it. Mr. Railton strongly objected to the New House master punishing juniors of the School House.

"Get those lines written at once, Figgins!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "This—this unseemly feeding is not to continue, you understand!"

"Yes, sir!" said Figgins & Co. in unison.

And Mr. Ratcliff departed.

"Beast!" said Figgins disgustedly.

"Cad!" growled Kerr.

"Rotter!" snapped Wynn; and added more brightly: "Anyhow, he's left us the feed!"

"Hang the feed!" said Figgins—and Kerr.

But Fatty Wynn received some consolation in the fact that the feed was still to come, although it was forbidden for the time being.

Figgins & Co. had received a shock. After all the trouble to which they had gone, they could not entertain Tom Merry & Co.

And therein Figgins & Co. found much to grumble at.

CHAPTER 2.

And One for Rats!

"NICE fellow, Ratcliff!"

It was Jack Blake who made that remark. The School House juniors were on their way back to their studies, in obedience to Mr. Ratcliff's orders.

"He's a beast!" said Lowther, with a frown. "And he isn't a just beast, either!"

"Rather not!" said Digby sullenly. "I wish I could biff him!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head.

"Wathah not, deah boy," he said slowly. "Fwightful had forme to biff a mastah! But—but I'd like to see somebody else biff him, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"What's the difference?" demanded Jack Blake.

"My hat, Blake!" said Monty Lowther. "I know I'd sooner stand by and see another chap biffed than be biffed myself!"

"Rats!" said Jack Blake. And the subject of biffing Mr. Ratcliff was dropped.

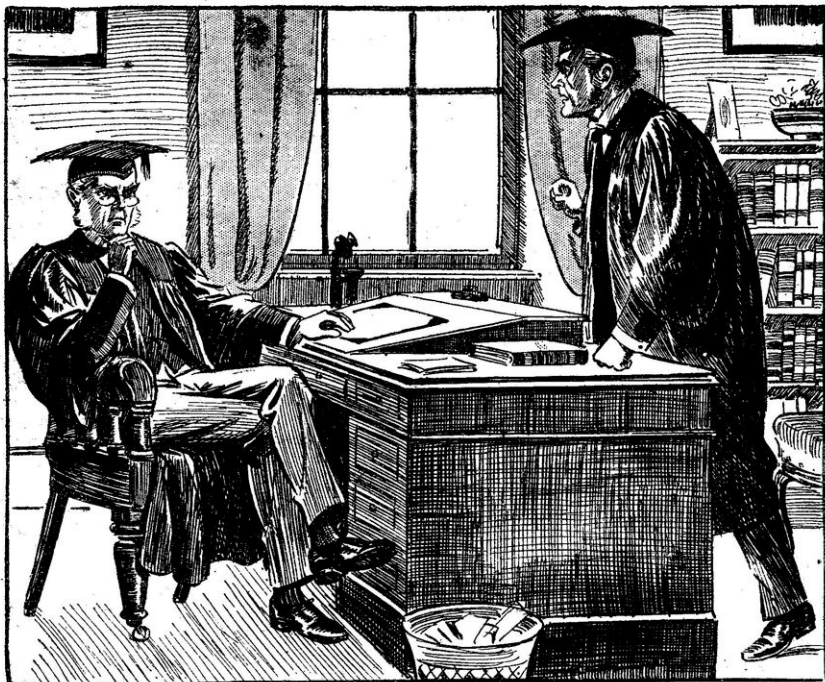
But the School House juniors did not forget the New House master. As Monty Lowther would put it, Mr. Ratcliff was a nightmare—he haunted the juniors of both Houses.

The party met Dr. Holmes, the respected Head of St. Jim's, as they were entering their own House, and they moved aside to let him pass.

"Ah, Merry!" said the Head, as the light from the lamp at the foot of the steps shone on Tom Merry's face. "I should be glad if you would kindly inform Mr. Ratcliff that I desire to see him in my study—at once!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Tom Merry promptly.

And he sped across the quad towards the New House again. Tom Merry did not hurry because he thought that the Head's tone sounded like trouble for Mr. Ratcliff. Dr. Holmes was much



The Head was seated at his desk, a worried frown on his face, when the New House master entered. "I've rather unpleasant news for you," began Doctor Holmes. "The manager at the bank has asked me if your security is good. I trust—" "My security!" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff. (See chapter 2.)

liked by the majority of fellows at St. Jim's.

He entered the House, ran up the stairs, and knocked upon Mr. Ratcliff's study door. A sharp, metallic voice bade him enter. But Mr. Ratcliff did not give the junior captain a chance to deliver the Head's message.

"If you have come to lay a complaint, Merry," said Mr. Ratcliff sourly. "I will tell you beforehand that I will not listen to it!"

"But sir—" began Tom Merry.

"I won't listen to it!" snapped the New House master. "I have forbidden Figgins to allow you to make pigs of yourselves—"

Tom Merry flushed.

"Excuse me, sir—" he began again. "I presume you have come to complain?" interrupted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Not at all, sir," answered Tom Merry coolly. "I merely came to ask you—"

"I've already informed you—"

"Dr. Holmes requires your presence in his study at once, sir!" wound up Tom Merry coldly. "That is all I have to say, sir!"

And the junior captain turned and left the study without another word.

Mr. Ratcliff frowned, and took up his mortar-board. Two minutes later he was knocking at the Head's study door.

"Come in!"

Mr. Ratcliff went into the study, and closed the door behind himself. The

Head was sitting at his desk, a worried frown on his brow. He looked up as the New House master entered.

"Ah, Mr. Ratcliff," he said. "Please be seated. 'I've rather unpleasant news for you.'"

Mr. Ratcliff started.

"Indeed, sir!" he exclaimed. "I'm sorry to hear that!"

Dr. Holmes nodded. He evidently was not enjoying the interview.

"Ahem! The manager of the bank at Rylcombe has just been speaking to me," he said slowly, as if it pained him to speak. "They've—they've been asking me if your—ahem!—your security is good. I trust—"

"My security!" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff in surprise. "Indeed, sir! Might I ask why they should ask you?"

"Ahem! It appears you are considerably overdrawn at the bank, Mr. Ratcliff—"

"Indeed, I'm not, sir!"

"Ahem! The manager says you are. I really think he ought to know!" said the Head, raising his brows slightly. "This is a painful subject to me, Mr. Ratcliff. I do not like interfering in other gentlemen's business."

Mr. Ratcliff nodded. He could not help thinking what his answer would have been if it had been Mr. Railton, the School House master, instead of the Head, to whom he was speaking.

"I quite understand, sir," he said

quietly. "But—but a great mistake has been made. Perhaps you would not mind my using your telephone, sir?"

"Not at all—not at all!" answered Dr. Holmes, with a touch of eagerness. "I most sincerely hope the manager is wrong."

Mr. Ratcliff took up the receiver, and placed it to his ear. Giving the number of the bank in Rylcombe, he waited to be put through.

"Ah! Is that the manager? No? Then please put me through to him. I'm Mr. Ratcliff, of St. Jim's!"

There was another short wait, and then the Housemaster spoke again.

"The manager? Mr. Ratcliff, speaking from St. Jim's. I understand—ahem!—that you have been asking Dr. Holmes if—yes, yes, I quite understand your point of view. But since when, might I ask, has my account been overdrawn?"

There was another short pause, and the Head saw Mr. Ratcliff's face gradually pale until it looked positively ghastly.

"What! Go-o-o-d gracious me! Dear me!"

Mr. Ratcliff gasped the words out. That he had received a great shock was evident. He put down the receiver, and turned to the Head.

"Ahem! Alas! You—you will excuse me, sir—but—but I'd rather not explain how—ahem—"

The New House master broke off, and wiped his brow with his handkerchief.

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The Head nodded sympathetically, although he did not like Mr. Ratcliff. "I quite understand Mr. Ratcliff," he said quietly. "If I can be of any use to you, I should be pleased—very pleased!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Mr. Ratcliff slowly. "Indeed, I thank you. But—but I have received a great blow, sir. As you know, a schoolmaster does not receive a very great salary. My private income has now—excuse me, sir, I should like to return to my study!"

"Certainly!" said Dr. Holmes, and rose from his chair, and opened the door for the New House master to pass out. Mr. Ratcliff did not get out of the School House without being seen. Baggy Trimble, the fat junior of the Fourth, passed him on the way to his study, which was No. 2 in the Fourth Form passage.

Mr. Ratcliff passed him without a glance, but Baggy Trimble saw at once that something was amiss. The New House master's face was still as white as when he had first heard the message over the telephone, whatever that was.

Baggy Trimble's eyes glistened. He watched Mr. Ratcliff pass round the corner of the passage, and down the stairs, then ran as fast as he could—which was not very fast—to Jack Blake's study.

He burst into the room, his eyes shining with excitement.

"Hallo!" said Jack Blake quickly. "House on fire, Baggy?"

Trimble shook his head excitedly.

"No; something better than that!" he said hastily.

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners, of the Shell, had gone back to Blake's study after leaving the New House, and they gazed questioningly at Baggy Trimble as he spoke.

"Going to stand us a feed?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"No; better than a feed!" said Trimble. "Ratty's in trouble!"

The Co.'s stared at one another.

"Off your dot?" asked Manners pleasantly.

"Nunno; But I passed him on the stairs just now," said Trimble; and proceeded to draw upon his imagination now that he saw he had caused a sensation. "His face was white—as white as Gussy's—ahem!—D'Arcy's waistcoat! He was grinding his teeth with rage, and his perspiration was splashing on the passage!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with laughter, and Baggy Trimble looked annoyed. But thinking that the juniors were glad to hear that Mr. Ratcliff was in trouble, he continued his story—with slight additions to the truth.

"When he saw me he paused," he said eagerly. "He glared at me, and I thought flames darted out of his eyes and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Baggy!"

"Fact!" said Trimble warmly.

"Then, after one fiendish grin—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

"He walked on!" finished up Trimble.

"I think he'd just come from the Head's study. Perhaps he's got the sack!"

"No such luck!" said the juniors in unison.

"Bai Jove!" I wathah hope the beast leaves St. Jim's!" said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I'm suah the school would be a far more pleasant place with Watcliff out of the way!"

"Gussy," sighed Monty Lowther, "why raise false hopes in our manly breasts?"

"Haha, ha!"

The news which Baggy Trimble had imparted had evidently not upset the juniors. If it had been Mr. Railton whom Trimble had seen, there would probably have been a deputation from the juniors to the popular Housemaster to see if they could do anything for him.

But Mr. Ratcliff was a different matter altogether.

Baggy Trimble, having finished telling the juniors all that he knew, hurried away to spread the news round the rest of the studies.

Tom Merry looked thoughtful when the door had closed behind Trimble.

"Of course, Baggy was talking out of the back of his neck," he said slowly, "but—"

"We hope he wasn't!" said Robert Arthur Digby shortly.

"Well, yes. But as we happen to know that Ratcliff has been to the Head, I suppose we can moderate Trimble's yarn, and say that something has upset the old bird," went on Tom Merry. "Now—I wonder if he's been wigged by the Head?"

"Quite likely!" said Jack Blake. "He's always up to some bullying trick in the New House. I expect the Head

has found out something and has choked him off!"

"He always looks pasty," said Monty Lowther. "I expect Baggy Trimble saw him under a light; he would look more rotten than usual then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to laugh at!" said Lowther.

"Doesn't he always look rotten?"

"Wathah!" said D'Arcy warmly. "I must say, Lowthah, you are cowwett there!"

At that moment there came another interruption. Figgins & Co., their eyes shining with delight and excitement, burst into the study.

"Heard the news?" asked Figgins excitedly.

"What news?" demanded the two School House Co's.

"Ratty!" almost shouted Fatty Wynn.

The juniors looked interested. They were likely to hear something sound from Figgins & Co. They would not draw upon their imaginations, as Baggy Trimble had done.

"He's in trouble!" said Figgins quickly. "My hat! And I'm jolly glad the beast has got it in the neck!"

"Rather!" agreed Fatty Wynn.

"But we don't know exactly what the trouble is," put in Kerr. "You see, all we heard was that he'd been to see the Head—"

"That's right," interrupted Tom Merry. "I took the message from the Head."

"Good!" said Giggins enthusiastically, taking up the story. "Then Redfern heard him walking up and down his study groaning!"

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Groaning! Great Scott!"

Tom Merry looked doubtfully at Figgins.

"Redfern hasn't made a mistake?" he asked cautiously.

"No, Redfern's not like your Baggy Trimble—"

"He's not ours!" growled Monty Lowther. "We wouldn't own him for all the tea in China!"

"Well, he's in your rotten—ahem!" I mean, he's in the School House," said Figgins, hastily correcting himself as he saw the warlike expressions that immediately leapt into the School House juniors' faces on the mention of their House. "Old Ratty's got it in the neck, and serve him jolly well right, the beast!"

Figgins & Co. had suffered much under the harsh ruling of Mr. Ratcliff. More than once the New House had been driven into revolt by the bullying manner in which Mr. Ratcliff treated them.

Now that it seemed as if the Housemaster was in trouble, he had few sympathisers, and Figgins & Co. were not amongst that few. The juniors were not bearing malice exactly, but they could not help feeling glad that Mr. Ratcliff was sampling something like the trouble he had caused them.

"Perhaps the beast will have to leave St. Jim's!" said Fatty Wynn suddenly. "Then we can have as many feeds as we like—"

"Shut up about the grub!" snapped George Figgins. "Can't you think of anything else besides grub, you fat cormorant?"

"Yes, rather," returned Wynn. "Ratty, for instance!"

The juniors smiled.

"I wondah—I wondah!" murmured D'Arcy.

"You wonder what, fathead?" asked Jack Blake cheerfully.

Arthur Augustus turned a withering stare on his leader.

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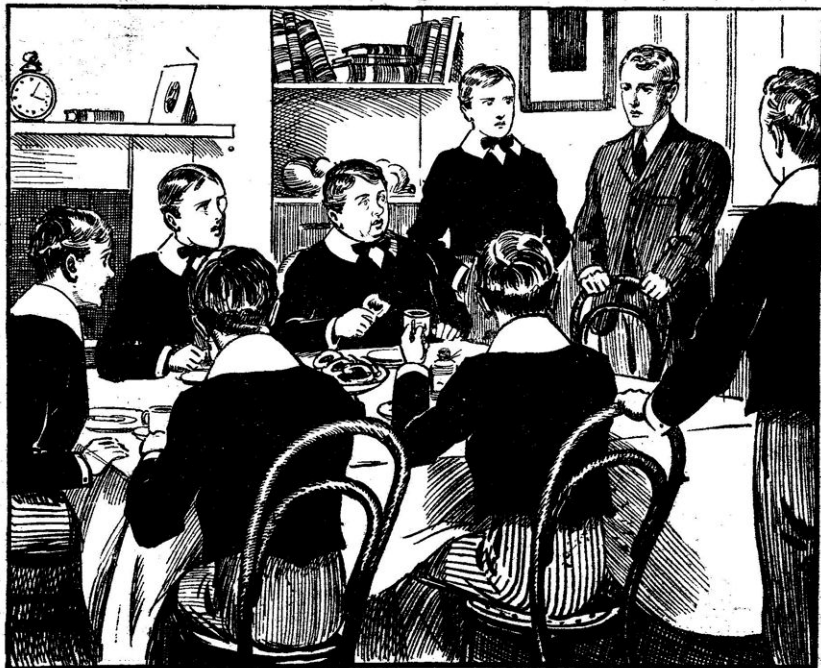
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"I don't like the beast—ahem!—Mr. Ratcliff any more than you do," began Monteith. "But I draw the line when it comes to kicking a chap when he's down and out!" "Down and out?" echoed the juniors. (See Chapter 3.)

"Weally, Blake, I uttably refuse to be cawtewised as a fathead!" he said coldly. "I must ask you to withdraw that remark!"

"Rats!" said Jack Blake coolly.

"If you say 'wats' to me, Blake—"

"Oh, take him out, and dump him in the dustbin, somebody," groaned Lowther. "He talks like a blessed gramophone!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Brrrr!"

D'Arcy fixed his eyeglass firmly in his eye, and stared coldly at the Shell junior.

"If you were not a visitah to this studay, Monty Lowthah!" he said coldly. "I should be obliged to administah a feaful thwashin'!"

"And Blake would be bound to fetch a stretcher!" said Lowther cheerfully. "But that doesn't tell us what you were wondering, Gussy! If you've got anything sensible to say—"

"Bai Jove, Lowthah, if you persist in sayin' Gussy hotly. 'Howevah, I'm in an awkward posish. I'm your best, so cannot be rude to you. I was wonderin', deah boys—"

"So you said before!" said Tom Merry. "Is it a painful operation?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus glared at the Shell junior witheringly, but not for worlds would D'Arcy have been rude to a fellow in his study who did not belong to it.

That, in D'Arcy's opinion, would have been the height of bad form.

"I'm sowwy, Tom Mewwy, but I shall have to cut you off the list of my friends," he said icily.

"So long, you chaps," said Figgins, making his way towards the door. "Sorry I can't stop to see what Gussy's wonderin'; he takes too jolly long!"

"Pway wait, deah boys," said D'Arcy hastily.

The New House juniors waited.

"I was wonderin' if Mr. Watchcliff has been disappointed about his clobber not awritin'," went on D'Arcy, but that was as far as he got.

"Chump!" growled Blake.

"Dummy!"

"Idiot!"

"Ass!"

These and other remarks of a similar nature, broke from the juniors. Had they thought a moment, they might have known that D'Arcy would think of clothes as the source of Mr. Ratcliff's trouble. Clothes, to D'Arcy, was like grub to Fatty Wynn—one of the most important things of life.

"Bai Jove, you chaps! I absolutely refuse to listen to any more wibald remarks!" he said hotly. "As for Blake & Co., I shall latab have the pleasuah of administahin'—"

"A feaful thwashin'!" Lowther finished up for him.

That was the last straw. With all the

dignity that he could put into his expression, D'Arcy surveyed the grinning juniors. Then, with his nose high in the air, he left the study.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" chuckled Lowther.

Gussy did not reply. He was past words, and blows, to a fellow who was a visitor to the study, could not even be thought of.

The juniors left in the study chuckled as they looked at one another.

"Gussy hasn't helped us very much," said Figgins, with a grin. "But we know the beast has got it in the neck somehow, or through something, and that's all we jolly well care!"

"Rather!" said Kerr and Wynn. And the New House juniors, almost jubilant because their intensely-disliked Housemaster was in trouble, nodded to the School House juniors, and walked quickly back to their own House, leaving Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. to discuss the matter.

CHAPTER 3.

A Check to Celebrations!

"TOMMY!"

It was George Figgins who shouted the name.

Tom Merry & Co. were crossing the quad to the tuckshop after dinner the day after Mr. Ratcliff had

stopped their little feed in Figgins' study.

The Shell juniors stopped, and waited for their rivals to come up. "Hullo!" said Tom Merry. "Going to the tuckshop?"

"I should jolly well think we are!" said Fatty Wynn warmly.

"We're going to order the biggest feed you've ever heard about!"

"But—But Ratcliff—"

"Ratcliff, my son, is non est!" said George Figgins, with a chuckle.

The Shell juniors stood.

"What's happened?" asked Tom Merry quickly.

"Ratcliff, the beast, is leaving St. Jim's!" announced Figgins gleefully.

"The New House in the future will be a place of happiness and joy, instead of a den of hate!"

"Good!" said Monty Lowther. "My congrats!"

"Thanks!" said Figgins & Co.

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"You haven't any idea what is the trouble?" he asked, as they made their way to the tuckshop.

"Not the faintest!" said Figgins.

"And, what's more, I don't jolly well care!"

Tom Merry did not reply to that.

"So you're having a big feed to celebrate Ratcliff's going, I suppose?" said Manners.

"Jolly good idea!"

"Rather!" said Fatty Wynn heartily.

"I consider that the best way!"

"Of course, you chaps and Blake & Co. will come over this evening?" said Figgins, turning to Tom Merry.

Tom Merry hesitated. He liked the New House master no more than did Figgins & Co. But—

"We'll come!" said Manners and Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded, but did not speak.

"That's that!" said Figgins. "Come over as soon after lessons as you can!"

The juniors walked into the tuckshop, where Fatty Wynn ordered the biggest feed it had ever been his pleasure to order.

Wynn did not trouble about money—Kerr was in funds.

Tom Merry & Co., their eyes opening wider and wider as Fatty ordered article after article, began to look forward to the evening with renewed interest.

The parrot of a couple of cakes and a bottle of ginger-beer, then left Figgins & Co. to see about the feed. As a matter of strict fact, Figgins and Kerr had very little to do with it—Wynn was quite capable of looking after that.

Jack Blake & Co. were in their study, which was No. 6 of the Fourth Form passage, when Tom Merry & Co. arrived to give them Figgins & Co.'s invitation.

They promised to be on the top line two minutes after they were released from classes.

And they kept their word. They hurried straight from the classroom after lessons to the New House, and made their way to Figgins & Co.'s study.

The table was already laid. Fatty Wynn had seen to that as soon as he had got back from the tuckshop. The table literally groaned under the good things upon it.

The New House Co. were there, and with them was Redfern.

"We've come!" said Blake cheerily.

"And I must say that table is a real giddy picture. A pity old Ratcliff can't leave the giddy school every day in the week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We don't want him to!" said Figgins promptly. "Once is enough! We don't want to see him any more!"

Fatty Wynn looked up from the fire.

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where he was busy cooking sausages, eggs, and tomatoes. The fat junior's eyes were sparkling.

"I suggested to Figgins that we should keep up the day every month!" he said.

"But old Figgys doesn't seem to cotton to the idea at all!"

"If it was only cotton that was necessary, my fat tulip," said Figgins.

"I'd be on the idea like a shot. But it's cash that's necessary!"

"Well, we might when we're in funds!" said Fatty Wynn, with a glance towards the good things on the table.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther arrived at that moment, and D'Arcy

He shook hands solemnly with Monty Lowther first, then extended his hand to Tom Merry and Manners. There was not the ghost of a smile on the Shell junior's lips.

Fatty Wynn announced that the feed was ready a moment later, and the juniors crowded round the table. But there was not room for the lot of them, and Manners and Lowther seated themselves in the armchairs before the fire.

They lost nothing by so doing, for Fatty Wynn, despite his great liking for a feed, would not let them go hungry in order to satisfy his own appetite. Fatty Wynn was in his element as a host, and took care that his guests lacked nothing.

There was little chatting whilst the food was being consumed. But when there was little left, and only Fatty Wynn was eating, Figgins rose to his feet, a cup of tea in his hand.

"Gentlemen!" he said.

"Hear, hear!" said the gentlemen warmly.

"I rise to drink the health of the guests!"

"What ho!"

The health was drunk with enthusiasm—in tea.

"We are gathered together on this—"

"Suspicious occasion!" murmured Lowther.

"Rats! Shut up, Lowther, you clump!" said the chairman.

"This very auspicious occasion, when a great piece of luck has come the way of your humble friends—"

"Hurrah!"

"Ratty, the beastliness of whom you all know, is hopping it from the noble precincts of dear old St. Jim's—"

"Hurrah! Pip-pip!"

"So we're celebrating the event as it should be celebrated. The beast will no longer interrupt us when we want to entertain the gentlemen of the School House—"

"Ripping!"

"We shall be able to visit them more often, because we shall have a lot less lines to do—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So I ask you to raise your glasses—nunno, I mean your cups, and drink to our jolly good luck!"

Figgins & Co.'s eyes were glimmering with excitement. The tyrant of the New House was making his departure, for what reason nobody as yet knew.

But Ratty was going, and that was all that mattered.

The headmaster called for was drunk, and Fatty Wynn refilled the cups.

The juniors were beginning to get excited.

Arthur Augustus, D'Arcy rose to his feet as soon as Figgins sat down, his cup of tea in his hand.

"Gentlemen, I am not going to make a long speech—" he began.

"Another piece of luck!" chuckled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, dear boys—I mean, gentlemen," said D'Arcy, with dignity, "I hope you're not going to interrupt me when we're in to our friend Figgins' brilliant speech—"

"Hurrah! Loud cheers!" grinned Figgins.

"We rejoice with them, not so much because old Watty is going, but because it means so much to our respected friends, Figgins & Co."

"Hear, hear!"

"So I ask all gentlemen of the School House to stand, raise their cups, and drink to their good luck!"

The School House juniors rose to their feet as requested by their noble chum, and the toast was drunk with increased enthusiasm.

No. 35.—TOWSER.



A noble animal, the property of George Herries, who places his value beyond mere money. Has figured prominently in many adventures, and has many friends at St. Jim's; a few real enemies, though the great Arthur Augustus D'Arcy apparently had a great objection to him. It is doubtful, though, whether his objection is so strong as he pretends it to be. No other dog in the world like Herries' bulldog.

immediately became rigid. He had lost forgotten the way in which the Co. had spoken to him in Study No. 6 of the School House.

Monty Lowther saw what was happening, and went straight across the study to the noble son of the House of Eastwood.

"Guessy!" he said contritely.

D'Arcy turned loftily, and surveyed the Shell junior through his eyeglass.

"Surely we're going to be friends—we're all guests of Figgins & Co., you know!" went on Lowther.

"Surely you won't spoil our enjoyment by not speaking to us?"

Arthur Augustus smiled slightly.

"Of course, if you look at it like that, Lowther—" he began.

"I do! We do! We do!"

"Then, of course, I accept your apology!" said D'Arcy magnanimously.

"Pwaw shake hands, dear boys!"

The spirits of the juniors were rising as the minutes sped by. They began to get excited, and Lowther put the finishing touch to matters.

"For Ratty's a rotten old rotter!" he sang.

The song was taken up with gusto, and the corridors rang with their voices. Even Fatty Wynn, who was far from musical, was allowed to shout the words to the good old tune of "For he's a jolly good fellow!" uninterrupted.

"Where is Ratty?" asked Tom Merry, when they had finished.

"Packing!" answered Figgins jollyly. "Come on, you chaps! Let's have that song again! It's top-hole!"

But the juniors were destined not to sing it again. The door was suddenly flung open, and Monteith, the New House prefect, walked in, and carefully shut the door behind him.

"Hallo, Monteith!" said Figgins quickly. "Come on, old son. There are still a few sosses left!"

"And some tea!"

"And cakes! Good old Monteith!"

"For he's a jolly good fellow!"

Manners started the song again, and the New House prefect, although he tried hard, could not get silence until the juniors from both Houses had finished roaring out their delight.

"You fatheads!" said Monteith grimly.

"Oh, come!" said Tom Merry remonstratively. "We're expecting you to make a speech—acknowledge our song, you know!"

"I'll speech you, you rascals!" said Monteith, with a laugh. "Now, look here, you chaps, this is not playing the game!"

"Bai Jove, Monteith!" expostulated the swell of the School House. "I say, you know—"

"Shut up, D'Arcy, there's a good chap," broke in Monteith. "I mean what I say. You fellows are not playing the game!"

"But—aren't you glad old Ratty is going?" demanded Figgins warmly.

"Yes, I am, for that matter!" replied Monteith instantly. "But I am not showing it like you chaps are doing. Play the game; don't kick a man when he's down!"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, dear boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"My hat! Nor did I!"

The juniors looked at one another uneasily, and the New House prefect took his opportunity to rub it in.

"I don't like the beast—ahem!—Mr. Ratcliff any more than you. But I draw the line when it comes to kicking a chap when he's down and out!"

"Down and out!" echoed the juniors.

"Yes, I don't know exactly what the trouble is, but I believe Ratty has been the victim of a swindling rotter who's bunked with his cash and securities. Got them on a forged order, or something. That's why Ratty is leaving St. Jim's. He can't keep up his position here, and his domestic expenses elsewhere, on the salary he gets at St. Jim's. He's going to find more lucrative work, I think."

"My hat!"

"So there's no need for you chaps to work yourselves up into a pitch of excitement just because he's going. I'm glad enough in one way, but when a chap's down, I'm not kicking him, however much a rotter he is! And I'm sure, from what I know of you fellows, that you're not the sort to do so, either."

The juniors were silent for a moment. Then Tom Merry turned to the New House prefect.

"You are right, Monteith," he said slowly. "The rotter—I mean, Mr.

Ratcliff is down and out, if what you say is correct. There's no need for us to rub it in!"

Figgins looked distressed, and Arthur Augustus looked positively worried. Not one of the juniors present had given a thought to the trouble in which Mr. Ratcliff was involved. They were only glad because he was leaving St. Jim's.

Monteith nodded, and left the study. Mr. Ratcliff, had he heard Monteith's words, and seen the effect they had had on the juniors who were celebrating his going, might have had a tremor of conscience at the way in which he had treated the House prefect.

But Mr. Ratcliff knew nothing of what had happened in Figgins & Co.'s study. He was packing his bag, his face white and tense, and a grim, bitter twist to his lips.

The celebrations had received a check,

No. 36.—Mr. HENRY SELBY,
M.A.



Third Form Master. Rather soured-tempered and severe, and rules his juniors with a rod of iron. A good master, nevertheless. Probably much excuse for his severity, for he has a very unruly crowd of youngsters to govern. Wally D'Arcy and his happy band, though quite decent little fellows, are sufficient in themselves to tax the energy and patience of any master.

and very soon after Monteith had gone the School House juniors returned to their own studies, leaving Figgins & Co. thinking deeply over the words of their prefect.

CHAPTER 4.

A Question of Help!

THE question is—
"To be, or not to be!"

"Exactly!"
Jack Blake sat in the big armchair in Study No. 6, staring thoughtfully into the fire. Tom Merry & Co. were also in the study.

The juniors looked at the leader of the Fourth Form Co. in surprise. It was not like Jack Blake to be very serious.

"What is the question, Blake?" asked Digby.

"The question is," said Blake slowly. "Is Ratcliff to be helped, or is he not to be helped?"

The juniors nodded. The troubles of the New House master had occupied much of the juniors' thoughts during the night that had passed since the feed in George Figgins' study.

Monteith had touched their soft spot. When a man was down, the juniors of St. Jim's, like most sportsmen who played the game, thought more of helping than kicking.

Had it been anybody else but Mr. Ratcliff who was in trouble, there would have already been many consultations amongst the juniors as to what was to be done to help the troubled one. But Mr. Ratcliff was not liked—he was hated by the juniors at St. Jim's.

The New House master had only himself to thank for the feelings of the juniors towards him. He had ruled over the fellows under his care with a rod of iron, so to speak. He was a beast, as they put it, and not even a just beast.

Much can be forgiven a man if the punishment he lades out is merited, though it might be as stiff as the imagination can conceive, and far more than fitted the crime. Mr. Ratcliff had never thought of anybody's feelings—he had punished at every opportunity.

It was not to be wondered at that the juniors were inclined to be joyful because his reign had come to an end. It was only natural. But Monteith had touched them to the heart when he had put a check to the celebrations.

And Jack Blake's words had awakened the interest in Mr. Ratcliff's affairs.

"Of course, it is for Figgins & Co. to start a wheeze," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "We'll back them up, if they start something good."

Manners and Lowther nodded, but Blake & Co. merely looked thoughtful.

"Perhaps Figgay would wathaw we suggest it," said D'Arcy slowly. "You see, dear boys, old Figgay and his chums have been the ones who have suffahed most at Watty's hands."

"Exactly!" said Blake.

"But—what we were helping Figgay celebrate," murmured Tom Merry. "I must say I feel a bit of a pig for displaying joy because a man's down. I should like to wipe that off."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, that's just how I feel about it, dear boy," said D'Arcy quickly. "I feel a beastly pig. However much a wotah old Watty was, I think Monteith was right when he said he shouldn't be kicked."

"Now, if it was old Railton—" began Digby.

"That's a different matter!" interposed Manners. "Railton is a jolly fine chap, and Ratty is a rotter. Whether we helped him or not, he would still be a rotter in my opinion."

The juniors agreed there. They could never think of Mr. Ratcliff in the same way as they thought of their own House-master.

"It's merely a question of sympathy," said Tom Merry. "I know I've stood in the Hall and seen a chap expelled—a rotter to the core. But I've felt sorry for him."

"Yes, yet still glad he's leaving St. Jim's," supplemented Horries. "I think we might wait a day and see if Figgay says anything. If not, we might tactfully speak to him about it."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "You could leave that to me, dear boys. It would wequah a fellow of tact and judgement—"

"Brrrr!" said Lowther. "Don't joke

when there's a serious matter being discussed, Gussy!"

"I'm not jokin'!" exclaimed Gussy indignantly.

"Well, whatever you're doing, you're trying to be funny, I suppose?" growled Lowther. "You know perfectly well that a delicate matter like that can't be left in the hands of a Fourth Form kid—"

"Bai Jove, Lowthah!"

"Fourth Form kids!" roared Blake, leaping to his feet. "I'll jolly well show you!"

What Blake was going to show Lowther was not known, for at that moment the door opened, and Figgins & Co. appeared.

"I say, you chaps, we want to speak to you!" said Figgins at once. "Sorry to stop your giving Blake a thick ear, Lowther, but—"

"He couldn't give a mouse a twisted tail!" snorted Jack Blake. "And I'll jolly well show—"

"Shut up, there's good chaps!" said Kerr quickly. "It's serious bizz we've come over about."

"Ratty?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes," replied Figgins. "The fact is, we're rather sorry we celebrated old Ratty's downfall. Not so much because he's down, you know, but because old Monteith rubbed it in about kicking."

"We see," said Lowther, with a chuckle. "You're very lucid!"

"Rats!" growled Figgins. "The thing is, you chaps, do you think we could elect him Ratty, whilst feeling glad at the same time that he's left St. Jim's?"

"I think so," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact, we were talking about it before you came in."

"Oh! Perhaps you've thought of a wheeze?" said Kerr.

"Not yet. But we'll help you find one, and work it up for you if you like," answered Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Count on us, deah boys!"

"Thanks muchly!" said Figgins gratefully. "We—we came to see if it would be all right to do a chap a good turn whilst intensely disliking him. It's a funny way to put it, I know, but you chaps understand."

"Wathah!"

"Quite so," said Tom Merry quietly. "It's a New House affair, really. We've nothing much to do with Ratty—"

"And a jolly good job, too!" growled Manners.

"But, going back to old Monteith, when a man's down I reckon it's up to some chap to give him a helping hand! He has not enough friends, so we'll have to help. The question that now arises is—"

"How?"

"Exactly!"

The juniors looked at one another. They were not entering with much enthusiasm into the business of helping Mr. Ratcliff. But they were agreed that something ought to be done.

"The only thing is, we don't want to make a great show that is going to bring us in the quids by the hundreds!" said Figgins, with emphasis.

"Bai Jove! Why not, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Because that might bring him back to St. Jim's!" said Figgins.

"And that wouldn't do!" said Kerr firmly.

"Not a bit!" said Fatty Wynn, with emphasis.

"Just give him a buck-up," went on Figgins. "That's all we need do. All right!"

The Schoolhouse juniors agreed with the New House Co. on that point. They did not want Ratty back any more than did Figgins & Co.

"It's a case of 'absence makes the heart grow fonder'!" said Lowther, with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He has gone, I suppose?" asked Herries.

"Yes; first train from Rylcombe this morning!" replied Kerr. "Now, what shall we do?"

It was rather surprising that Figgins & Co. had come to the School House fellows for help. A keen rivalry existed between the two Houses, and it was usually something pretty big before either House appealed to the other for help.

"A sale of work?" suggested Herries.

"Rats! Sell old Towser!" snapped Digby.

"Wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "Wippin' ideah, Digby! Towsh has no respect whatever for a fellah's twoushans, and I expect he would fetch about a fivah at a show!"

Herries snorted.

"Yes, I'm likely to part with Towser to help a beast like Ratty!" he growled.

"Let me catch anybody trying to sell Towser!"

"A dance?" suggested Manners thoughtfully.

The juniors nodded. There might be something in that.

"We want something new, if we can think of it," said Figgins.

"Then you've come to the right place to get it!" said Blake warmly. "Always rely on a School House chap to think of anything that's new!"

"Rats!"

"Look here—" began Blake hotly.

"Chuck it, you chaps!" said Tom Merry hastily. "Don't row now. Wait until we've thought of something!"

"That's the ticket!" said Lowther.

"If there was only ice about—" began Tom Merry.

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"You were thinking of an ice carnival?" asked Kerr quickly.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "But, you see, there's no ice, and we couldn't fix any particular day for that."

"Might get Gussy to go and stare at the river like that, Gussy," he said, he stares at us sometimes!" suggested Lowther.

"That would freeze a blessed iceberg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"That's all right, Gussy. You needn't apologise!" said Lowther magnanimously.

"I wasn't going to apologise, you cwass as!" snorted Gussy disdainfully.

"Then I accept it!" said Lowther calmly.

D'Arcy surveyed the humorist of the Shell coldly, and Lowther grinned.

"Now, if you'd only go and stand by the river like that, Gussy," he said, "could freeze the giddy water!"

"And then we should be able to hold the carnival," said Manners, with a chuckle.

"Bai Jove! You wottah!" exclaimed D'Arcy hotly. "I shall be compelled to administrah—"

"Leave it till to-morrow, Gussy!" interrupted Blake. "Look here, you chaps! There's no reason why we shouldn't have everything ready for a carnival, and then hold it when it freezes."

"Quite so!" agreed Tom Merry.

"And so it was agreed that the juniors should prepare for an ice carnival, to

help Mr. Ratcliff through his troublous times.

"It's too late to think of making the arrangements, or discussing details before classes," said Figgins. "Perhaps we'll come over this evening after tea."

"Come over to tea!" said Tom Merry quietly. "Blake & Co. will be coming along to our study. We're in funds just now!"

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn heartily.

"Then that's that!" said Figgins. "So long, you chaps!"

And the New House Co. departed.

CHAPTER 5.

Ratty in Rags!

"MY hat!"

It was Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, who gave vent to that ejaculation. Kildare was not at St. Jim's. He was walking down the Strand, in London.

The St. Jim's captain was also captain of games, and he had come to London to buy some sports gear. Kildare stopped very suddenly as he saw that which caused him so much surprise.

Across the road stood a man, whose clothes, though well cut and well made, were covered with mud. There was something very familiar to Kildare about that suit and its wearer when he first saw him.

But when the man turned and glanced his way, Kildare recognised him.

"My hat!" he exclaimed again. "It's Ratty!"

Kildare did not stop and stare at Mr. Ratcliff. He walked quickly across the road. But so bewildered was he by this sudden appearance of a man who had left St. Jim's a fortnight before that he was almost knocked over by a motor-omnibus.

But Kildare paid no heed to the abuse which the driver hurled at his head. Kildare could see Mr. Ratcliff, late master of the New House at St. Jim's.

So far, Mr. Ratcliff had not noticed Kildare. The first intimation he had that Kildare was in London was when he felt a light tap on his shoulders.

Mr. Ratcliff swung round, bitterness in his face.

"What— Oh, Kildare!" he gasped.

"Yes, sir," said Kildare warmly.

"What does this mean, sir?"

"Sir?" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff. "You call me 'Sir' now, Kildare?"

"Certainly—sir!" answered the captain of St. Jim's warmly. "Your age demands that respect, if nothing else does—now."

Even Kildare was not friends with Mr. Ratcliff. More than once there had been 'words' between the youthful captain of St. Jim's and the New House master, and Kildare had generally come out best.

But Kildare felt a great wave of pity run through him as he saw the pitiable plight of the late schoolmaster.

"Excuse me, sir—ahem!—but have you—ahem!—had any grub?" he asked nervously.

Mr. Ratcliff flushed.

"Th-thank you, Kildare!" he stammered. "As a matter of strict fact, I have not."

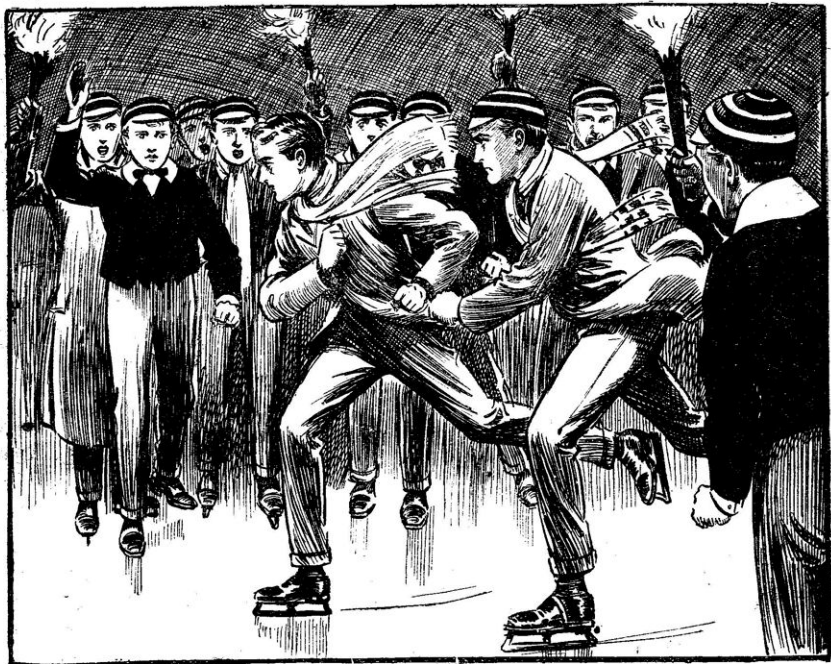
"Then that's rather fortunate, sir," said Kildare with a smile, "because I haven't, either. I should feel honoured, sir, if you would be so kind as to accompany me to a restaurant."

Mr. Ratcliff stared at Kildare with something like his old stare.

"Are you sure, Kildare?" he asked sharply.

"Quite, sir!"

That was a white lie of Kildare's. He had had breakfast only an hour before,



Kildare flashed past Tom Merry, and seemed almost inseparable from Monteith. But Kildare was two feet in front at the vital moment, and the race went to the School House. "That's the stuff to give them?" roared Tom Merry. (See Chapter 6.)

but he knew perfectly well that Mr. Ratcliff would not accept any money with which to pay for his meal. The only course was to take Ratty into a restaurant.

Kildare looked sharply up and down the street, and noticing a not too conspicuous restaurant, he led Mr. Ratcliff to it.

It was not until meat and bread and coffee was laid before them that Mr. Ratcliff spoke.

"You have wondered what has happened to me, Kildare?" he asked quietly. "Well, yes, sir," said Kildare frankly.

"Then I think that if I were to explain to you the cause of my sudden downfall from prosperity, it would not go any further?" went on Mr. Ratcliff.

"I'd—I'd rather not listen, sir. Couldn't you?"

"But I wish to speak to somebody!" said Mr. Ratcliff, and his tone was as bitter as Kildare had ever heard. "Kildare, you do not know how absolutely friendless a man may be when he is down!"

"I've a good idea, sir," said Kildare, as the other hesitated.

"Ah! An idea! That just about sums it up, Kildare!" said Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. "No one who has not suffered as I have suffered this last week or so can know what it really means. I am friendless. I am in rags!"

"Not quite friendless, sir," said Kildare slowly. "You have one here, sir!"

"You bear no malice, Kildare?" asked Mr. Ratcliff incredulously.

"No, sir."

"Then, for that I thank you. I heard—I thought everybody was dead against me. But to tell you my story, Kildare. Until the day before I left St. Jim's I was pretty well-to-do. But a man whose name I need not mention forged my signature and secured some very valuable securities, not to mention a large sum of money, from the bank in Rylcombe. I had just passed through a cheque for a considerable sum, and there was no cash to meet it when the bank-manager came to pay it out. He rang up the Head to see if my security—if I was good enough, in as many words—to stand the money, as I was overdrawn at the bank.

"I spoke to the manager myself, and then learned that I had already drawn my securities and a huge sum—for a man in my position, that is—the day before. I hadn't, Kildare! Not one penny-piece did I draw from the bank myself. It was a forgery!"

"My hat! Is it as bad as that, sir?" said Kildare in surprise.

"Every bit!" said Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. "I have been trying to get work to do—work that will bring me in sufficient money to keep body and soul together. But will they look at a man

of my age, Kildare? Not a bit of it!"

Never before had Kildare seen Mr. Ratcliff in so bitter a mood. It was evident that he was suffering intensely by reason of his position.

Kildare slipped his hand carelessly into his pocket, kept it there a moment, then drew it out. Mr. Ratcliff did not feel his hand as Kildare slipped into his pocket a pound-note. That was all that Kildare had left out of the money he had brought with him.

"Well, you must excuse me, sir!" said Kildare, glancing at his wristlet-watch. "I promised the Head I would be back by dinner-time to-day. I can only just catch my train."

Mr. Ratcliff held out his hand.

"Thank you, Kildare!" he said gratefully. "I'm obliged to you, and very glad to have met you. But I do not wish the Head to know that I am in this state of poverty!"

"Your wishes shall be respected, sir," said Kildare quietly. "And jolly good luck, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff nodded. "Good-bye, Kildare!" he said.

They shook hands and parted, but when he reached the door of the restaurant, Kildare suddenly stepped back.

"Watch the 'personal' column of the 'Daily Mail,' sir!" he said quietly.

The next moment he had gone, leaving THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 625.

Mr. Ratcliff to try and puzzle out what he meant by that last remark.

Kildare caught his train with a few minutes to spare, and although he had papers to read, he could not fix his attention to them. The picture of Mr. Ratcliff, in his dilapidated state, was constantly before his eyes.

He reported to the Head, but made no mention of the fact that he had seen Mr. Ratcliff.

Five minutes later a fag poked his head into Tom Merry's study.

"You're wanted!" he said, peering at Tom Merry. "And you're in for it! Kildare doesn't half look wild!"

"You cheeky kid—" said Tom Merry hotly.

The fag banged the door and ran off as hard as his legs could carry him. He had no wish to see what Tom Merry wanted to jump so quickly from his chair for.

"Better go, I suppose!" growled Tom Merry. "Don't think it's a row, though. He's been to London to buy sports gear, so I expect he wants to know what the juniors want."

"That's about it!" agreed Manners. "Give him my love, Tommy!" called out Lowther cheerily, as his leader left the study.

Kildare was walking up and down his study when Tom Merry entered in response to Kildare's invitation.

"Ah, Merry!" said the captain of St. Jim's. "You can keep a secret, I suppose?"

Tom Merry stared. Kildare did not very often ask a Shell fellow to his study to tell him a secret.

"My hat! Yes, of course!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I saw Mr. Ratcliff to-day—" "Great pip!" in London!"

"Yes; he told me a story—a pitiful story. I might mention it. He was in a row, Merry, or jolly near it."

"My only aunt! Is it as bad as that, Kildare?"

"Apparently so, Merry. He asked me not to tell the Head. I haven't done so, but he didn't say I was not to speak to you. You will see that it does not get abroad—it might reach the Head's ears."

"Sure!" said Tom Merry warmly. "But I suppose I can tell my chums—they will keep it dark enough!"

Kildare hesitated. "Seeing that I was going to ask you something, I think you may as well," he said slowly. "Look here, Merry! What I want to know is—can't you juniors do something for Ratty—I mean, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"We are—when the time comes!" said Tom Merry.

He told Kildare how they had made up their minds to hold an ice-carnival if the chance came.

Kildare's eyes shone. "That's a topping stunt!" he said. "I hope it freezes soon!"

"We shall have the races, but no prizes. All the entrance fees will go to the fund. After the races, the skates will be sold by auction—all that goes to the funds. I think we should get a decent bit, Kildare."

"I dare say you will, Merry!" said Kildare. "And I might—I'm very pleased with you and the other juniors concerned—"

"Figgins & Co., as well," said Tom Merry hastily.

Kildare started.

"Figgins & Co.!" he repeated. "Are they anxious to help Ratcliff, too?"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry heartily. "They came over and saw us about it."

"Then, they're good chaps!" said Kildare warmly. "Anyhow, it's in keep."

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ing with the character they've got—sportsmen all!"

"Rats! Ahem! Sorry, Kildare, old chap, but you're talking rot," said Tom Merry, flushing slightly. "You can leave the bizz to me, and we'll help old Ratty. Oh, but how are we going to find him?"

"I told him to watch the 'Personal' column in the 'Daily Mail,'" explained Kildare. "He will do so. We can advertise for him when we want him."

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

Manners and Lowther were as surprised as Tom Merry had been when they were told that Mr. Ratcliff was in rags. They felt more pleased than ever that they had decided to help him.

When the Shell juniors went to Study No. 6 and told Jack Blake & Co., they were inclined to be doubtful. The idea of Ratty in rags was a little too thick to think about, as Blake said.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy disinterestedly. "Bai Jove! I think I will send Watty the fiver I had from the patch this mornin'. I'm frightfully sorry to hear such bad news, Tom Merry!"

"Not such bad news as we should get if you sent that fiver away!" growled Herries. "I'm wanting to borrow some of that to buy Towser some biscuits!"

"Wats! Towser can starve, dear boy!" said Gussy warmly.

"Do you mean to say that you'd allow Towser to starve before that rotter Ratty?" demanded Herries hotly.

"Yas, wathah! Watty is a wottah, but he is some use on earth!" said D'Arcy witheringly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" That was too much for Herries. He rushed at his noble chum, and the two rolled on to the floor.

"Ow! Yow! Gewwoff, Hewwies, you wot—" Yow! yelled D'Arcy.

"Ow!" roared Herries, as a fist crashed into his ear. "Yow! Oh, my hat! Gussy, you-you chump—" "Drag him off, Blake!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake, chuckling, dragged the combatants apart. D'Arcy stood up, panting for breath, and very much dishevelled.

"Don't you speak of Towser like that again, you dummy!" snorted Herries. "I refuse to be called a dummy!"

"Shouted Gussy. "Welease me, Blake! I desiah to administrah a feahful—" "You'll both get bumped in a minute!" said Blake darkly.

"Well, he shouldn't—" "Hewwies shouldn't—" "Oh, chuck 'em out!" growled Blake.

Herries was seized by Tom Merry and Digby, and Monty Lowther and Jack Blake grabbed D'Arcy. In a moment the two juniors were being whirled towards the door.

"Welease me, you wottahs!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"You burbling chumps!" howled Herries.

The burbling chumps and the rosters did not stop in their efforts. D'Arcy and Herries were pitched into the corridor, and the door was banged.

For a moment Herries and D'Arcy hurled threats to the juniors behind the closed door, but, realising their impotence, went to the dormitory to change their collars and wash the dust from their faces.

CHAPTER 5. The Ice Carnival.

"BRRRR! It's cold!" Monty Lowther shivered and stopped down before the fire in the study. He had been down to the gates to post a letter.

"Splendid!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically.

Lowther looked round at his leader.

"Splendid!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tommy!" said Lowther heartily. "If you say it is splendid because I'm shivering with cold—" "I don't!" interrupted Tom Merry cheerfully.

"I am saying that it's splendid because it may freeze, and we shall be able to hold the ice carnival!"

"My hat! I'd forgotten all about that!" said Lowther quickly. "Great pip! I hope it freezes like one o'clock!"

Lowther's hopes were fulfilled. It froze hard during the night, and the next morning, when Tom Merry hurried to the window of the dormitory, he gave a cry of joy.

"Hard as nails, I'll bet!" he said joyfully. "Come on, you chaps. Turn out, and we'll go over and see Figgins & Co."

Figgins & Co. were up and dressed and in their study when Tom Merry & Co. put in an appearance. Figgins nodded cheerfully.

"Hallo, our chaps!" he cried. "We were coming over to see you, only we thought you wouldn't be up yet!"

Tom Merry & Co. glared wrathfully at their New House rivals.

"Eatheads!" said Manners witheringly.

"Chumps!" snorted Tom Merry.

"Ases!" growled Lowther.

Figgins & Co. returned the glare with interest.

"If you've come over for a thick ear or three before breakfast," he said warningly, "you're going the right road to get them!"

"Rats!" snorted Tom Merry again. "You couldn't give a mouse a fat ear!"

It looked like trouble between the two Co.s. But the arrival of Jack Blake & Co. stopped it.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "Are you chaps up?"

"Sure, we're in bed and fast asleep!" said Herries, with a chuckle. "I suppose you chumps have come over to tell Figgins & Co. that it's freezing?"

"Just the very thing, my son," said Jack Blake. "Isn't that so, Dig?"

"It is!" agreed Digby. "Is that what you came for, Herries?"

"Precisely!" said Herries solemnly. "I don't know what Gussy thinks about it."

"Precisely the same as Blake!" said D'Arcy, with a chuckle.

Lowther flushed.

"Look here, you chumps—" he began hotly.

"Don't quarrel in the New House, please," said Kerr, with emphasis on the last word. "We're quiet, respectable fellows over here!"

School House juniors glared at New House juniors, and once again trouble was averted by the arrival of another party. Monteith walked into the study, his eyes gleaming with pleasure and excitement.

"Ripping frost, you chaps!" he said quickly. "Going to hold your ice carnival to-day?"

"We is!" said Lowther, with a chuckle. "That is, if the Head says the river is safe!"

"Good!" said Monteith. "I must get my skates out!"

The fact that there was going to be an ice carnival as soon as the river was safe was well known to everybody at St. Jim's. There was excitement in the air the whole of the morning.

But Dr. Holmes, who went down to the river to see if the ice was thick enough to hold half St. Jim's, came back, and sternly forbade any skating

until later in the day. As it was then freezing hard still, the fellows were not so downhearted as they might otherwise have been.

It was a Saturday, and therefore no lessons were held during the afternoon. It was moreover, fortunate that there was no football match for juniors or seniors that day.

At five o'clock the Head gave the word that skating might commence. But it was pitch dark.

The moon would be up in a couple of hours, but that would be too late to start racing. The next day was Sunday, and there could be no skating. The juniors also had to face the fact that a thaw might set in at any moment.

It was decided to raid the neighbouring woods, and make torches. Half the juniors of St. Jim's followed Tom Merry & Co. in the raid, and torches were soon obtained.

Nobody knew exactly what was going to happen, save the three Co.'s. The fellows were asked, by notices stuck on all boards, to congregate on the river-bank the first time skating was allowed.

That was enough for the majority of fellows. They were content to wait and see what Tom Merry had up his sleeve. It had been arranged amongst the three Co.'s that Tom Merry should be leader.

As he had thought of the carnival, he had half-part five the roads were literally teeming with juniors and seniors of both Houses. Everybody had pairs of skates slung over their shoulders by the straps.

The torches were not lighted until the crowd reached the river-bank. Tom Merry & Co., with Figgins & Co., and Jack Blake & Co., were well in front, and there was a small mound of old logs erected by the time the majority of the fellows arrived.

Tom Merry got straight to work. "Light up some of the torches, you chaps!" he shouted.

The torches were lighted, and presented a pretty picture as they burned brightly, throwing a yellow light on the faces of the assembled fellows from St. Jim's. All round the frost hung on the boughs of trees and on the bank of the river. The ice glimmered enticingly under the light of the torches.

Tom Merry climbed on top of the logs. "Gentlemen!" he shouted. "We are —"

"Hurrah!"

"Don't interrupt, there's good chaps!" said Tom Merry pleadingly. "We have not much chance. I am much obliged to you all for keeping off the ice until now. I asked you, in the notices I placed on the boards, to keep off, as we desired to hold a carnival for a very charitable object."

"Old Ratty would be pleased to know we referred to him as a charitable object!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Monty!" said Tom Merry angrily. "Blake, biff him if he interrupts again! Gentlemen, I want you to place confidence in me when I say that the charges being made for racing are going to a worthy cause! I am not at liberty to say why we want the money."

"I know—and it's sound enough!" sang out Kildare.

There was no mistaking Kildare's voice, and loud cheers greeted his words. When the captain of St. Jim's backed up the captain of the juniors there was no doubt that things were strictly on the square.

Not that the fellows would not have taken Tom Merry's word for it. The junior captain was as popular as Kildare.

"Thanks, Kildare!" said Tom Merry,

with a laugh. "Much obliged for those few words! Gentlemen, there are going to be races—everybody who goes on the ice is expected to drop a boblet into the coffers of the Co."

"Hurrah!"

"Gentlemen not dead set on the giddy races," went on Tom Merry, warning to his work, "are requested to line the route with torches!"

"Hurrah!"

"Will the leaders of the different Forms please get up their own races whilst we take in the splash?"

"They will!" roared the whole assembly.

"Then please come round in a queue, drop in your boblets, and get on the ice!" sang out Tom Merry enthusiastically.

"Hurrah!"

The fellows, entering into the fun of the proceedings, lined up, singing and making jokes.

The three Co.'s held out their caps, and the "bobs" poured into them.

Some fellows dropped two or more shillings. Kildare was seen to drop a pound-note, which Tom Merry picked out of his cap and slipped into his pocket, with a grateful smile. It would be safer there, as it might otherwise have blown away.

Many of the fags had come, and Wally D'Arcy, the young brother of the more stately Gussy, was amongst the skaters.

"Good old Tommy!" he sang out cheekily, as he dropped two shillings into Tom's cap. "If you would induce Gussy to lend me a threepenny-bit I'd give you that at once!"

"Weally, Wally!" expostulated his elder brother. "You should not joke about a serious matter like this! If you want any money I shall be glad to lend it you!"

"Dish it out, then!" said Wally cheerfully.

Gussy searched through his pockets, and flushed. He had not a penny-piece.

"I'm sorry, Wally!"

"Been spending your cash in riotous living, I suppose?" said Wally severely.

"No; as a matter of fact, dear boy, I've given it all away!"

"Oh!"

Wally did not say any more. He knew that Arthur Augustus, with his usual generosity, had dropped every half-penny he had into the pile of silver collected.

At last the final shilling was dropped, and the whole of St. Jim's almost was on the ice.

The route where the races were to be held was lined on two sides by fellows holding torches. Races were held, and the excitement rose to fever pitch when it became known that Kildare, Darrel, and Monteith were to race down the whole of the lighted route.

The fellows lined up in two long rows, keeping a wide lane of beautifully smooth ice clear for the competitors.

Tom Merry was asked, and accepted, the job of judging the result. He waited at the end of the line for the competitors to come down the "lane."

The light from the torches was so good that they could see the start. Kildare and Monteith came away together, Darrel not getting into his stride quite so quickly as the other two seniors.

"Go it, Kildare!"

"Stick it, Monteith!"

"New House!"

"School House!"

The seniors raced at terrific speed. Darrel had picked up some of the ground he had lost at the start, and when two hundred yards from Tom Merry they were almost level. Kildare was a foot or so in front.

"School House!"

"Kildare!"

"No—Monteith!"

Darrel tried hard to keep up the pace, but Kildare was too strong for him. Monteith kept it up, however, and the two seniors raced neck and neck, with Darrel a couple of yards to the rear.

Tom Merry could have danced with excitement as the racing seniors approached him. He knew that it was going to be a close race. Kildare put on a spurt, which Monteith answered with another.

Neck and neck! Fifty yards—forty—thirty!

"Kildare!"

"No—yes—yes!"

Kildare flashed past Tom Merry, and seemed almost inseparable from Monteith. But Kildare was two feet in front at the vital moment, and the race went to the School House.

"That's the stuff to give them!" roared Tom Merry. "Here, come on, you chaps! More House races!"

The idea was taken up on all sides, and the two Houses picked their own teams. There were four in a team, two from each House. Kildare and Monteith offered to act as judges, and Tom Merry was released from the onerous position. There might have been trouble with only a junior to say which House had won!

CHAPTER 7.

Once a Rotter!

"H I!" Tom Merry roared out as he saw the dim figure of a skater on the ice.

"Hi! Where's that cash?" he shouted again.

The figure seemed to spurt.

Figgins & Co., Jack Blake & Co., with Manners and Lowther were tying up the silver they had collected into their handkerchiefs and scarves. They were almost out of range of the light cast by the torches.

They looked up as they heard Tom Merry's stentorian cry.

"A welsher!" demanded Monty Lowther loudly.

"Yes. Come on, you fellows!" cried Tom Merry. "After him!"

D'Arcy came sweeping towards them, a torch in his hand. He was a graceful skater, and looked fine as he approached the juniors.

"Come on, Gussy!" roared Jack Blake.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Gussy indignantly. "The wotah!"

He changed his direction, and sped after Tom Merry, who was already down the river after the figure he had seen.

D'Arcy was fast, and caught up with the Shell leader.

"I want to bump the wotah when we catch him!" said D'Arcy, in disgust.

"Fancy bilkin', bai Jove! He's the only one that has!"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry grimly. "If he's anything like my weight, I'll punch his silly napper!"

"Yaas, wotah!"

"Hi! Where's your cash!" roared Jack Blake, spurring on behind the leaders.

Tom Merry discovered, as they began to overtake the figure in front, that his hopes of punching the bilker's head was remote. The figure was not a member of St. Jim's at all, but a man.

He carried a bag in his hand, and every now and then he would turn his head to see how far he was from the juniors of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry frowned.

"That's not a St. Jim's chap," he said slowly. "But I'll wager he's been up to

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no good! See? He keeps looking round to see if we are near him!"

"Bai Jove! I was thinkin' the same thing, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I vote we collah him!"

"No harm in that!" said Tom Merry. "We can apologise!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

But they were saved the trouble of apologise. The man in front suddenly struck a piece of wood that had frozen into the top of the ice, and was sent sprawling.

They were going at a terrific speed, and it needed all the juniors' skill to steer clear of the man, for they had not been fifteen yards from him when he fell.

D'Arcy held the torch high as he swept past the fallen man, and turned swiftly to come back.

The bag the man had carried had burst open, and several bundles of paper were scattered on the ice.

Arthur Augustus slowed down as he approached the man, who was sitting up, rubbing one arm.

"Excuse me, deah sir," said D'Arcy politely. "But you appear to wathah dwead our catchin' you up! I hope theah's nothin' w'ong?"

The man smiled.

"Not at all. If you would leave me your torch, I could pick up the papers that have fallen from my bag without troubling you," he said. "Doubtless there's somebody waiting for you down below!"

D'Arcy hesitated. He was suspicious, for the man had done his best to get away from them. His anxiety to do so was obvious from the many times he had turned his head. An honest man, reasoned D'Arcy, would have asked them what they meant by it.

But he hesitated. Tom Merry came up. Blake, Manners, and Lowther were coming in the opposite direction. Tom Merry went straight to one of the bundles of papers, and picked it up.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy heard him gasp in surprise.

"Banknotes!" exclaimed Tom Merry, between his teeth.

The man on the ice swore beneath his breath. He staggered to his feet, sliding until he gained his balance.

"Put them in the bag, please!" he said huskily. "They belong to me!"

Tom Merry picked up another bundle of papers, and gave still another gasp.

"Ratcliff!" he shouted, in his excitement. "Here, collar him!"

The juniors had gathered round the man, and they made for him as Tom Merry shouted. But the man was too quick for them. He flung out both arms, sweeping the juniors clean off their balance.

Manners and Lowther slipped to the ice with a crash, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy crashed into one another in their effort to grapple with the man.

Down they went to the ice, and by the time they got to their feet the man was well down the river.

"Let him go!" panted Tom Merry, for the breath had been knocked out of his body by the fall. "We shall never catch him! Here! Look at these papers!"

The torch had been sent flying out of D'Arcy's hand as he collided with Tom Merry, but it still burned on the ice. He quickly picked it up, and hurried to the side of his chums.

The papers in Tom Merry's hands were securities, and across the top of each bundle was a slip of paper bearing the name "RATCLIFF" in large capitals.

"The loss of these put Ratty in rags!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

"Now we've got them back he'll have to have them, Figgis!"

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"He's looking after the cash, with Kerr and Wynn!" said Jack Blake. "My hat! He'll be sorry to hear of this little capture!"

"Bai Jove! Poor old Figgis!" said D'Arcy sorrowfully.

Not one thought did the juniors give to what the capture of the papers meant to Mr. Ratcliff, other than that they would bring him back to St. Jim's. Their whole thoughts were for Figgis & Co., who would have to suffer anew the ruling of the bullying master.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, with a shrug of his shoulders. "We must go and see Kildare!"

"Bai Jove! What a surprise!" ejaculated Gussie.

The juniors gathered up the remaining bundles of papers, and Tom Merry placed them in the bag, and, with D'Arcy lighting the way, the juniors raced back to the scene of the carnival.

As they approached, the excited shouts of the fellows became louder and louder. Figgis & Co. were on the bank, still tying up the cash for Ratty, when the juniors came upon them.

"Here, Figgis!" said Tom Merry. "That little lot is no good!"

Figgis & Co. stared.

"My hat!" ejaculated Figgis, in surprise. "There's twenty quid here, or thereabouts!"

"But Ratty will be coming back!" said Tom Merry quietly.

"Coo-coming back!" stammered Figgis & Co. in unison.

"Yes. That chap we chased wasn't a bilker at all!" explained Tom Merry softly. "He had all Ratty's securities in a bag, and bundles of banknotes!"

"My-m-m-my hat!" stammered Figgis, leaping to his feet. "Th-th-that's put the lid on it!"

"G-g-g-g-g-racious!" stammered Fatty Wynn.

Kerr was silent, but a bitter smile curled at the corners of his lips.

It was some minutes before Figgis & Co. recovered from their astonishment and chagrin, and could ask Tom Merry all that had happened.

"I suppose the chap missed the evening train to London," said Tom Merry. "The ice would be the quickest way to Wayland Junction. That's my opinion of how he came to be here!"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"But that doesn't explain why he bunked. He could have stopped, and we should have seen that he wasn't a St. Jim's chap!" said Manners.

"Ah, but I shouted, 'Where's that cash?'—meaning, of course, the bob to go on the ice. He must have thought otherwise, and taken it for granted that we knew all about his pinching the securities and cash. Therefore, he bunked!"

"Bai Jove!"

"That's about right, Tommy!"

"And the rotter will be coming back," said Figgis, between his teeth.

"Perhaps he'll be all right when he hears about this," said Herries consolingly.

"Perhaps he won't!" snapped Figgis. Kildare came racing up a moment later, and his eyes flashed as the news of the capture was told him.

"I'm very glad—for Ratty's sake," said Kildare quietly. "But—but I'm sorry for you chaps, in a way."

"So are we!" growled Kerr.

"What's going to be done with the cash?" asked Ratty Wynn. "Shall we start a feed to all the chaps?"

"He'll be in it!"

"Trust Fatty to think of a feed!" said Lowther, with a chuckle.

"No!" said Kildare firmly. "It will

go to the Cottage Hospital, if the chaps are willing."

The chaps proved willing, but there was considerable surprise when they were told that the "charitable object" who had needed the cash was no longer necessitous. But they were willing enough to let the money go to the Cottage Hospital.

The ice carnival had been a great success, and no one knew what a great blow to their joy and happiness the transferring of the monies received really meant to the juniors.

There was no smile on Figgis & Co.'s faces as they returned to St. Jim's, their hands deep in their pockets. They felt more bitter than ever towards their master.

Kildare reported to the Head as soon as he got back to St. Jim's, and Dr. Holmes was eager to know all that had happened. He sent for Tom Merry, who explained the chase on the ice, the fall of the thief, and his subsequent escape.

"However," said the Head, "we have the money, and Mr. Ratcliff can be found. I dare say, by the insertion of advertisements in the papers."

Dr. Holmes did not know that, but for Kildare having slipped a pound-note into the master's pocket, he would not have been able to buy papers in which to see the advertisements.

"I think you are right, sir," said Kildare. "Might I suggest the 'Personal' column of the 'Daily Mail'?"

Tom Merry chuckled inwardly as he listened. Kildare had quickly thought of how it was best to let Mr. Ratcliff have the good news—good news to Mr. Ratcliff, at least.

The Head nodded.

"That is a very able suggestion, Kildare," he said approvingly. "I will send a letter to the offices at once."

Tom Merry was dismissed, and returned to his study.

It was Tuesday morning that all St. Jim's knew that Mr. Ratcliff was coming back to the school. Many fellows who were sorry he had gone, in such trouble, suddenly discovered they were more sorry still that he was coming back.

This applied particularly to the New House juniors. They were literally mad with disgust. They had thought the tyrant had left them for ever. But now he was coming back.

Kildare was going to London to meet him. That was all the school knew about the business. But Tom Merry rightly guessed that it was to equip the House-master in new clothes that Kildare had really gone to London.

The advertisement, as everybody knew, asked Mr. Ratcliff to meet Kildare at Euston Station at noon on Tuesday. But not one fellow at St. Jim's ever knew how much careful suggesting it took before Kildare was able to get what he wanted into the paper.

Mr. Ratcliff arrived, and went straight to the Head.

"I am very glad to see you back, Mr. Ratcliff," said Dr. Holmes, shaking the master warmly by the hand. "Very glad indeed! I regret, however, to see that you are looking ill. Half-starved, I might have said."

"One finds it difficult to eat when one is troubled in mind, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff easily.

Dr. Holmes had been far nearer the truth than he thought.

Mr. Ratcliff had certainly not starved, but he had gone, sparingly into the pound which Kildare had left in his pocket.

Kildare had received that pound note on his way back to St. Jim's with the

Housemaster. But Kildare did not tell his companion what the three Co.'s of St. Jim's had done for him, or how the money, originally intended for him, had been sent to the Cottage Hospital.

As they fully expected, Mr. Ratcliff very soon made his presence felt amongst the juniors of the New House. Figgins & Co. were the first to rub against him. They were in their study, sitting moodily before the fire, when the door was opened without the preliminary of a knock.

"Figgins!" Figgins turned quickly as the old hated, metallic tones reached him.

"Yes, sir?" he asked slowly.

"Have you done those lines I gave you before I—ahem!—before I went away?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins & Co. started.

"N-no, sir," said Figgins lamely.

"Then you will do four hundred," snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "That will perhaps teach you that when I give an order it is to be carried out! See that I have them by to-morrow evening!"

And Mr. Ratcliff left the study—and left an impression upon the juniors they were not likely to forget. Mr. Ratcliff had not been in the House more than an hour before he had gone to see if Figgins had written the lines!

It was not to be wondered that the juniors stared, their eyes flaming with anger, at one another.

"The awful beast!" said Figgins hotly.

"The rotter!" snapped Kerr angrily.

"I'd keep a chap like that without grub for weeks!" said Wynn grimly.

Tom Merry & Co. came over to the New House study after tea, and found Figgins & Co. very downhearted. They could hardly believe their ears when they were told of Mr. Ratcliff's visit to the juniors.

"Did you ever?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, never!" said Manners and Lowther together.

"All of the—Hullo, Gussy, what's the trouble?" said Tom Merry, as the Fourth-Former entered the study.

"Watch! wants you, Tommy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I say, Figgay, you look down."

"I feel it!" growled Figgins.

He explained to D'Arcy the cause of his downheartedness.

Tom Merry, with a nod, went off to the Housemaster's study. He found Mr. Ratcliff sitting at his desk, poring over the securities recovered from the man during the carnival.

"You were, I understand, largely responsible for the recovery of these securities, Merry," said Mr. Ratcliff at once. "At the same time, I understand it was a pure accident that put you on the man's track. However, thank you!"

"Yes, sir!" said Tom Merry disgustedly.

He moved towards the door, with the intention of leaving.

"One moment," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Did you—did you see the man, Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry quietly and coldly. "He was fairly tall, well built, small, cunning eyes, a dark moustache, and—and, yes, sir—come to

think of it, he was something like you!" He broke off as he realised what he was saying. But it was too late.

Mr. Ratcliff snatched at the cane on his desk, and Tom Merry's eyes flashed. Then the Housemaster seemed to gulp something out of his throat, and moved his hand away from the cane.

"That—that is all, Merry," he said.

Tom Merry left, and ran off to Figgins & Co., when he found Jack Blake & Co. had joined D'Arcy, Manners, and Lowther.

They roared with laughter when he told them what he had said.

"I don't take back a syllable!" he said, when he had finished. "Of all the rotten rotters, he's the rottenest!"

"Hear, hear!" assented the juniors.

"I—I—I wish he was still in rags!" said Fatty Wynn fiercely.

The other juniors thought much the same, but it was no good their wishing.

Mr. Ratcliff was master of the New House, and it was certain that whilst he held that position, Figgins & Co. would have a warm time.

As a result of the business which had taken Mr. Ratcliff from St. Jim's, the juniors consider that there are occasions when it is permissible to kick a man when he's down.

They raised their boots, as Figgins put it, but did not kick. But he was jolly certain they would kick if the opportunity should arise again!

THE END.

Another grand long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "The Jape of the Term!" Order your copy well in advance.

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FIRST LONG INSTALMENT OF OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY!

CHAPTER 1.

Enemies in the Making.

THROUGHOUT the whole of the kingdom there is no other school quite like "Harmood's." A home college for the sons of Britons over-seas" is the description which the founders themselves have given it.

From great sheep-farms, from cattle-ranches, from tea-plantations, and trading-stations, from every far-flung outpost of Empire, and from all manner of queer settlements where the Union Jack is the symbol of power, Harmood's boys have come.

The school itself stands in one of the fairest parts of England, not very far from the old-world town of Bigglesdale, and on an elevation overlooking the river which plays such a big part in the sporting life of Harmood's.

It was on the day following the river finals that Jim Quinton, who, yesterday, had stroked the winning senior four, strolled into the Sixth Common-room. Even among the crowd of giants which made this year's Sixth something of a record, Quinton seemed to stand on a pedestal of his own. When he actually stood among the others this afternoon the difference was accentuated by his dress.

Practically all the other fellows were in shorts, and wearing sweaters, or at least soft collars and flannel coats. Quinton was arrayed in dark tweed and wore a stiff collar, while a hard felt hat was stuck firmly on his head, and he carried a stick and gloves. One would have judged him for a very determined young man of business rather than a schoolboy. But then Harmood's turned out men!

"All dressed up and nowhere to go!" one of the fellows in the Common-room called out. "What's the game to-day, Quinton? What about the spread this afternoon?"

"Off!" Jim Quinton, over six feet in height, and broad in proportion, squared himself and faced the gathering. "I'm sorry, you chaps, but I've got another appointment. Just seen the Head, and I have to go! We'll have the birthday spread to-morrow. The stuff will keep all right till then. I'm very sorry!"

Everyone in the room had wakened up now. There were more questions and comments, but everyone accepted the sad news. Quinton's grand birthday celebrations were postponed till the morrow.

There was a general conversation going on before Quinton could escape. Two or three were anxious to know if he had really heard the very latest scream. It

was too funny altogether! Bracster was the outside edge and the frozen limit!

"What's Bracster done now?" Quinton was anxious to hear the yarn.

"He hasn't tried the game on you, then?" Willoughby asked. "He's tried it on the other three of the Senior Four! Wants to borrow one of the winner's gongs to show his dear pater, who's coming to see him to-day. You see Bracster's idea? Oh, he's admitted it to Reardon! Wants to fool his governor that he won it! He's a marvellous fellow is Bracster!"

The two or three who were standing near laughed loudly. It seemed quite an absurd story, but the fact remained that Bracster had done his utmost to borrow one of the winner's bronze medallions given after yesterday's race. They were big three-inch gongs, and in due course each proud winner would have his name inscribed in the space left for that purpose. And Bracster wanted the loan of one to show his father, and to boast of his prowess in winning it! Bracster, who hadn't even been in a losing four!

"No, Bracster didn't ask me!" Quinton laughed with the others at the story. "We're not exactly on the best of terms these days! Well, I'll cut along now! The spread stands fixed for to-morrow!"

Quinton went out and down the stairs to the main entrance. A long drive led to the big gates, and it was just as he was nearing the gates that Quinton became aware of a row somewhere among the trees on his right.

He was in a hurry, but instinct compelled him to turn into the shrubbery, and a very few yards brought him into full view of the conflict.

A very small boy, rough and dishevelled, without cap and with his shirt-collar torn loose, was just in the act of flinging himself violently upon a thin, lanky fellow, nearly as tall as Quinton himself, but lacking the breadth and the manliness of Quinton.

The fury of the small boy was amazing. He had no earthly chance of bringing the bigger fellow down, though that was apparently his ambition.

"Give it me back, you cad!" he gasped, and clung to his opponent in a desperate effort to overthrow him. "It's mine! Give it back!"

By this time Quinton had recognised the two. The little chap was Ridman, cox of the winning seniors yesterday, and his tall opponent, who at the moment was contemptuously amused, was Dillon Bracster of the Sixth.

"What's the trouble here?" As a prefect, Quinton had every right to interfere, and the sound of his voice had an immediate effect on both.

Ridman relaxed his futile efforts, and for a moment stared at Quinton. Bracster's face had lost its amusement, and he turned on the intruder quickly.

"It's none of your business, anyway, Quinton!" he said meaningly. "So push off, will you?"

But Ridman had found his voice now.

"He's taken my gong—the senior four gong, Quinton!" he gasped. "I wouldn't lend it to him, and he took it from me!"

"Is that correct, Bracster?" Quinton remembered the story he had heard in the Common-room, and there was a steely coldness in his voice.

"Mind your own business!" Bracster retorted, and began to turn away with an air of indifference.

Quinton was on him in a flash. He had seized Bracster and whirled him round with a swiftness which surprised that youth.

"Hand it up—quick!" Quinton was not troubling to argue the point as to whether it was his business or not. "Give the thing back to Ridman, or you know what will happen!"

Bracster knew what the threat meant only too well. It was but a few weeks since he and Quinton had brought a long-continued enmity to a head, and the result had not been pleasant for Bracster.

Yet he made one last attempt to bluff. "How do you know I've got it?" he demanded. "Are you going to take a kid's word—"

"Give it up—now!" ordered Quinton.

It had the desired effect. With a sudden movement Bracster pulled a square, flat case from his pocket, and flung it violently from him.

"Take the thing!" he snarled. "You'll pay for this, Ridman! As for you, Quinton—"

"Yes!" The senior boat captain encouraged him to go on. "What are you going to do, Bracster?"

As no answer came he turned to the junior.

"You'd better clear now, young Ridman!" he suggested. "And I wouldn't carry that thing about in your pocket. You give it to me to-morrow, and I'll take it with mine to be inscribed. Run away!"

The youngster needed no second bidding. Bracster also turned and went slowly back to the drive, but Quinton kept near him.

"What was the idea, exactly, Bracster?" Quinton asked calmly, still keeping pace with the other as he turned towards the gates. "You weren't hoping to tell anyone that you won the thing, were you?"

Whether it was the sense of defeat or whether it was the calm assurance of Quinton's tones which stung Bracster into some show of fight, cannot be said. But he stopped suddenly now, and faced Quinton.

His face had gone whiter than ever, and his lips were quivering with rage, so that he gasped the words out, passionately and wildly.

"You'll pay for this, Quinton! Oh, I'll make you pay for it, and when you least expect it! You think you can bully and interfere with me just when you like. But you'll regret it! I'll have you crawling to me presently! I'll bring you down!"

"Oh, dry up!" Quinton laughed at the childish threats, and no faint premonition touched his mind that one day the threats might be fulfilled. "Why can't you behave decently, Bracster?"

But Bracster was still breathing out his threats.

"You're cock of the walk for the moment! Everyone's afraid of you. But you wait! I'll get square with you! I'll make you—"

"Like to try now?" suggested Quinton ominously. "No, I'm sorry! I can't waste the time at present. But I'll talk to you later, and give you every chance, Bracster! So long!"

They had reached the gates, and Quinton realised that two strangers were standing under the archway. It was for this reason he had cut his speech short. As he passed them, he was conscious of the fact that they were both staring at him intently, and he felt a sense of resentment. They were both tall, middle-aged men, and, after he had passed, Quinton could have sworn that he heard them mention him by name, although he had never seen them in his life before.

"Old Man Quinton's son!" In a startled whisper one of the men spoke to the other, and Quinton caught the words. He turned when he had gone a few more yards. The two men were shaking hands with Dillon Bracster, and Quinton guessed that one was Bracster's father, and the other a friend, who, report said, were visiting the school to-day. It was to impress these two apparently that Bracster had gone to such trouble to gain the loan of one of the Senior Four medallions.

However, Quinton had quite enough to think about on his own account, and very speedily forgot Bracster and his childishness, as well as his two visitors.

It was some considerable time since Mr. Bracster had seen his son, but his greetings to-day were very brief, nor did his friend, Mr. Kerzon, waste much time on the youth.

"Who's that fellow who just left you?" Mr. Bracster indicated the retreating form of Jim Quinton. "Is it Quinton, Dillon?"

"Yes; he's an out-and-out bounder," Bracster answered. "I've just been—"

"Good!" Mr. Bracster and his friend almost forgot young Bracster's presence and became quite excited.

"You couldn't mistake him!" Kerzon was saying. "I'd know him anywhere. I'm going to start on the job right now, Bracster. You talk to your boy, and explain the idea to him. Put him wise to his part! I'm going to follow our young friend, Quinton, and see if he really is meeting Matlock—I'll find out all I can! The game's begun! See you to-night! Good-bye!"

He waved his hand and hurried off down the road in the same direction that Jim Quinton had taken.

Mr. Bracster smiled as he turned to his son. His face was red and ornamented with a heavy moustache, but there was the same curiously sly look about his eyes, and the same little sneer playing about his mouth as there was on his son's face.

"So that's James Quinton, is it?" he asked musingly. "A nasty fellow to argue with, I imagine! You're not fond of him, Dillon?"

"I hate him!" Bracster had forgotten his desire to impress his father and his friend in his own personal bitterness.

"I'm glad!" Mr. Bracster appeared pleased with his son's outburst. "I'll tell you now that he is my enemy and yours, just as his father was before him. Don't forget that, Dillon! The fortune that should be ours now belongs to James Quinton. It's in your hands to put the matter right, my boy!"

Dillon Bracster looked at his father in

Head. It simply asked Jim to meet Mr. Matlock at the Crown Hotel as soon after four o'clock as possible. He had evidently written to the Head on the subject, too, for, without asking him, Jim had been given permission to stay out until any hour he chose, and it was largely the Head's attitude which had aroused Quinton's curiosity.

Mr. Matlock was in his room at the hotel, and Jim was taken up to him at once. The legal man was sitting at the table with quite a number of important-looking papers before him, but he rose at once, and came forward to meet Jim with a welcoming smile.

"Many happy returns of the day, Jim!" were his first words, and there was a peculiar earnestness in his voice. "Very, very many happy returns!"

"Thank you, sir!" It surprised Jim that Mr. Matlock was even aware that it was his birthday to-day.

"You are eighteen to-day, Jim—a wonderful age!" the legal man went on. "And to-day you enter into your



The negro, with a queer cry, raised the lid of the box, and drew forth a beautiful golden chain, which he held before the astonished Quinton. (See page 18.)

amazement. If this were true—if his father were also planning against Jim Quinton, he was quite sure what the result would be. Quinton would go down!

His Father's Will.

JIM QUINTON very speedily forgot everything but his own errand. Once or twice on his journey to Bigglesdale, he took out the letter which the Head had handed to him, and read it through again.

Yet there was nothing very exciting in the letter. It was from Mr. Martin Matlock, solicitor, who, since the death of Jim's father somewhere in Africa three years ago, had assumed any responsibility there was regarding Jim.

On one or two occasions Jim had spent part of his holidays with the Matlock family, and once or twice Mr. Matlock had come to the school to visit him; but his letter to-day had come through the

heritage! But come and sit down! We have a lot to talk about. I'll get them to bring us tea."

Gradually, and with all the precision which only a legal man can employ, Mr. Matlock explained the object of his visit.

"It was your father's wish that on your eighteenth birthday the full position should be placed before you," he began. "These papers here explain all that I know, but these"—he raised a brief-sized linen envelope, carefully sealed—"are for you alone. This contains information which is for you and for no other person. Let me relate the whole story as I know it."

Some parts of Mr. Matlock's story Jim already knew, but many details he had never heard before, and he followed every word carefully, only occasionally interrupting to ask a question when everything was not quite clear.

Briefly, John Quinton, Jim's father, had spent the greater part of his life in practically unknown regions of Central

Africa. In due course he had settled down in the country of the Karradons, an independent kingdom about which as yet very little was known.

Here he became so powerful that the king himself was ruled by him, and he had established trading connections which must have brought great wealth both to Quinton and those who worked with him.

The few white travellers who ever ventured so far, returned with glowing reports of the order and the system which was being established in what had hitherto been regarded as an uncivilised tribe. Only the difficulty of getting there prevented others from going, and in any case it had come to be regarded as Quinton's claim.

"I believe he was regarded almost as a god by the natives," Mr. Matlock said. "He was a very wonderful and a very lovable man. When he died, he apparently held out the hope to them that in due course his son would come to them and take his place. His land and his cattle, and all the wealth he had are being carefully watched over—for you, Jim. He had big schemes on foot, but did not live to see them fulfilled. Now the choice lies with you. Let me show you his last instructions to me, and these different papers."

For an hour or more they went through the various papers, reading and studying each in turn. The sealed package which Mr. Matlock had already pointed out was handed over still unbroken, for Jim to study later when he was alone.

"You will run no risk of losing them, Jim," Mr. Matlock asked. "I imagine they are of considerable value, and doubtless contain information which should not be made public. It is, of course, for you to decide whether you will take up your heritage, or not. Don't hurry about making a decision, though there are others—"

"I shall follow my father's wishes to the letter, sir!" Jim said quickly. "That is quite certain!"

There could be no mistaking his tone, though for a moment Mr. Matlock looked at him carefully.

"I am very glad, Jim!" he said, at last. "It is exactly what I expected. There may be some dangers and difficulties—but you are your father's son! And from all I can gather, it is a very wonderful heritage he has left to you!"

Mr. Matlock rose to turn on the light, for it was growing dark. Scarcely had he done so, when a tap came at the door, and it was opened very quietly.

Into the room came a tall, brown-complexioned man, dressed in what appeared to be a gamekeeper's suit of velvet. Yet there was something of the soldier in his bearing, and he raised one hand in semi-military salute to Mr. Matlock. The latter at once stepped forward, and whispered something, upon which the man retired immediately.

There are, of course, other people who are anxiously awaiting your decision, Jim," Mr. Matlock explained, when he came back. "Two or three of them are already in this hotel. The man who came in just then is Tim Daly, and he was one of your father's most trusted assistants."

"Did he know—" Jim began.

"Everything!" Mr. Matlock answered. "He has come to England in the hope of accompanying you out there. There is another very queer fellow, Erik, who was your father's personal attendant, valet, and general handyman. I don't know what nationality he is, but he speaks English perfectly. Apparently

they had all arranged to meet at my office yesterday. The other man, Nijellah, they call him, so far as I can make out, is a native, and he—"

A tap at the door, carefully regulated, yet insistent, interrupted Mr. Matlock, who went forward again.

Into the room came three men. One of them, the Englishman, Jim had already seen. Just behind him was a very small man, dressed with almost painful neatness, and holding a bowler hat very firmly in his hand. In appearance he was not unlike a Jap, and at first eight Jim would, incorrectly, have put him down for one.

Behind him came a slightly taller man, who was certainly the most outstanding of the three. He was a pure negro, with big, staring eyes, which were fixed on Jim from the first moment he entered the room. The expression on his face was one of wonder and amazement, but as his features never changed this was apparently his normal expression.

His dress was more typically English than either of the white men. He wore a frock-coat, light-grey trousers, and stiff high spats; a striking silk tie of blue and yellow, ornamented with a brilliant scarf-pin, was carefully adjusted about a collar that looked amazingly white in contrast with his ebony skin. Yet Quinton was impressed by the fact that there seemed nothing absurd in his dress. In some way he needed and deserved a brilliant setting.

Jim sprang to his feet at once. Only Tim Daly came forward, however, and Mr. Matlock introduced him.

"I'm pleased to meet you!" he said briefly. "You're like your father. You're taking the job? That's fine, Mr. Quinton! Erik!"

The little man came from the back of the room.

"Sit down, Mr. Quinton!" Daly whispered, and there was something in his tone which suggested that he was not giving a command, but merely showing Jim the ropes.

"Bazar Quinton!" Daly waved his hand to Jim, and Erik, standing stiffly before him, bowed.

"He'll look after you, Erik will," Daly commented. "You can trust Erik!"

"I'm sure—" Jim began; but Erik, at a sign from Daly, had turned, and another call brought the negro forward. Jim Quinton was sitting upright in his chair, feeling unusually self-conscious and not a little puzzled. He realised that Daly was standing by his chair on the right, and that Mr. Matlock was standing on the left.

"Bazar Quinton!" Daly cried, as the negro came nearer.

Immediately the black man went down on one knee. In a mysterious way he suddenly produced from behind him a carved box; which he balanced on the other knee. At the same time he began to make weird noises. His voice was harsh and powerful, and even while he spoke he kept those great dog-like eyes of his fixed on Quinton.

"This is Nijellah, a fairly important fellow in Karradon," Daly explained quietly. "He helped your father; and your father made him!"

"Tell him I'm glad to meet him," Jim answered.

Now, had anyone told Jim Quinton of this scene an hour before he would have asserted that nothing could keep him from laughing. Yet at the moment he felt no hint of laughter. From the brown

carved box which Nijellah was slowly unfastening came a wonderful aroma, which in some way made Jim think of great forests, and brought back almost forgotten memories to his mind.

The room seemed very quiet, and Jim felt that both Tim Daly and Mr. Matlock were standing by him very solemnly. It seemed a long time since he left Harmond's this afternoon, and before him a new world was slowly opening.

"The King's gift for your birthday!" It was Daly who stated Jim's wandering thoughts. The negro, with a queer cry, had raised the lid of the box. One hand kept the box in place on his knee; the other was held poised in the air, palm upwards.

On a background of plain, dead black lay a wonderful gold chain, coiled round a sparkling, flashing oval, which scintillated and danced with ten thousand brilliant lights. As Quinton leaned forward the myriad colours changed, catching up new lights, and sending back fresh beams of liquid colour.

He heard a little cry of amazement from Mr. Matlock, standing just behind him. Before Jim could turn to him, Nijellah had carefully raised the box and pushed it forward on to Quinton's knees.

"Take it!" whispered Daly. "But what can I—" Quinton began, half-afraid of his gift.

"I'll tell him you are pleased, and that you are coming back with us to thank the king yourself," Daly said, and spoke in some weird tongue to the negro.

The bearer of the king's gift was on both knees now, and sat mute and still until Daly had finished. Then he bent his head forward till it almost touched Quinton's boots, and slowly drew back again.

A moment later he was on his feet. Very slowly Nijellah backed, until he was level with Erik, but all the time his eyes were fixed on Quinton. In turn Jim found it impossible to do more than gaze fixedly back at the man.

Daly stepped forward, and with the two went to the door. Opening it, he allowed Erik and Nijellah to pass out, but came back to Mr. Matlock and Jim himself.

"Extraordinary!" Mr. Matlock was the first to break the silence. "But this wonderful chain, and the precious stone, whatever it may be—what is to be done with it?"

Tim Daly shrugged his shoulders.

"It's Mr. Quinton's," he said. "Tomorrow he'd better hand it to Erik to look after for him. He'll have to wear it occasionally—out there!"

He waved his hand, and again Quinton felt something touching his imagination. The scintillating stone and its myriad colours, the queer aroma of the box, and this strange performance in which he had played a part, all filled his mind with wonder. What strange adventures lay in waiting for him in that mysterious country of which Daly spoke as "out there?"

"You didn't mind the little ceremony, Mr. Quinton?" Daly asked suddenly. "It's better; your father always believed in it. And you'll be like him out there—the Big Man!"

Jim closed the box and put it on the table, then turned to Daly.

"When do we go out there?" he asked, and his voice showed no trace of excitement.

"Ah!" Daly drew up a chair, and Mr. Matlock also sat down. "You're like the old man! Well, I'll give you the facts as

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I know them. I'm not hiding from you the fact that there's certain dangers. Things have altered a little in the past three years. Even in this country there are one or two people with schemes. But we'll pull through. You're the Big Man, you know."

So Jim sat and listened to as strange a story as he had ever heard. It was not the story Mr. Matlock had told him. It was the story of a great dream, and of its slow accomplishment. Old Man Quinton had been the Big Man—and he had left a son to succeed him!

It was after eleven o'clock when Jim Quinton rose at last. It was late, and there might be difficulty in getting in. Tim Daly offered to accompany him; but Quinton wanted to be alone. He had much to think about to-night.

So Daly let him go alone, and returned to Mr. Matlock.

"I'm thinking he won't be quite so much alone as he fancies," Daly told Mr. Matlock. "Erik's on duty from today!"

The Fight Begins.

QUINTON had left the wonderful carved box, with the king's gift, in Mr. Matlock's care; but the packet of personal papers was safely reposing in his inner pocket. He meant to read them at the first opportunity.

He was about half-way on the road to Harwood's school, when the big headlights of a car shone behind him, and Quinton drew into the side.

The car slowed down almost to a standstill as it drew level with him.

"Going to the school?" someone called to him. "Jump in! We're going there!"



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Quinton turned. There were two men in the car—one at the wheel, and one sitting in the back. He could not recognise either of them, but they had obviously recognised him, or guessed his destination.

The door at the back was already open, and Quinton, without hesitation, jumped in. It was really jolly decent of these people to give him a lift.

A moment later the car was moving on.

"You're Quinton, aren't you?" asked the man who was sitting by him.

"I am, sir," Jim answered. "I'm afraid I don't recognise you, though, in this light."

"No?" The man laughed, and it seemed as though at that moment the car gave a jolt, for the man lurched towards him. The next moment Quinton realised that something had been jammed over his face, and he was breathing a sickly-sweet scent.

He made an effort to pull it away; but the man was almost on top of him, and was using every ounce of his strength. The whirring of the wheels had risen to a roar in his ears, and queer lights were dancing before his eyes.

And then he had a vague idea that someone else had jumped into the car and was dancing wildly before him.

The dancing figure was leaning over the man at the wheel. Quite suddenly the car came to a dead standstill, after an unpleasant swerve, and Jim could no longer see the figure of the man at the wheel.

"You are better, Bazar Quinton?" a queer high-pitched voice asked him. "You can rise?"

The little figure had put one arm through Jim's, and was helping him to stand upright. The door of the car

was open, and very carefully Quinton stepped down. He still felt dazed and uncertain of himself.

"You will go back to the school, Bazar?" the little man asked, and Jim, nodding, found himself walking along.

"What happened exactly? Who are you?" he asked at last, and was annoyed with himself because he felt so heavy and stupid.

"It is Erik, your servant, Bazar," came the answer. "I followed and sprang on the car lest evil came. They"—he waved one arm backwards towards the car—"are enemies. I shall go back to them and learn all about them when you are safe!"

Jim was too dazed and uncertain of everything to ask further questions. He felt very grateful to this little fellow, but at present all that he desired was to get back to the school and to bed.

The porter was expecting him, but Jim had only a vague recollection of bidding Erik good-night, and of going upstairs.

He undressed and tumbled into bed, still in a maze. Yet his mind remembered the papers, and he put them under the pillow for safety.

That night he slept heavily, and strange dreams troubled his rest. Someone awakened him in the morning, and for some hours after rising he was still suffering from a headache.

During the afternoon he locked himself in his own room and read through the papers which his father had left to him. And now, for the first time, Quinton began to realise the magnitude of his heritage. It was not only the wealth of which he would have control, but the tasks which this was to accomplish—the fulfilment of the wonderful plans for which his father had died.

A banging on the door roused Quinton to realities at last. Hastily he locked the papers away in his drawer, and went to the door.

Several of the Sixth were there, demanding his presence instantly. Was not this the day of the great Birthday Feast? In the Common-room the table was already laid. Quinton and others would remember this spread in years to come, for the end of the term was very near, and in a few short weeks many of the Sixth would be going back to their homes in far-off corners of the earth, where their days at Harwood's would be a jovious memory, and the training of Harwood's would stand there in good stead.

It was a riotous gathering. Even Quinton forgot that even now, in all probability, Mr. Matlock would be with the Head, arranging an early date for him to say good-bye to the school.

"Where's Braester?" Some one suddenly realised that one member of the Sixth was not at the feast.

"He's gone off with some queer-looking fellow, who looks as though he's just had a nasty argument with a lamp-post," another fellow answered. "I met them at the gates this afternoon."

He looked at Quinton, expecting the host of the afternoon to make some comment, but before he could speak a Third Form youngster had entered the room with a message for Quinton. A stranger had called at the porter's lodge and desired to see Quinton just when it was convenient to him.

"Who is it?" Quinton asked. "Didn't he give a name?"

The youngster looked dubious, and whispered his answer very quietly.

"He's a funny little chap, and said his name was Eric, or Arrick, something like that. He said you would know Quinton, and that I wasn't to disturb you."

"That's all right," Quinton jumped to his feet, laughing. "I'll go down and see him right now."

As soon as Quinton entered the porter's lodge Erik came forward, his queer little eyes shining with excitement.

"You are well, Bazar?" He asked the question anxiously, and stared up into Quinton's face.

"As fit as can be, Erik!" Quinton assured him. "But what happened last night? What was the idea? Did you find out anything?"

"You have enemies, Bazar," Erik answered quietly. "They escaped last night. But I know them now."

He held up three fingers and counted them slowly.

"Braester, Kerson, the Boy Braester!" Erik said softly. "You will watch the boy."

He pushed a tiny weapon into Quinton's hand, and the boy captain looked at it in amazement. It was a very small, but beautifully made revolver.

"Good heavens!" Quinton felt he wanted to laugh. "You don't think—"

But Erik was showing him exactly how the "toy" worked, and landed him a small box of ammunition.

"Take care, Bazar! Mr. Daly—he sends you that message!"

Erik bowed, and, without waiting for further comment, went out. Quinton put the little weapon in his pocket and smiled.

He was not a fool, and quite appreciated the fact that weapons were useful in certain parts of the world. Indeed, the Sixth at Harwood's had lessons in rifle and revolver shooting, but their proper place was insisted upon. One never needed a weapon for anything but sport in England.

That night the Head sent for Quinton. Mr. Matlock had been to see him, and it had been decided that at the end of next week Jim Quinton should end his school-days.

"Mr. Matlock has told me something of your future, Quinton," the Head told him. "I knew your father years ago. I hope that here we have done something towards making you as big a man as he was. I shall see you again."

As big a man as he was. The phrase stuck to Quinton, and he recalled what Daly had said. Jim Quinton himself would be the "Big man" out there.

Last night Quinton had slept heavily. To-night, in contrast, he felt not the faintest inclination to sleep, and at two o'clock was wide awake and alert.

The majority of the Sixth at Harwood's slept in one corridor, two given sharing a room, Quinton's own close friend, Willoughby, was his room-mate, and their views coincided.

As he lay thinking of the future and of all it might hold, he had a sudden impression that a figure had passed the door.

There was nothing of wonderful importance in that fact, yet Quinton jumped out of bed instantly and went to the door. He was inclined to be over-imaginative to-night.

He could just discern a figure, partly dressed, standing at the top of the stairs, and in his hand he was apparently carrying an electric torch, for a momentary flash revealed the fact that the fellow was feeling his way cautiously.

Quinton went back and two seconds later had put on a pair of gym shoes, and slipped into the nearest coat he could find. Returning to the corridor, he could see no sign of the night-walker, and he hurried quickly down the stairs. In the

corridor below he hesitated, for there was no sign of his quarry.

Then came to his ears a quick, tearing crack. Quinton decided that the sound came from one of the Sixth studies further along the corridor on his left, and he went down swiftly and silently.

All the study doors were open. That was the rule for night-time at Harwood's. But as Jim went along he came to one that was closed, and realised that it was his own.

He turned the handle noiselessly and peered inside. The moonlight was sufficiently strong for him to see quite clearly the figure of someone at the table in the centre of the room. The drawer was wide open, and the fellow had in his hands a package which Quinton recognised immediately. It was the home envelope, which he himself had opened to-day, containing the private and personal papers from his father.

Quinton stepped forward instantly, and in that brief moment recognised the one at the table. It was Dillon Braester.

"What's this game, Braester?" Quinton's voice was low but sharp, and it startled the other.

"Put those down," Quinton ordered.

"Who told you?"

To his surprise Braester made a sudden movement. He sprang swiftly to the side of the table, and reached out to the window, which was already slightly open. Before Quinton quite grasped what the move meant, Braester had flung open the window, and thrown the packet through.

Quinton had jumped forward now, and seized Braester in a fierce grip. But he was already too late. The papers had gone, and Braester, even while Quinton pulled him away, had managed to give a curious whistle—a signal, so Quinton guessed, to someone below.

"What's this mean?" Quinton banged Braester against the wall, pinning him there, and demanding an instant answer.

"Tell me!—Everything—quick!"

"Find out!" Braester gasped.

"Rave the school! I've stolen my own papers! Let me go!"

"Are you going to tell me the whole story, Braester? Quick!" Quinton raised one arm threateningly, but to-night it failed to frighten Braester.

"You'll need some help," he managed to sneer. "Go and call."

He stopped abruptly and Quinton relaxed his grip. A cry, sudden and agonising, came from the outside. It was the call of someone in urgent danger, and in horrible pain—a ghastly, frightened cry of terror, the very sound of which sent a little thrill of fear through both Quinton and his captive.

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