

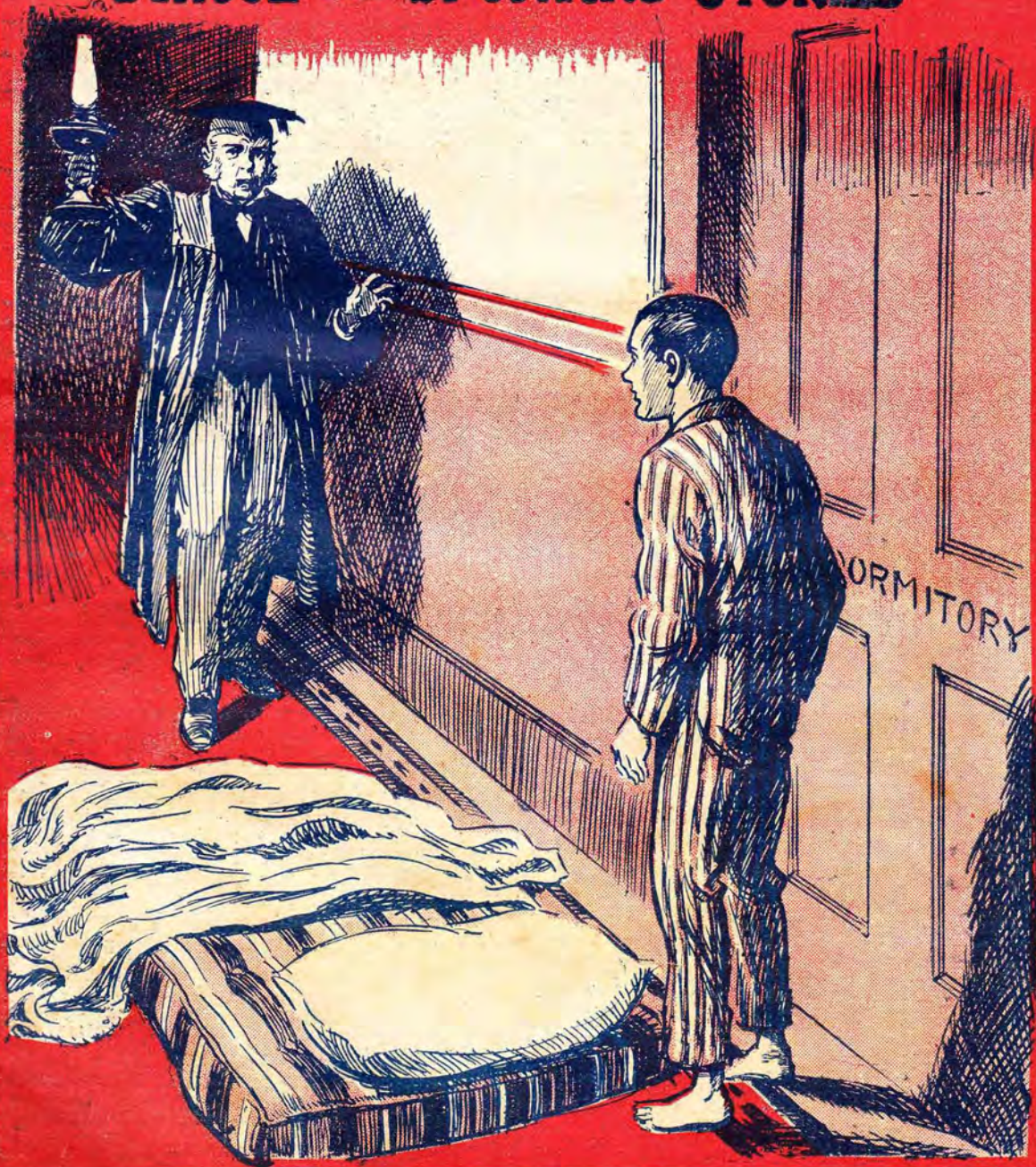
Meet Tom Merry & Co. In This Magnificent 25,000-Word School Story!

The GEM 2^D

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No. 891.
Vol. XXVII
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1925.

LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



NOT WANTED IN THE DORMITORY!

Left alone in the chilly corridor the Schoolboy Refugee finds it hard to explain to his Form-Master how he and his bed came to be thrown out of the dormitory!

(A telling incident from the grand extra-long school story of St. Jim's in this issue.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

MY DEAR CHUMS.—Among all the good things the GEM contains each Wednesday, of course the great story of the doings of St. Jim's takes first honours. There are always brisk and lively happenings at the old school which is adorned by the presence of Tom Merry and his friends.

"CHUMS AT LOGGERHEADS!"
By Martin Clifford.

This is the title of next Wednesday's grand, extra-long, complete story of St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford. This twenty-five-thousand-word yarn is in the happiest vein of the famous author, who has made the celebrated characters household words all over the wide world. Chums do fall out, as we know. The best of friends have cross words, and tumble head over heels into the saddest of all misunderstandings. That cannot be helped. You don't find lutes minus rifts in this every-day sort of world. Taking all that sort of thing as read, we can give brief consideration to an extremely fine story. The plot nails the attention at the start. Before I say more, I should like to urge all my friends to make sure of their copies by ordering in good time. Be sure, and you will not be sorry. And you would be no end sorry to miss this tale of trouble in the Fourth, with D'Arcy and Blake in a real worry over a certain mighty mysterious happening. Baggy Trimble is also involved. Trimble comes in as the bad third. I have no wish to be hard on Baggy, but, truth to tell, he is never very good, and this time he puts his silly foot into it with a vengeance.

"ERRORS" COMPETITION.

Next week I hope to give the full results of our grand "Errors" Competition. The work of judging has been immense, and I would like to point out that the standard of entries, to say nothing of their number, has been absolutely tip-top.

THE TUCK HAMPER!

It is entirely satisfactory to note that my tip about using postcards in this competition has borne good fruit. In every way the postcard is best. I am not asking for microscopic writing, but the best yarnlet can be got on to a p.c. all right, and it saves postage, and no end of trouble. Paste the coupon on the postcard.

A CROSS-WORD PUZZLE!

We have a St. Jim's yarn next week crammed full of cross-words, but they have nothing to do with cross words. In our new issue I am offering a first-rate Cross Word puzzle. Look out for a very fascinating teaser, and brain enlivener!

"FOOTBALL CHUMS!"
By Arthur S. Hardy.

As the weeks slip by I, for one, have felt prouder than usual of our serial. From letters to hand, this feeling is shared by readers all over the country. Next week's instalment shows Hal Chester succeeding in his purpose. He has had plenty of stiff work, but he is getting on hand over fist. Mr. Hardy has knocked about the world, and seen many strange sights. He understands the rough and tumble of life as well as he grasps all the meaning of a tussle on the football-field. That's why this present yarn is so entralling. We find the tables turned, but it is not to be expected that there is an end to trouble. That would not be reality, for trouble is a standing dish at life's banquet, so to speak. But what Mr. Hardy can, and does show, is that there are compensations, and suitable rewards for tenacity and courage in the fight. Hal Chester has fought the good fight, and no mistake. It was not in his heart to want a spectacular triumph over his mean-spirited stepfather. Hal is a sportsman, and real sportsmen feel no sense of elation when they see the most dour adversary feel the pinch of bad times. It is not like that at all. The big prize which is won by the youngster is the chance which Fate gives him to stand by his mother in her distress. What that means any fellow knows. This great serial was a winner from the outset. It is something even better nowadays. It will give any reader something to think over pleasantly for many a long day to come. Watch out for the new instalment.

YOUR EDITOR.

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GET BUSY NOW!

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER!
SOME HEAD!

The village schoolmaster had urged his boys to take up fretwork and carpentry as hobbies. He had also arranged for small prizes to be given to those who brought him the best-made articles. One day a lad produced a splendid little model cabinet. "This is very nice," said the master. "Tell me, where did you obtain the pattern to work from?" "Please, sir," answered the boy, "I made it out of my head, and I've just enough wood left to make another!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Harry Dunning, 39, Dartry Road, Chelsea, S.W. 10.

TOO MUCH TIME!

Prison Visitor: "And what brought you here, my poor man?" Convict: "Havin' too much time on me hands." Prison Visitor: "Ah! Idleness is indeed the parent of crime." Convict: "That ain't it, sir; I was caught with three watches in my pocket I couldn't account for!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. E. Cooper, 185, Telford Road, Wolverhampton.

THE TELL-TALE FEATHER!

A little girl complained to her mother that she was not feeling well, and the mother thought the symptoms were those of chicken-pox. Early the next morning the child went into her parents' room looking very serious. "Yes," she said, "it is chicken-pox, mamma; I found a feather in bed!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Jeffery Druce, 23, Albert Road, Widnes, Lancs.

A CAPITAL LIKENESS!

Sandy had been photographed, and he was gazing intently at his "pictur," when MacPherson came along. "What's that ye hev there?" asked Mac. "Oh, a photograph o' mesel," replied Sandy, showing it to his friend. "Mon," exclaimed Mac, "it's awfu' like ye, Sandy. What did it cost ye?" "Weel," said Sandy, "I dinna ken, for I haena' paid for it yet." "Mon," said Mac, in a firmer tone, "it's awfu' like ye!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to William Mitchell, 5, North Shore Street, Campbelltown, N.B.

TONGUE TWISTER!

"You've no need to light a night-light on a light night like to-night. For a night-light's light's a slight light, and to-night's a night that's light. When a night's light like to-night's light, it is really not quite right to light night-lights with their slight lights on a light night like to-night."—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Stanley Lord, 3, Knotts Lane, Colne, Lancashire.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

Little has been heard of Alan Lorne lately, but this magnificent yarn makes up for the deficit. A reformatory boy comes to the school. Who he is, and how the Fourth Former at St. Jim's becomes implicated in the consequent happenings, you will see for yourself when you read this pathetic and dramatic school yarn—



THE SCHOOLBOY REFUGEE!

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

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

An Amazing Announcement!

LORNE!" Alan Lorne of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's did not reply.

He was seated in the armchair in his study with his legs stretched out, his hands driven deep into his trousers-pockets, and a wrinkle of thought on his brow. He looked troubled, and from time to time he would stir uneasily in the chair.

Baggy Trimble, who had just looked into the study, blinked curiously at his preoccupied Form-fellow.

He coughed.

"Ahem!"

Lorne did not seem to be aware of Trimble's presence.

"I say, Lorne!" said the fat youth of the Fourth, his curiosity deepening.

"Eh?" Lorne looked up with a start. "What is it, Trimble? Cut off, and don't bother me!"

"Oh, really, Lorne!" said Trimble peevishly. "You might be civil to a chap, you know."

"Rats!" said Lorne curtly. "Get out, Trimble!"

Nobody at St. Jim's was ever civil to the egregious Baggy, even at the best of times, and on this occasion Alan Lorne certainly did not appear to be in the mood to be civil to anybody, much less to Baggy Trimble.

Baggy growled.

"Look here, Lorne, you needn't bite a chap's head off when he brings you a message!" he said.

Lorne started up and flashed Trimble a quick glance.

"A message!" he ejaculated. "From whom?"

"It's from the Head," said Baggy, looking more curiously than ever at Lorne. "He wants to see you in his study."

"Oh!"

Lorne rose from the armchair and stood by the fireplace, as if irresolute. His face was flushed and his chest heaving, and he clenched his fists together tight.

"I—I say," said Baggy, blinking at Lorne. "Is there anything up?"

Lorne did not reply.

"He, he, he! You're expecting a row, Lorne, that's what it is. What have you been up to?"

"You fat idiot, I haven't been up to anything!" exclaimed Lorne angrily.

"You're jolly touchy, Lorne, I must say!" said Baggy. "Of course, you can't pull the wool over my eyes. You've been up to something, and you're in a blue funk about seeing the Head. I can put two and two together—"

"Yes, I know; and you generally make six of it, you nose-y young rotter!" retorted Lorne. "Clear off, Trimble, or I'll punch your fat head!"

He took Baggy by the shoulders and propelled him through the doorway into the corridor outside. Baggy roared.

"Yarooop! Leggo, you beast!"

"Now cut off, Trimble!" rapped Lorne, closing his study door behind him.

He walked away towards the Head's study, and Baggy scowled after him.

"Yah! Bad-tempered beast!" he snorted. "There's something behind this, I know. And—and I'll jolly soon find out, too!"

Baggy followed Lorne at a respectful distance, and watched him hesitate outside the Head's study before he finally tapped at the door.

"Come in!" said the quiet voice of Dr. Holmes from within.

Lorne opened the door and entered.

Dr. Holmes regarded him gravely over the rims of his eye-glasses.

Alan Lorne was not a very prominent boy in the school affairs. He was a quiet, reserved lad, and had always been just one of the rank and file among the juniors. Rather weaker natured than some of the others, and somewhat backward in the school games, he was never a conspicuous figure, although he was well liked by everyone, and nothing bad had ever been recorded against him.

He met the Head's glance with a flushed face.

"You sent for me, sir?" he said.

"Yes, Lorne," said Dr. Holmes quietly. "I wished to speak to you on rather an important matter. It is in connection with a new boy who will be coming into the Fourth."

"Oh!"

Lorne drew a deep breath, as if of relief, and Dr. Holmes looked rather hard at him.

"I am going to take you into my confidence, Lorne, knowing you to be an honest and trustworthy lad," he continued.

"Can I rely on you to respect my confidence implicitly?"

"Yes, sir," replied the Fourth-Former wonderingly. "If you tell me anything in confidence I shan't let it go any farther."

"Thank you, Lorne!" said the Head. "This new boy, whose name is Hewett, is coming from a reformatory school."

Lorne's face went suddenly white, and again Dr. Holmes looked curiously at him.

"You are amazed, Lorne," he said quietly. "And, I suppose, that is not without reason. It is certainly a most unusual thing for the headmaster of a public school to enrol a boy direct from a reformatory. The boy who is coming here, I might mention, is reported to be a hardened character and an incorrigible rogue. His mania is for robbery, and he was expelled from Telminster School for striking down a master at night and taking his pocket-book containing money. That was the culmination of his career of roguery and black-

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guardism, and he was sent to Broadheath Reformatory. He is now about to be temporarily released in order to come here. The circumstances are rather unusual, and—er—it is a difficult matter to discuss."

He paused, and drummed on the desk with his fingers.

"The matter is purely in the nature of an experiment, and it originated, not from myself, but from Sir Marcus Royce, who is one of the governors of this school," went on Dr. Holmes. "Sir Marcus is also on the controlling board at the reformatory, from which the new lad is coming, and it seems that he selected Hewett as being one of the worst boy characters on whom to try the experiment. In short, Hewett has been temporarily released from the reformatory, and he is coming to St. Jim's as a new boy."

"Sir Marcus suggests that a better way of reforming the lad would be to allow him to mix with boys from whom he could take a good example, and who would teach him the right way in life. Sir Marcus maintains that, whereas evil companions were the cause of the boy's downfall, so the companionship of good boys would tend to reform him. That gave him the idea of taking the boy from the reformatory, and, for the purpose of the experiment, sending him to a good public school, where a high standard of morality among the boys is maintained. That is why he suggested St. Jim's, where the boys, I am proud to say, are fine examples of the best in young British manhood."

Lorne looked at the Head aghast.

"So a— a young rogue from a reformatory is coming here to St. Jim's!" he exclaimed.

"That, precisely, is the case, Lorne," said the Head. "Sir Marcus had some difficulty at first in persuading me to fall in with his suggestion; but after having fully considered the matter I acceded. There may be something, after all, in what he says. A boy who is easily influenced by others does not find good companionship among the lower criminal class of boy at the average reformatory. I have always been an advocate of kindness rather than cruelty and harsh, punitive methods in dealing with boys, and I shall allow the boy Hewett to enter St. Jim's, so that, if there is any good in him, he may have an opportunity of redeeming his past. I wanted to inform you, Lorne, that I have decided that Hewett shall occupy Study No. 8 in the Fourth Form, which, so far, is occupied only by yourself and Percy Wyatt. It is a large study, and there is plenty of room for the new boy."

Lorne looked astonished and dismayed.

"You would naturally resent having your study shared by a boy from a reformatory school," said the Head gently. "But I know you to be a sensible and chivalrous lad, and it is to those points in your character, Lorne, to which I particularly appeal. You must think of Hewett, not as a young criminal, but as an unfortunate lad who has made a mistake and is trying to atone."

"Sir Marcus informs me that Hewett has promised to make the best of the opportunity now to be afforded him. His parents are rich, and he is an ex-public schoolboy, so that in all probability he will fall in naturally with the school life here. I myself have not seen the boy, but I have every confidence in Sir Marcus' judgment. I trust, Lorne, that you will assist me in this rather difficult matter, and will fall in with my wishes?"

Lorne hesitated, his face flushed and his eyes glittering. Dr. Holmes glanced again curiously at him.

"Well, Lorne?" he asked.

"I—I'll raise no objection to Hewett coming into my study, sir," replied the junior, seeming to gulp something down in his throat.

"Remember, Lorne, that what I have told you is in confidence, and there is no need for the other boys to know the truth concerning Hewett," said the Head. "I have undertaken that his past shall be kept a secret, and that no distinction shall be made between him and any ordinary new boy who comes to St. Jim's. His movements and behaviour will be carefully watched by the masters, of course; but, so far as the rest of the school is concerned, Hewett will be an ordinary new boy. I confided in you, Lorne, because you are to be Hewett's closest associate, and I deemed it best to tell you. You will, I am sure, allow the information to go no farther, and will do all you can to help the lad in what is bound to be a most difficult time for him. I should like you to be a friend to him, Lorne, and, bearing in mind the reason for his presence at St. Jim's, encourage him and lead him from the pitfalls that may beset his path. Will you do that?"

"I—I'll try, sir," said Lorne in a low voice.

"There are other boys in the Lower School to whom I might have entrusted the task—Merry, or Blake, for instance," went on the Head. "But, after duly considering the matter, I felt that I could rely upon you, Lorne. I shall always be only too pleased to advise or instruct you, Lorne, if you meet with any obstacles. Hewett will be arriving to-morrow afternoon, which, of course, is a half-

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holiday, and I was wondering whether you could undertake the further task of meeting the lad at Lexham Junction and bringing him on here. Sir Marcus Royce will accompany Hewett as far as Lexham, and, of course, it would be impossible to leave Hewett to come on here alone. If you have no particular engagement to-morrow afternoon, Lorne, perhaps you would be good enough to travel to Lexham?"

"Very well, sir," said Alan Lorne.

The Head gave him a kindly smile.

"I am greatly indebted to you, my boy," he said. "I know I can trust you."

Alan Lorne left the Head's study, with cheeks burning and hands clenched tight; and Dr. Holmes, looking after him, wondered what other matter was weighing on the junior's mind.

CHAPTER 2.

The Secret Out!

LORNE did not hear the faint scuffle that sounded outside the Head's study door just before he came out, neither did he perceive the fat figure that disappeared round the corner as he stepped into the corridor.

Lorne walked straight to his study, and, closing the door, flung himself down into the armchair.

"Luck!" he muttered fiercely to himself. "Just luck—that's all it is! The chap happens to be rich and well connected, I suppose, and that gave him the preference over the others in the reformatory. If he had been poor, he wouldn't have got the chance of making good. It's the same everywhere—the ones with influence get on, while the poor people, like Ronald—"

He did not finish that sentence, but sat there, with fists clenched tight and his jaws set angrily, as if consumed with savage thoughts.

At length he took a letter from his inside pocket, and, unfolding it, re-read it for, perhaps, the fourth or fifth time. Lorne could not have told the number of times he had read that letter since receiving it that morning.

This is what was in it:

"Dear Alan.—I don't know whether you will get this letter. I have tied it to a stone and thrown it over the wall, hoping that someone, with a spark of pity, will pick it up and send it on to you."

"I want to explain to you why I am in this dreadful place. Don't think hard of me, Alan, as I know you must have done when you heard that I had been expelled from St. Corbyn's and sent to a reformatory school. It was not entirely my fault—there were others more to blame for what happened."

"St. Corbyn's is notorious as a 'swagger' school, where sons of snobbish aristocrats are sent. I never realised what it would be like until I got there. The place is full of young snobs, with pots of money, and I, a scholarship boy and son of a poor tradesman, was looked down on as something less than dirt, and I was shunned by practically everyone. The masters were the same, and the Head was as big a snob as any of the fellows. He was down on me from the first."

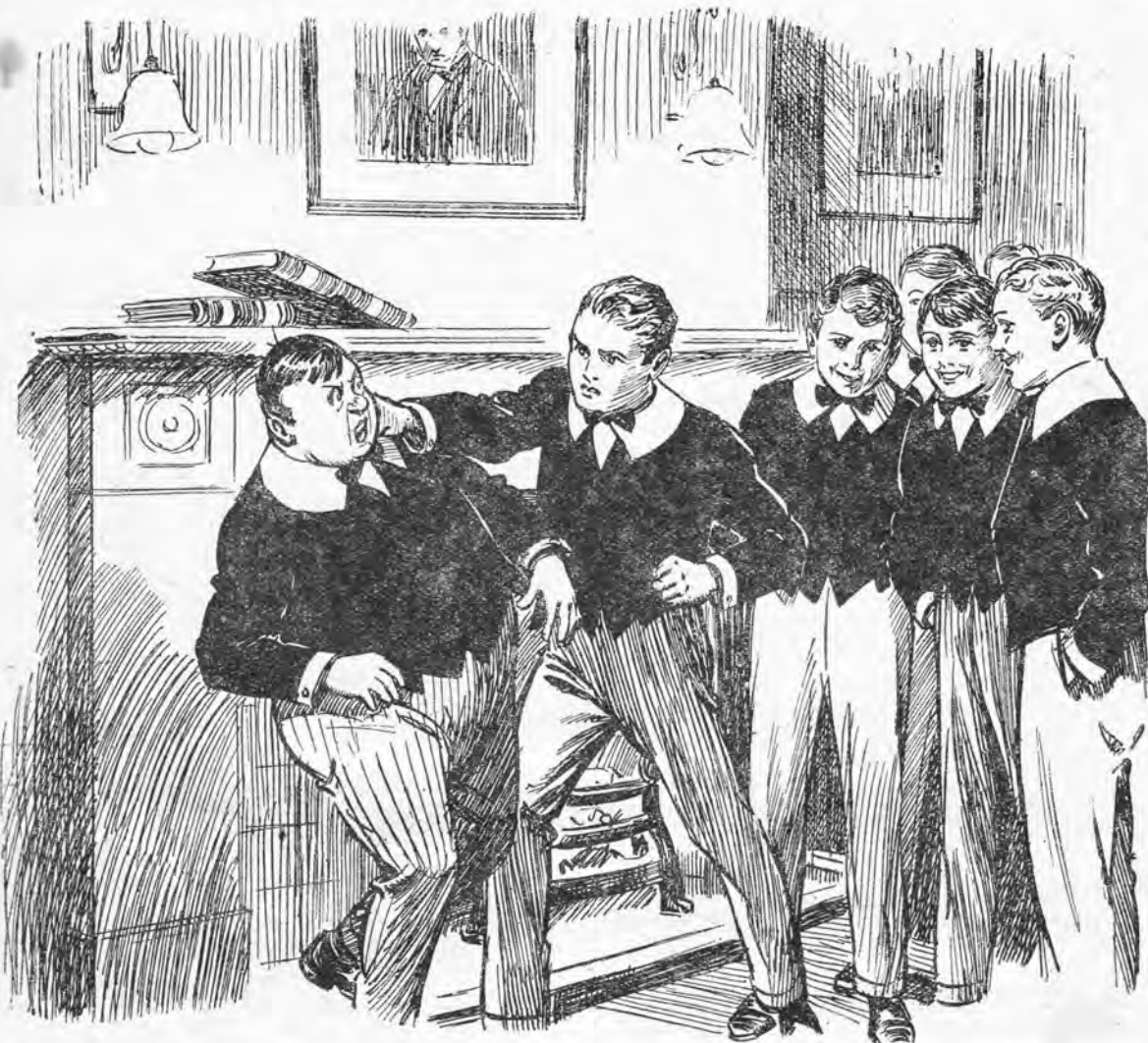
"Well, to cut a long story short, I determined to make the best of it, but found it impossible to keep up appearance with the others. My allowance wouldn't run to it, and I felt an outcast. You can imagine how utterly miserable I felt, as poor as a church mouse and struggling to keep up with the others."

"Two fellows in the study next to mine realised how I felt, I suppose, and they worked out a plot to disgrace me. They feigned friendship and helped me a bit at first. They gave me money, and I lowered myself to do jobs for them secretly."

"Then Rawson, the worst rotter of the pair, told me that if I liked I could borrow some cash he had in his desk belonging to the football club. The cash wouldn't be wanted, he said, until mid-term, when my next scholarship grant would arrive, and I could pay it back then. I knew it would be wrong to take the money, but they tempted me, Alan, and I fell."

"A big affair was coming off in the school, and I either had to buy special clobber for it, or keep out and suffer more sneers from the others. Rather than that, I let Rawson persuade me, and I took the money. Then the cad turned on me, and accused me of thieving. The money was found on me, the story I had to tell was laughed at and not believed, and Rawson and his pal downed me for all they were worth."

"I had no chance, Alan—I wasn't wanted at the school, and the Head made the most of it. I was expelled and sent to a reformatory—and here I am."



"It's a rotten shame!" said Baggy Trimble. "Fancy Lorne consenting to harbour a reformatory rotter in his study. If I had my way I'd—I'd—" The fat Fourth Former broke off suddenly as he caught sight of Alan Lorne striding towards him. Lorne's face was black with anger, and he clapped a heavy hand on Trimble's coat-collar. "You prying little rotter!" he said angrily. "So it's you who has been telling tales!" (See page 6.)

"You cannot imagine what it is like, Alan—the humiliation and the shame of it, to be classed with the young blackguards there are at this place, confined as in a prison, and beaten and bullied as if I were a criminal. The men in charge here are brutes. I had always imagined life in a reformatory to be hard, but I could never have imagined the life as it really is. They make criminals of the boys here—they don't reform them. They break a boy's spirit and his heart.

"Tell them all at home what I have written, Alan, and let them know that I am not so bad as I was made out to be. Goodness knows when I shall see you again, but if I get a chance to break out of this place I shall take it. I think I would rather die than stay here. When I think of the cruel way I have been treated, just because I am poor, it makes me savage.

"There is a fellow in this place who is as precious a rotter as you'd find anywhere—a chap from a public school whose parents are well off. He gets treated with every consideration, and has an easy time—just because he's rich. I'm poor, and they all know it here—and that's just the difference. The majority of the inmates deserve to be here, but it was a cruel injustice to make a reformatory 'lag' of me.

"I won't stand it, Alan; they'll never break my spirit, and if I can get out I will. You're the only pal I've ever had, and if I do manage to get free, I know you will help me.

"So good-bye for now. I'll get another letter through if I can.

"Your affectionate cousin.

"RONALD."

Lorne gave a short, bitter laugh as he thrust the letter back into his pocket.

"I wonder if the fellow Hewett who is coming here happens to be the one Ronald writes about?" he muttered. "I—I hope he is. He may be able to tell me something about Ronald; but"—here the junior's face hardened and his eyes took on a glint—"he won't get much friendliness out of me! His riches, that got him consideration at the reformatory, won't put him in favour here, so far as I am concerned. Why couldn't Ronald have got the chance that Hewett has got? Ronald isn't a rotter at heart, I do know, and deserves the chance. But"—Lorne gave another bitter laugh—"but he's poor, and he's downed. There's one law for the rich, and another for the poor. Ronald ought not to be in that rotten reformatory; he—"

The junior broke off as a bang sounded at the door. It came open a minute later, and Percy Wyatt strode in.

He was looking angry and excited. He glared at Lorne and waved his arms wildly.

"Is it true?" he demanded loudly.

"What the dickens—"

"Is it true?" yelled Wyatt.

"Is what true?" asked Lorne, looking mystified.

"About a reformatory rotter coming into this study!" roared his study-mate wrathfully. "I want to know if it's true!"

Lorne started and jumped up. He regarded Wyatt in amazement.

"How—how did you know?" he panted breathlessly.

"Then it is true!" roared Wyatt. "You admit it, Lorne?"

Alan Lorne set his teeth hard. His brain was in a whirl. It was only five minutes ago that the Head had confided in him, yet Wyatt knew already—and, if Wyatt knew, others would certainly know.

"I—I don't know what you're talking about!" Lorne stammered.

Wyatt gave a short.

"You jolly well do know what I'm talking about!" he exclaimed. "I hear that a chap from a reformatory is being pitchforked into St. Jim's, because his people have got money and he's being given a chance to take example from a gang of good little boys like us. And—and you've undertaken to have the rotter in here and look after him! You—you blithering idiot!"

Wyatt seemed quite put out about it.

"How did you know?" asked Lorne quickly. "Who told you, Wyatt?"

"Why, the yarn's common property!" exclaimed Wyatt wrathfully. "I don't know exactly where it originated, but a lot of the chaps have got hold of it. Look here, Lorne! You might be frank with me, as I dig in here with you. Is it true?"

Alan Lorne shrugged his shoulders.

"Supposing it were true?" he said. "What of it?"

"What of it?" roared Wyatt. "Why, d'you think I'm going to chum with a reformatory rotter? D'you think I'd allow a convicted cad from an industrial school to share this study with me? Not so jolly likely! If you've consented, Lorne, you must be off your rocker, and you can jolly well dig in with the new rotter on your own! I'll clear out!"

"Look here, Wyatt!"

"You mark my words!" said Wyatt darkly. "If the reformatory rotter comes in here, I'll go out. Kernish and Reilly have promised to let me go in with them. You'll be left on your own with the precious new boy!"

Lorne looked dismayed.

Wyatt and he were not exactly bosom chums, but, being study-mates together, a close comradeship had sprung up between them. Lorne did not welcome the idea of Wyatt leaving him.

"I say, Wyatt, you needn't kick like that, you know," he said. "This is a pretty big room, and—"

"Bosh!" snorted Wyatt. "You can't wheedle me round like that, Lorne. You're an ass to give in to the Head's mad wishes! He must be potty to allow a cad from a reformatory to come here, anyhow. If he'd spoken to me, I should jolly well have told him flat that I wouldn't have a reformatory rotter in my study! Why, you're made of sawdust, Lorne!"

Alan Lorne clenched his fists, and was about to make hot retort, but he controlled himself.

He set his teeth and strode to the door.

"I'll find out who's been spreading this yarn about!" he said angrily. "If any trouble is caused, the Head shan't blame it on to me!"

He left Wyatt alone, and hurried down the corridor.

A buzz of voices sounded from the Common-room, and he strode in. Baggy Trimble's voice was the loudest, and Lorne saw the fat youth of the Fourth standing by the fireplace, surrounded by an excited crowd of juniors.

"It's a crying shame, that's what I think about it!" Baggy was shouting. "Lorne ought to be jolly well bumped for it, too! If I had my way with that silly fathead, I'd—"

Baggy broke off abruptly, for at that moment he caught sight of Alan Lorne striding towards him.

Lorne's face was black with anger. He thrust his way through the juniors, and clapped a heavy hand on Trimble's coat collar.

"You spying little rotter! So it's you who has been telling tales!" he exclaimed angrily.

Baggy wriggled as Lorne shook him.

"Yoooop! Ow-wow! Leggo, you rotter! Yah! Oooogh!"

Shake! Shake! Shake!

"Here, chuck that, Lorne!" exclaimed Aubrey Racke, stepping forward and grasping Lorne's arm. "We want to have this out with you. You've consented to harbour a reformatory rotter in your study unbeknown to us, and thought you'd pull the wool over our eyes nicely!"

"Rather!" sneered Mellish. "I call it a rotten cheek! What do you mean by it, Lorne?"

"Mind your own business!" panted Lorne, wrenching his arm free from Racke's grasp. He whirled round on Baggy, and that youth raised his voice unto the heavens.

"Yarooooogh! Help! Keepimoff! Ow-wow-wow!"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry's cheery voice at the door. "Who's killing our prize porker?"

The captain of the Shell was followed in by Monty Lowther and Manners. Behind the Terrible Three came Jack Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth.

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All seven juniors were looking fresh and ruddy from their exertions on the footer field.

"Rescue!" roared Trimble as soon as he saw the new comers. "Lorne's bullying me! Wow!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle and looking at Lorne. "It's wathah unusual for you to be in a wumpus, deah boy. What's Twimble been doin'?"

"He's been spying!" exclaimed Lorne. "He—"

"I haven't!" howled Baggy. "I never let out anything I heard at the Head's keyhole, Lorne! I—"

"So you were eavesdropping at the Head's keyhole!" exclaimed Lorne wrathfully.

"Nunno! You're mistaken, Lorne! I—I mean— Yow-wow! Don't sh-shake me like that, you rotter! Oooop!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Baggy, how many more times am I to warn you about listening at keyholes, you fat rotter?" he said severely. "I've tried to break you of the habit."

"But I didn't!" howled Baggy. "I—I happened to be passing the Head's door, when my collar came undone and I stopped to do it up."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "He's changed the boot yarn to his collar now! It used to be his bootlace that came undone right outside the door he wanted to listen at!"

"Oh, really, you know—"

"You little toad!" cried Lorne. "You must have followed me to the Head's study and listened to all that was said. And you've spread the yarn all over the school by now, I suppose!"

"Anyhow, we're glad Trimble found it out!" said Racke, with a sneer. "Otherwise the whole school would have been spoofed and the new cad would have had the laugh of us!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the other juniors round the fireplace.

Tom Merry looked round in wonder.

"What's all this about?" he asked.

"Why, the Head's importing a rotten criminal chap from a reformatory into St. Jim's, with the idea of reforming him by kindness and good example!" roared Crooke, of the Shell. "None of us was to know about him except Lorne."

"Bai Jove!"

"It was going to be a nice wangle between the Head, the new chap, and Lorne!" said Racke. "The whole school was going to be spoofed properly, you know!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked in amazement at Lorne, whose face was flushed with anger.

"Look here, Tom Merry! Now that Trimble has nosed out the story and babbled it over the school, I might as well tell you the exact facts!" exclaimed Lorne. And in brief, terse sentences, he recounted all that Dr. Holmes had told him concerning the new boy.

"The only reason the Head let me into the secret is because there happens to be room in my study, and he decided to put Hewett in there," said Lorne, in conclusion. "When the Head asked me to keep the secret and help this chap, what could I say?"

"You ought to have told the Head to go and eat coke!" said Mellish.

"You should have told the Head outright that we don't want any old lags from reformatories mixing with us!" roared the great George Alfred Grundy. "The Head should have asked me, then I'd have told him something! I'm Grundy, and I don't beat about the bush!"

"Oh, bosh!" said Lorne, in exasperation. "I don't suppose any of you would have acted differently, under the circumstances. The Head asked me, and I couldn't very well refuse."

Tom Merry nodded.

"You're right, Lorne," he said. "We should all have done the same, under the circumstances."

"Yas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I agree with Lorne. I certainly should not approve of havin' a wematoway wotthah planted in my study; but the Head thinks he is wight in what he is doin', and the Head's wish is pwactically law, bai Jove."

"Is it!" snapped Racke bitterly. "Well, we'll jolly soon show the Head that we're not going to stand it. Look here, Tom Merry! You're captain, and it's up to you to lead a demonstration to the Head, to protest against the reformatory rotter coming here."

"Hear, hear!" roared a score of voices.

Tom Merry flushed.

"Don't talk out of the back of your hat, Racke!" he exclaimed. "If the Head has settled on the new chap coming, he certainly won't let us chaps interfere. Besides, the fellow may turn out all right—"

"Yah! He's sticking up for the reformatory rotter!"

"Listen to the ass!"

A chorus of angry cries arose at the junior captain's remark.

Even Blake looked uncomfortable.

"Draw it mild, Tommy," he said. "You can't stick up for the reformatory chap, you know."

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"I stick to what I say," he replied calmly. "The fellow may be all right—at least, he may be no worse than some of the precious rotters we've got here already—Racke and Mellish and Crooke, for instance!"

Those three youths scowled darkly at the Shell captain.

"If he slipped up and got sent to a reformatory, and is anxious to make good, I don't see why the chap shouldn't be given a chance," went on Tom. "I think it's jolly decent of the Head to put him to the test, anyhow. Not many Heads would allow a reformatory chap in his school—"

"And not many chaps would tolerate a reformatory cad as a schoolfellow!" hooted Lennox. "It's too thick, and we're not going to stand it, are we, chaps?"

"No jolly fear!"

"No reformatory rotters for us!"

"Let him come, anyway!" said Aubrey Racke, with relish. "We'll give him the time of his life. We'll make him glad to get back to the reformatory. St. Jim's is no place for rotters of his kidney!"

"The same applies to you, then!" said Tom Merry calmly. "You're about as big a rotter as one could possibly wish to meet, Racke. Perhaps the only difference between you and the new boy is that you haven't been bowled out yet. I always did say you'd end up in prison some time or other."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke darted Tom Merry a malicious look.

"You think yourself mighty clever, Tom Merry, don't you?" he sneered. "But if you think you can make things easy for the new chap, you're mistaken. Wait till he comes. We'll show him what we think about him. And let me warn you, Merry, that you'll get it in the neck if you interfere!"

"Oh, bosh!" laughed Tom, not in the least perturbed.

He strode from the Common-room, and his chums followed him, looking decidedly ill at ease.

They were loyal to their leader, and knew that what he said was right. Yet the idea of a boy from a reformatory coming into their midst was repulsive to them. They decided, however, to wait till the new boy came, and then judge him themselves. As for the other juniors, they were all against the idea, and they waxed highly indignant. There was no denying that, now the secret had come out, a very hot time awaited the boy from the reformatory, when he did arrive at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

The Boy from the Reformatory!

"LEXHAM JUNCTION!"

A porter bawled out the name raucously, and Alan Lorne jumped up as the train drew into the station.

He had been day-dreaming all the way from Rylcombe, and had not noticed the arrival of the train at Lexham.

True to his promise to the Head, Lorne had set out to meet the new boy, Hewett, and bring him to St. Jim's. A great deal of hostility had been shown towards Lorne at the school, and Racke & Co. might have prevented his going had not the junior been excused from the dining-hall earlier than the others, in order to catch a train at Rylcombe.

His thoughts throughout the journey had been occupied with his cousin, Ronald, to whom he was deeply attached.

The two had been brought up together and had been close chums until parting, when Lorne had gone to St. Jim's, and his cousin remained at his old school to study for his forthcoming scholarship.

The disaster that had overtaken his cousin had come as a great blow to Alan Lorne. He had told nobody at St. Jim's that his cousin was in a reformatory school. He was ashamed for that knowledge to get round the school, yet in his heart he was deeply sorry for Ronald. There was nothing he would not have done to help the unfortunate lad.

Lorne had been wondering whether Hewett came from the same reformatory as the one where his cousin was being kept. The thought had set his pulses beating wildly. Supposing Hewett told them at St. Jim's that Ronald Lorne was an inmate of a reformatory school? Yet the junior reassured himself with the thought that, for his own reputation, Hewett dare not tell. He was looking forward to meeting the new boy and asking him about Ronald. If he did come from the same place, it might be possible to rescue Ronald. The idea seemed preposterous, yet Lorne felt that he would risk anything to get his cousin out of the dreadful place to which he had been so unjustly sent.

"Lexham!"

The porter's call roused him from his reverie, and he jumped out of the train.

He left the platform and hurried over the bridge to the main-line platforms, where Dr. Holmes had informed him Sir Marcus Royce and Hewett would be waiting.

A tall, distinguished-looking gentleman and a boy in Etons were standing by the barrier of the main platform, and Lorne walked towards them.

He raised his school cap respectfully to Sir Marcus Royce, who held out his hand cordially.

"You are Master Lorne, whom Dr. Holmes spoke to me about on the telephone this morning?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the Fourth-Former.

"It's very good of you to come, my lad," said the baronet warmly. "I have to return to London by the next train, otherwise I should have been able to accompany Hewett all the way to St. Jim's. Dr. Holmes has—er—explained to you about your future study-mate, I believe?"

Lorne nodded.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a quiet voice.

"I will introduce you," said Sir Marcus. "George Hewett, this is Master Lorne, whose study you will share at St. Jim's."

"Lorne!"

The reformatory boy echoed the word in a strange tone, at the same time darting the junior a sharp look.

The two shook hands, and Lorne was able to take good stock of the other.

Hewett was a slim but wiry-looking boy, fairly tall, and with the poise of an athlete. His face would have been handsome but for the hard lines and his deep-set, glittering eyes. His complexion was sallow, and when he smiled it seemed to veil a hidden, mocking cunning in his expression.

His small, strong hand took Lorne's hand in a hard grip.

"Hewett has his ticket for Rylcombe, and here is his luggage," said Sir Marcus, indicating two large trunks at their side. "I think you lads had better hurry off to the local platform, as the next train to Rylcombe leaves in a very few minutes."

Lorne and Hewett each took a trunk, and, having received some kindly words from Sir Marcus and a warm handshake, they made their way to the local platform.

The train from Rylcombe came steaming in shortly after, and the two boys found a first-class compartment to themselves, into which they took the trunks, there being no luggage-van on the train.

Sir Marcus waved good-bye to them from the other platform, and they both leaned out of the window to respond as the train drew out of Lexham Junction.

Hewett drew back from the window at length and sat down opposite Lorne, who had already taken his seat, and was regarding him curiously. Hewett returned the look with a sneer curling the corners of his thin mouth.

"Well," said the reformatory boy, after a pause. "Have you had a good look? Do you think you'd know me again if you saw me?"

Alan Lorne flushed.

"I suppose you're wondering what sort of a fellow I am," went on Hewett, with a harsh laugh. "A tough from a reformatory is rather a new sort of customer to deal with—eh? So you're the chap who's going to take me under his wing and cherish me! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—" began Lorne angrily, but the other cut him short.

"None of your cheek, young Lorne, or I might have to punch your head! You look a bit of a miff, and I reckon I could just about manage you with one hand!"

Lorne looked away uneasily. The train was now rattling along at a good pace through the countryside. It was apparent that the boy from the reformatory meant to pick a quarrel and to make himself as truculent as possible.

There was a pause, during which time Hewett lay back in the cushions and chuckled to himself.

A station passed, and then another. Hewett leaned forward towards Lorne with a grin.

"I say, you don't happen to have a brother in a reformatory, I suppose?" he said. "Chap named Ronald Lorne!"

The Fourth-Former's eyes opened wide.

"Then you—you know him?" exclaimed Lorne eagerly.

The other laughed sneeringly.

"Yes, I know him," he said. "He's at the place I've just come from. Quite a miff, you know—like yourself. Tries to make out he's innocent, and that he's been treated unjustly, and so forth. Scholarship cad from St. Corbyn's, chucked out for stealing footer club money. He's having a high old time now. I can tell you."

Lorne would have liked to have flung himself at the fellow and called him to account for his insolence, but he was not a fighting man, and he did not wish for trouble.

"Well, I think I've managed to pull the wool over the eyes of that old buffer well enough," Hewett chuckled. "I mean Sir Marcus Royce, of course. He thinks I'm repentant and eager to get back on the straight and narrow path, you know. He thinks I'm going to St. Jim's to learn to be a good little boy, and all that. Ha, ha, ha! The way I've spoofed him is really funny! He's got me out of the giddy reformatory, and now I'm out I mean to stay out. They'll never see me back at the reformatory if I

can help it. And I'm jolly sure they won't see me at St. Jim's."

Lorne stared blankly at him.

"You—you mean, you're not coming to St. Jim's?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"No fear!" said Hewett with a reckless laugh. "You don't suppose I mean to go on there with you, like a giddy lamb, do you? Ha, ha! Not much, old son! I told Sir Marcus I'd be grateful to him to my dying day for a chance if he gave it to me—a chance to get my freedom, I mean. And I've got it, and here I am! I'm reckless, let me tell you, and I stand no half-larks. Take it from me, Lorne, I'm not going to St. Jim's with you!"

"My—my hat!"

"I'm getting off at the next station, old son," continued the young rascal, rising to his feet and looking out of the window, "and if you attempt to interfere, I shall leave you lying on the floor, trussed up and quite safe and sound. How does that appeal to you?"

"You rotter, you can't break away like that! You—"

"Can't I?" laughed Hewett. "It'll take more than you to stop me, anyhow. I never intended from the first to go to St. Jim's for this so-called reformation stunt. They'll never reform me, not if they lock me up and starve me!"

The young rascal's eyes took on an evil glitter, and Lorne involuntarily shrank away from him.

"I mean to go my own way, and do just as I like!" said Hewett between his teeth. "I've got money, and when I run out of it I shall steal more. Did your Head tell you what an expert housebreaker I am?"

"No!" panted Lorne.

The other gave a sardonic laugh, and the St. Jim's junior wondered that a boy could be so hardened.

"That's my speciality—robbery!" said Hewett. "I'm a blackguard, I know, and I mean to be one. Now, Lorne, will you consent to be tied up quietly, or shall I have to use force? I told you just now that I could manage you with one hand, didn't I?"

"You wouldn't dare!" panted Lorne, his heart thumping wildly. "You rotter, you've got to stay here, and—"

He broke off, for Hewett, with a savage snarl, leapt at him.

The two closed, and they swung heavily against the carriage door. Lorne struggled fiercely with his assailant, but realised the futility of it within a few minutes. Hewett's muscles seemed to be made of cast iron; his strength was amazing.

Suddenly, whilst the pair were swaying to and fro in front of the carriage door, Hewett stiffened, and his grasp of Lorne relaxed.

His gaze became suddenly riveted on an object outside the moving train, and Lorne, following the direction of his glance, gave a cry of amazement.

The train was descending a stiff, curving gradient preparatory to entering a tunnel, and as the signal had only just dropped to the "all clear," the speed of the train was slow.

From where they stood at the carriage window, Lorne and Hewett had a good view of the bridge over-running the tunnel.

They gazed in amazement, for down the framework of the bridge a boy, clad in a drab, brown suit, was clambering hand under hand. He reached the lower struts, and then swung himself sideways towards the oncoming train.

He turned his face towards the train for a brief flash, and in that instant both boys at the carriage window saw his strained, pallid features.

Hewett gave a low cry.

"Good heavens! It's Lorne!"

"Ronald!" Alan Lorne's voice rang out with mingled joy and fear. "Ronald—he's escaped!"

Next minute the train passed under the bridge, and, gathering speed, plunged into the impenetrable blackness of the tunnel.

CHAPTER 4.

A Desperate Ruse!

"NOW, Lorne!"

Hewett's voice came thickly through the darkness in the railway-tunnel.

Lorne could feel the blackguard's hot breath close to his face, and he stumbled back, groping blindly. All was pitch-black, and the noise of the train as it rumbled through the tunnel was a jarring din to the junior's ears. He gave a cry as a pair of hands gripped him in the dark, and he was forced back against the cushions.

"Give in, Lorne, or I—I'll hurt you!"

Lorne struck out wildly at his unseen assailant.

The thought that he had seen his cousin so close spurred him to desperation. The pair were fighting hammer and tongs when the train rushed out into the daylight once more, after what, to Lorne, seemed an eternity.

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"Let me go!" cried Lorne, reeling back against the door.

"Oh!"

Hewett let go of the Fourth Former suddenly, and turned, with blanched face, to the opposite window.

A boyish figure in brown had appeared in the framework. It was the boy they had seen clambering down the bridge at the other end of the tunnel! The newcomer gave a cry.

"Alan! And you—Hewett!"

There was a click, and the door came open.

Hewett sprang forward, to push the other out of the fast-moving train, but Alan Lorne held him back.

Ronald Lorne twisted himself into the carriage and shut the door. Hewett, with a snarl, sat down on the cushions.

"So you've broken out of the reformatory, Lorne!" he muttered.

The other nodded and turned to the St. Jim's junior, who eagerly grasped his hand.

"I never expected to find you, Alan, on this train, nor this rotter, either!" he said, panting a little. "Broadheath Reformatory School isn't far from here, you know, and I made a dash for it when our work squad was being rounded up for dinner. Luck came my way, and I got free. Goodness knows how I did it, but I dodged them, and I tramped to the railway line, hiding in fields and crawling behind hedges all the time. I knew that if I reached the railway, I'd stand a better chance of getting away, and when I saw the iron bridge at the bottom of the slope, and the train slowing down, I made up my mind to jump on the train, and chance the rest. I did it, and lay flat on the roof of the second carriage until the train reached the end of the tunnel. Then I climbed down and crawled along the footboard, looking for an empty compartment where I could hide. I never bargained on seeing you two."

Alan Lorne was still staring almost incredulously at his cousin.

"Ronald! It seems too good to be true! You're free from that horrible reformatory!"

His cousin gave a short laugh.

"Yes, Alan, free for the time being!" He set his jaw squarely, and a hard look came over his pale, handsome face. "They shan't take me back if I can help it, either! I'll resist them with my life!"

Hewett burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a couple of us determined not to go back! Two birds flown in one day! My word, what will old Blackwell, the governor, say!"

The runaway shot him a quick glance.

"I thought you had gone with Sir Marcus Royce to a public school, where they were going to give you a fresh trial, Hewett!" he exclaimed.

"Well, so I had!" grinned Hewett. "The benevolent Sir Marcus turned me over to your cousin here, whose job is to take me to St. Jim's."

"Great Scott! Then it's St. Jim's you're going to!" cried Ronald Lorne.

Hewett chuckled.

"It's St. Jim's I was going to!" he said. "You see, Lorne, I'm not going there, really. I'm like you—after my liberty. I shall go where I like, and hang St. Jim's!"

The two cousins exchanged glances.

"Now I see why you were fighting," said the runaway, in a low voice. "You were trying to keep him back, Alan."

"I was preparing to truss him up!" interposed Hewett, with a grin. "Now you have blown in so unexpectedly. Lorne, there'll be no need for any violence. I reckon we can come to terms. If your cousin gives me away I shall give you away—see? We're both in the same boat—or, rather, in the same train!"

The young rascal seemed to have acquired quite a good humour. He jumped up from the carriage seat and looked Ronald Lorne steadily in the eyes.

"Look here, Lorne, I've got a suggestion to make," he said. "It's practically all to your advantage, really. Here you are, a runaway from a reformatory, with a hornets' nest of officials scouring the county for you. You've got no money and no clothes. What chance do you stand of getting away? Your cousin can't help you much. You'll be back in Broadheath before nightfall, as sure as eggs, unless you do as I say!"

"Well?" said Ronald Lorne curiously.

"Well, supposing you went to St. Jim's instead of me—eh?" said Hewett. "Supposing you let me clear off, as I fully intend to do anyway, and you go on to St. Jim's as the penitent little reformatory boy who has come to be reformed by kindness?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Alan Lorne, giving a start.

A gleam entered the runaway's eyes.

"You—you mean that, Hewett?" he exclaimed. "You'll clear right off and leave me free to take your place at St. Jim's?"

The other nodded.

"I'll do it with pleasure," he said. "It will strengthen



As the two struggling juniors swung heavily against the carriage door Hewett suddenly stiffened, and his grasp of Lorne relaxed. His gaze became suddenly riveted on an object outside the moving train, and Lorne, following the direction of his glance, gave a cry of amazement. A boy, clad in a drab brown suit, was clambering down the side of the bridge! (See page 8.)

my position, because if I'm supposed to be at St. Jim's there'll be no hue and cry after me. At the same time, you'll be as safe as houses there, Lorne. Sir Marcus Royce is off to Scotland on business this evening—that's why he had to cut back to London so quickly this afternoon. So there'll be no risk of his visiting St. Jim's for a week or so, I know that. No one at St. Jim's has seen you, and if you care to take the risk, I reckon you can get away with it. A week at St. Jim's will give you plenty of opportunity to prepare for a permanent flit. There are plenty of clothes in these trunks, and you can change right here in this carriage. I'll clear off in the clothes I stand up in, and I can get a change at the first town I come to. I've got money, you see. Now, what do you say, Lorne?"

Ronald Lorne turned to his cousin.
"I'd do it, and be only too glad to. But—but it rests with you, Alan," he said huskily. "Would you take the risk of palming me off at St. Jim's as Hewett?"

The St. Jim's junior was silent.
To take his cousin to St. Jim's would be easy enough, and the plan would work—for a time. But what when the trick was discovered, as it must inevitably be? His cousin would have to run away from St. Jim's later, and, even supposing that he got away permanently, and that Hewett kept to his part of the bargain, the truth was bound to come out. Then he himself would be held responsible. Dr. Holmes would be angry with him—might even expel him from St. Jim's for playing such a trick.

Then Lorne thought of his cousin. Ronald's liberty—probably his whole future life—depended on this trick being

played, for, as Hewett had pointed out, his chances of holding out till nightfall were very remote. Already the telephone lines would be buzzing from end to end of the country, and the police would be on the look-out for the runaway in the brown reformatory clothes.

Lorne set his teeth hard. Come what may, Ronald must not be taken back to the reformatory! He did not deserve that awful punishment! He must not go back! Anything rather than he should be caught, now that he had his freedom. He would take the risk, and stand the racket afterwards, for Ronald's sake.

"Yes, I'll do it, Ronald," he said quietly and firmly. "If Hewett promises to clear off and keep the secret—"

"I'll do that all right," said Hewett. "All I care about is getting my own liberty. You two can do as you please so long as I am free. So it's a go!"

The runaway nodded.

"Yes, Alan, I don't know how to thank you, old chap!" he said huskily. "This means everything to me, and I—I shall never forget your pluck, even if the scheme fails."

"It won't fail!" said Lorne doggedly. "You'll come to St. Jim's, Ronald, and I'll see that you're all right. There's only one thing—the chaps there have found out that the fellow who is coming to-day is a reformatory boy, and they don't like it. They mean to make trouble, and you won't have a very easy time, I'm afraid."

"Never mind, I can stand that," replied Ronald quietly. "All I want is the chance to get my liberty. Besides, you'll stand by me, Alan, I know!"

Hewett showed signs of impatience.

"You'd better take these papers; they're my identification papers and letters that the headmaster will want to see," he said, handing the runaway a packet from his inside pocket and glancing out of the window. "Look here, the train's slowing up to pass this level crossing. I'll jump off here. There's nobody about, and it will be safer than getting off at a station. So-long!"

He gave the other two a cool grin, and, opening the carriage door, he stepped out on to the footboard.

The train was not travelling at a great speed, and as it approached the level crossing Hewett gave a leap, and disappeared.

The two cousins sprang to the open doorway, and looked back along the line.

They saw the reckless young blackguard sprawling on all fours in the grass at the side of the permanent-way. He was apparently unhurt, for he stood up a minute later and waved back to them.

Then he turned and walked off across a narrow path that led to a winding country road.

The train turned a bend, and that was the last they saw of George Hewett.

Ronald Lorne closed the carriage door and looked at his cousin.

"So he's gone!" he muttered. "And I'm going to take his place. Are you sure you'd rather not back out, old chap? If you like, I'll take some of the clothes out of these trunks and put them on, and do the same as Hewett has done."

Alan Lorne shook his head.

"That would be too risky," he said. "The police are looking for you—not for him. He will get a change of clothes, and he'll be able to get clean away. You'd be recognised and caught, Ronald. I'm game to go through with the scheme. You must come to St. Jim's as Hewett, and there you'll be safe. We shall have a few days, at least, to think out what you shall do next."

"Right-ho, Alan! You're a sport—a real sport!"

The runaway swiftly took off the reformatory school clothes and dressed himself from the ample wardrobe the two trunks contained. The clothes fitted him well, and the Fourth-Former gave him an appraising look.

"That's topping, Ronald!" he said. "You'll do a treat! And now let's make a bundle of these awful things and put them at the bottom of this trunk. We'll burn them when we get to St. Jim's. Hurry up! Rylcombe's the next station!"

The reformatory clothes were hurriedly stowed away at the bottom of the trunk, which was afterwards restrapped and locked.

A few minutes later the train steamed into Rylcombe Station.

CHAPTER 5.

The Unwanted!

ALAN LORNE glanced round anxiously as he and his cousin stepped out of the station. The junior fully expected Racke & Co. to be there, waiting to rag the new boy.

But there was no St. Jim's fellows in the station-yard, and Lorne heaved a sigh of relief.

Dr. Holmes had given him the money to charter the station cab, so he hailed Old George, the ancient village cabby, and told him to drive to St. Jim's.

One trunk was put on top of the old cab, and the other was placed inside. The two boys got in, and Old George whipped up his horse.

The ancient old vehicle rumbled out of the station yard and over the cobblestones into the High Street.

Ronald Lorne glanced out curiously through the window.

"So this is Rylcombe!" he exclaimed. "I've often longed to see it, and to visit you at St. Jim's, Alan. I never expected to come under these circumstances, though."

The cab passed through the village, and creaked at a leisurely pace along the Rylcombe Lane towards St. Jim's.

All went well until suddenly the boys heard Old George give a sudden exclamation. Looking out of the window, they saw a crowd of St. Jim's fellows pouring out from the hedges on either side of the lane.

Foremost among them were Racke, Crooke, Gore, and Mellish. These youths were grinning maliciously.

"Halt!" rapped Gore, planting himself in the cab's path. "Pull up, there!"

"My hey!" said Old George, and he reined in his ancient steed.

The cab drew to a halt, and the St. Jim's juniors gathered round.

"There he is!" roared Mellish, catching sight of Ronald Lorne inside the cab. "We've got the reformatory rotter nicely!"

"Out with him!"

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"Rag the cad!"

Both boys in the cab jumped up, clenching their fists as the doors on either side of the cab were wrenched open, and a number of juniors clambered in.

"No need for you to fight, Lorne," said Grundy. "We don't want you. It's Hewett we're after."

The two cousins stood back to back in the cab and lashed out with their fists. The attackers gave yells of wrath and anguish.

"Biff! Thud! Wallop!"

"Yow-wow-wow!"

"Yaroooooogh!"

"My nose! Yah!"

"Pack, you rotters!" shouted Alan Lorne, his eyes glittering and his chest heaving with rage. "Leave Ron—Hewett alone!"

"Ow-ow!" moaned Racke, whose eye had received a mighty biff from Ronald Lorne's hard fist. "Hold 'em, you chaps! Groogh! We'll rag 'em both for this!"

Crash! Thud! Wallop!

"Young gents! Young gents!" howled Old George, as his ancient cab rocked and vibrated under the thudding of the combatants' feet. "You'll smash my cab up. Stop it! Oh dear! There goes the window! You little rips, I'll call the perlice! My hey!"

The two cousins stood up nobly to the attack, but they were quickly overwhelmed and dragged out of the cab. They were whirled across the field and hustled into a barn at the other end. Mellish followed in the rear with one of the trunks.

Old George was left raving and storming on the box of his cab.

Gore slammed the door of the barn, and the new boy was dumped roughly on top of a heap of faggots. Rope was procured, and he was bound there.

"You cads! Let him go!" roared Alan Lorne, struggling to get free from the hands that held him. "He's done you no harm!"

"Gad! He's still taking the rotter's part," said Crooke. "Let's give him a good bumping as well!"

"Rather!"

"Bump the silly ass!"

Lorne was whirled over and bumped thoroughly on the hard floor of the barn. His schoolfellows did not relax the process until their arms ached.

"There," said Racke. "Perhaps that will teach you not to stick up for reformatory rotters in future, Lorne. Now we'll have Hewett up before the tribunal."

"I vote we rag him first," said Mellish viciously. "Let him have a good licking to start with!"

"Hear, hear!" said Scrope.

"No, we'll be fair about it," said Racke. "Look here, Hewett, we're going to examine you and show you that we don't think you a fit person to enter St. Jim's. If you've anything to say in defence you'll have a chance to say it. You have just come from a reformatory?"

Ronald Lorne did not reply.

"No need to ask him!" sneered Mellish. "Look at his closely cropped hair. Did you ever see such a prison crop? Fancy disgracing our school cap by putting it on a head like that!"

"You admit that you've come from a reformatory, then?" said Racke. "Do you consider yourself a proper person to mix with decent chaps at a public school?"

The fugitive's eyes glinted fiercely.

"Yes, I do!" he cried, in a ringing voice. "I'm as good as any of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't bluff, you rotter!"

"You were sent to Broadheath Reformatory for being an incorrigible rogue," said Racke. "When at Telminster School you acted the cad and the blackguard, and were finally expelled for attacking a master at night, half killing him, and thieving his pocket-book. I happen to have a pal at Telminster, and I rang him up this morning. He told me all about you, and I rely on his word. You were a proper rotter and a menace to the other boys at the school. They gave you a lot of rope, but things got so bad that you had to be sent to a reformatory. That's your record. Have you anything to say?"

Ronald Lorne flushed and was silent.

He knew that what Racke said concerning Hewett was true. And, now that he was masquerading as Hewett, how could he deny it?

He looked round on the assembly of St. Jim's boys, and met black, condemning looks on all sides.

"There you are. He's had nothing to say," said Lennox.

"Fancy a chap like that being admitted to St. Jim's! Why, the idea is preposterous! The Head can say what he likes, but I reckon we have a right to say something in the matter, too."

"Rather!"

"Hands up all in favour of keeping Hewett out of St. Jim's!" said George Gore.

A score of hands went up.

"We're all in this together," said Racke.

"Chaps, we'll form an anti-Hewett League, and blow the consequences! Is it agreed that Hewett shall not be allowed to enter St. Jim's?"

"It is!"

"Keep him out by order of the League!"

"Then that's settled!" said Racke. "Hewett, you've got to right about turn and make tracks away from St. Jim's. You can go back to your reformatory, or go where you like, but you're not coming into St. Jim's if we can help it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Frogsmarch the rotter!" roared Mellish.

"We'll frogsmarch him out of the field and send him away in style!" said Racke. "Fetch his giddy trunk forward. We'll pitch that out with him!"

"Rather!"

The trunk was dragged to the front, and willing hands sent it sailing out of the barn. Hewett was then hauled down from the faggots, struggling.

"Now, take up your weapons, chaps!" said Racke viciously. "We'll give Hewett something to remember us by!"

Twigs and knotted handkerchiefs were brought to light, and the juniors formed in a double line outside the barn. Ronald Lorne was put in the doorway and set staggering forward between the line. Blows rained upon him from all sides, and he had to run the gauntlet down the field.

The frogsmarching was in full progress when a group of juniors came running in through the gate. Tom Merry and Blake led the way, and behind them were the rest of the Co.—Lowther, Manners, Digby, and D'Arcy. Kangaroo, Talbot, and Levison were with them. The party of juniors had been deviated to the scene by Old George. They looked in astonishment at the hapless junior staggering between the line of juniors.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "That must be the new fellow—Hewett!"

"They're wagging him, bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

Tom Merry frowned and strode forward.

"Hold on here!" he exclaimed. "What's all this about?"

"We're ragging Hewett, that's all!" sneered Racke.

Ronald Lorne had sunk to the ground from sheer exhaustion.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at his strained, pallid face. His expression of suffering might have touched a heart of stone. There was something in the look he gave Tom Merry that went straight to the heart of the young Shell captain. He looked round with blazing eyes.

"Why couldn't you leave Hewett alone and give him a chance?" he exclaimed hotly. "You can't take matters into your own hands like this. Kildare and North are coming down the road, and they're bound to chip in."

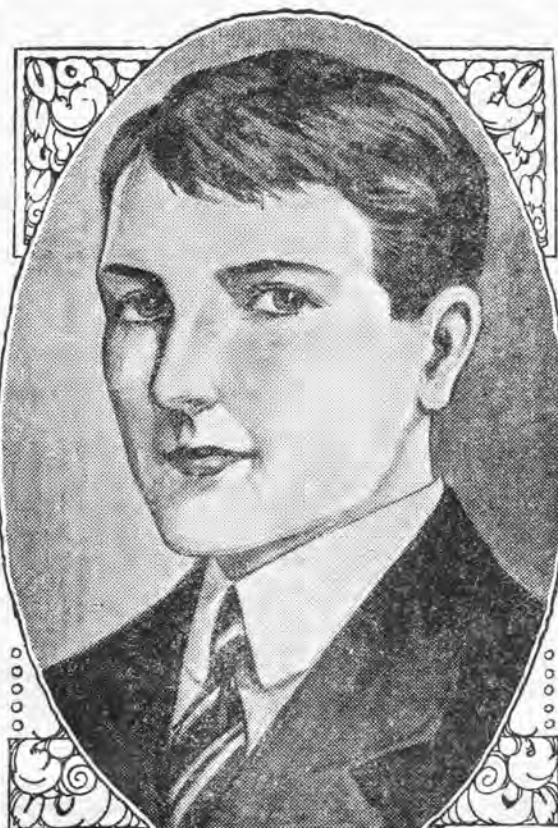
"Yah! We won't have the reformatory rotter at St. Jim's!"

"Keep off the grass, Tom Merry!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "Heah comes Kildare, deah boys."

The stalwart captain of St. Jim's came striding across the field, with North, of the Sixth, behind him. The prefects looked round angrily.

"What are you little rascals up to?" demanded Kildare. "The cabman complains that you've damaged his cab and smashed a window. Who is this fellow you are ragging?"



NIGEL MACGREGGOR.

A member of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's and a friend of Patrick Mulvaney. A quiet and reserved fellow is Nigel. Although interested in all kinds of sports this Scottish member of the Sixth spends most of his time reading books. He is always willing, nevertheless, to help any of the juniors in their studies, and takes a special interest in Tompkins, the botanical member of the Fourth Form. All the masters like Macgreggor, and he is thought highly of by Eric Kildare, the senior prefect and captain of the school.

"It's Hewett," said Lennox, "the precious rotter from the reformatory!"

Kildare and North looked closely at Ronald Lorne.

They, like the others at St. Jim's, had been somewhat amazed at the Head's decision to have a reformatory boy in the school.

The boy before them now, however, did not look the type of junior they had expected to see.

"We've formed a league to keep Hewett out of St. Jim's," said Racke. "We don't want cads like him with us!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Kildare. "You kids don't realise what you're doing, surely. The Head is waiting for Hewett!"

Kildare's voice was so menacing that even Racke shook with fear. Ronald Lorne stood up stiffly.

"Come with me," said Kildare in a gruff tone. "I'll see that you are not molested. The first boy who tries to lay hands on Hewett again will hear from me."

The juniors hung back, looking angry and disappointed.

Ronald Lorne accompanied Kildare and North from the field.

"There you are, you chumps!" said Tom Merry. "I told you it was no good kicking over the traces. I think it best to leave Hewett alone."

"You can go and eat coke, Merry!" growled Gore. "You're always chipping in, anyway. We'll make things so hot for that cad, Hewett, that he'll be glad to leave. He may get in the school, but he'll want to get out before long!"

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry & Co. turned away and walked back to St. Jim's.

The others returned to the lane, when Racke, in response to Old George's protests, settled for what damage had been done.

Alan Lorne was the last out of the field.

He picked up the trunk that had been thrown out of the barn, and went back to the cab for the other trunk, Old George intimating that he refused to go any farther.

So, with a heavy leather trunk in either hand, the Fourth Former tramped on alone to St. Jim's, consumed with uneasy thoughts concerning his cousin.

Would Racke & Co. succeed in driving him from St. Jim's? And would Ronald be able to stand the persecution that threatened him if he remained at the school?

The situation was very critical, and Lorne wondered miserably what the end would be.

CHAPTER 6.

The Branded Study!

"HERE'S Lorne!"

Monty Lowther, of the Fourth, made that exclamation as the forlorn figure of Alan Lorne came into view in the Rylcombe Lane.

Tom Merry & Co. were standing at the gates discussing the new boy. They stared at Lorne, who came up with the trunks, looking exhausted after his long drag along the lane.

"Well, my hat!" said Blake. "Fancy Lorne taking all that trouble over the new chap when the others are such dead nuts against him! He's carried those trunks all the way from the field."

Lorne came up, panting.

"Is Hewett all right?" he asked. "They haven't ragged him any more?"

"No; Kildare took him straight up to the Head," replied

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Tom Merry. "I say, Lorne, you're a brick to stick up for Hewett like that. What sort of a chap is he?"

Lorne's eyes gleamed.

"He's as good as any of them," he said between his teeth. "He's decent, and those rotters ought to give him a chance. Are you going to let them keep on ragging him, Merry?"

The Shell leader looked curiously at the Fourth Former.

"It's all according to what the fellow turns out to be," he said quietly. "I'm prepared to give the fellow a chance, for one."

"Yaas, and so am I," said D'Arcy. "I had a good look at Hewett, and he wathah stawuck me as bein' twee blue. I'm a pweety good judge of chawactah, you know, deah boys. I don't think Hewett is as bad as he's made out to be—he doesn't look it, anyway."

"Still waters run deep, though," said Blake a little gruffly. "Hang it all, he wouldn't have been kicked out of school and sent to a reformatory unless there was something jolly wrong with him. Anyway, we shall see. If he's a rotter he'll soon show it."

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's what I think," he said. "I don't believe in keeping a dog down. It's rotten, I know, to think that we've got a reformatory fellow mixing with us, but, as Gussy says, Hewett doesn't look a rotter. I expected to see an awful tough. I feel half sorry for the chap, and I think he ought to be given a chance."

Lorne darted the Shell captain a grateful look and trudged away with the luggage.

Having taken the trunks upstairs to the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House, he made his way along to the study.

Juniors were standing in groups in the corridors discussing the reformatory boy. The same words were on all their lips—that Hewett wasn't wanted, that his presence was a disgrace to St. Jim's.

Lorne arrived at his study, to see Wyatt just coming out, carrying a pile of books.

"What—what are you doing, Wyatt?" faltered Lorne.

"I'm clearing out, that's all!" said his studymate airily. "If you think I shall share with that reformatory lag you're jolly well mistaken. I'm shifting all my traps, and when you want me you'll find me with Kerruish, Reilly and Julian."

"Look here, Wyatt—"

"Oh, rats!"

Lorne went into the room with a heavy heart. The place looked bare and desolate. Wyatt had already taken out most of his belongings.

The junior clenched his fists fiercely.

"I don't care!" he muttered. "I'll stick up for Ronald—and the others can go hang!"

Reilly came back with Wyatt, and they took the remainder of Wyatt's belongings with them. Reilly grinned back at Lorne from the doorway.

"Faith, an' I wish ye joy with the reformatory chap, Lorne," he said. "If ye have any valuables take my tip an' look 'em up, or get the Head to mind 'em. You're a chump to put up with him, begorrah!"

Wyatt slammed the door, and Lorne was left alone in his half-empty study.

He gritted his teeth. It was a bitter blow to him to lose his studymate, but rather than turn his back on Ronald.

He left the study and went along to the Head's apartment. He could hear voices in there, which he recognised as those of Dr. Holmes and his cousin's. A short time elapsed, and then Ronald came out.

"Well?" said the Fourth Former eagerly. "What did the Head say?"

"He's a brick," said Ronald huskily. "He said he was sorry that the school had got to know—about the reformatory. But he's going to stand by me. I—I felt ashamed, Alan, because I'm a cheat. I'm pulling your headmaster's leg, and before very long he'll know it."

"Never mind, old chap," said Lorne. "Come along to the bath-room and have a wash and a change. Goodness knows you need it."

He led the way to the bath-room, and whilst his cousin was washing he procured him a change of clothing.

Ronald Lorne looked fresh and more cheerful when he came downstairs with his cousin.

Fellows who met them on the way looked scornfully at the reformatory boy, and turned their backs on him.

They met Racke & Co. and a group of other juniors on the lower landing. Racke sneered openly.

"Mind your pockets!" said Gore, in a loud voice; and there was a chuckle.

Ronald Lorne flushed crimson. He clenched his fists, as if to make hot retort; but he controlled himself with an effort and walked off with his cousin.

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Sneers and hisses followed the two juniors.

Lorne took his cousin to the Fourth Form passage, and they halted outside the door of Study No. 8.

Lorne grasped the handle of the door, and at the same instant he gave vent to a cry.

On the study door a glaring red cross had been daubed, and under it were chalked these words:

"ABANDON HOPE ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE!"

From the end of the corridor came a chorus of chuckles, and, wheeling round, Lorne and his cousin saw a crowd of juniors grinning at them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Crooke of the Shell. "Do you like the way we've branded your study, Lorne? We had to do that, you know, in case any poor, misguided chap went in and got contaminated—or robbed!"

"You rotten cads—"

"It's hard lines on you, Lorne, but you've chosen to dig with the reformatory rotter!" said Mellish. "That cross is done with some of Taggles' best red paint, and I guess you'll have a job to get it off!"

Lorne whipped out his handkerchief and rubbed off the chalked words. He saw that what Mellish said was true—the red cross could not be erased so easily.

Hot words rushed to Lorne's lips, but he kept them back, realising how futile it would be to bandy words with his truculent schoolfellows.

He opened the door and strode in, his cousin following.

The two exchanged glances.

"Alan, old chap, I'm getting you into hot water," said Ronald Lorne huskily. "The fellows here will be getting their backs up against you unless you drop me."

"Hang them!" said Lorne savagely. "We'll stick it out together, Ronald, and let them do their worst. After all, you've got the Head behind you. And—and Tom Merry and his chums are decent chaps. They'll see fair play."

The cousins remained alone in the study all that evening.

Lorne, with what little money he had, went down to the tuckshop and purchased some things for tea. Tom Merry & Co. were in there, regaling themselves with some of Mrs. Taggles' new tarts, whilst Figgins & Co. of the New House were installed at the other end of the counter, Fatty Wynn making vast inroads into a pork-pie.

They all regarded Lorne curiously as he made his purchases.

"Standing the reformatory kid a feed, Lorne?" asked Herries.

Lorne nodded.

"Yes," he said calmly. "The poor chap's hungry, and he hasn't had any decent grub for a long time. The least I can do is to cheer him up with a feed. Everyone else is down on him."

Tom Merry felt a lump rise in his throat.

"Good for you, Lorne!" he said. "I'm blessed if I ever thought you were such a brick! Hewett must feel pretty rotten, however much of a cad he may be. I could tell by his looks that he was miserable, and—well, hang it all, I'm sorry for him, too! He may be a rotter, and not fit to associate with us, but he doesn't look that sort. I admire your pluck, Lorne, in backing him up."

"Thank you, Merry," said Lorne quietly.

He gathered up his frugal purchases and hurried away, leaving the juniors in the tuckshop wondering.

Lorne's chivalry towards the outcast surprised them. They had never suspected the Fourth Former of being so "decent." He made them feel almost ashamed.

The evening passed uneventfully. Fellows in all Forms came along to look and laugh at the defamatory mark on the door of Study No. 8; but nobody essayed to enter, or otherwise disturb the inmates.

Had they attempted to open the door, they would have found it locked. Inside Study No. 8 Alan Lorne and the fugitive were engaged in the task of burning the reformatory uniform, which Lorne had smuggled down from the dormitory earlier.

CHAPTER 7.

Thrown Out!

BED-TIME came, and Kildare shepherded the Fourth upstairs.

Lorne and his cousin went up with the rest, both feeling uneasy and apprehensive.

They could tell that something was "in the air" from the murmurings of the other juniors and the sidelong, meaning glances that were cast at the outcast.

The Fourth-Formers went to bed quietly enough, however, and Kildare, after seeing lights out, turned in the doorway before departing.

"No larks, mind, you kids," he said.

"All right, Kildare!"

"Good-night, then!"

"Good-night, Kildare!"

Silence reigned in the dormitory for the space of ten minutes.

Then Mellish sat up and lit a candle.

"You chaps ready?" he asked.

"Rather!"

There was a general exodus of the juniors from their beds.

Jack Blake sat up and blinked in the candle-light.

"Here, what's on?" he exclaimed.

"We're going to turn the reformatory cad out of the dormitory, that's all," said Mellish. "He's not a fit inmate for a respectable dormitory, and he's got to get out!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yank him out of bed!" cried Mellish.

Ronald Lorne jumped up and let go with his fists at a number of juniors crowded round his bed. He landed several telling blows before he was finally overpowered and dragged headlong out of the bed.

Bump!

He fell on the floor with a loud concussion, and Baggy Trimble sat on him, whilst the others held his legs and arms.

"This is where you get ejected—bed and all!" said Mellish grimly. "We couldn't rest, with you in here, Hewett. There ought to be a kennel for you out in the quad; but as that can't be managed just yet, we'll dump your bed out in the corridor, and make you sleep there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why can't you chaps leave Hewett alone?" cried Alan Lorne. "If Kildare comes back there'll be a row—"

"Go and eat coke!" said Mellish. "We won't have Hewett in our dorm, and that's flat!"

"Out with the rotter's bed!" said Trimble.

Willing hands dragged the clothes, pillow, bolster, and mattress from the outcast's bed. Alan Lorne stood by his own bed, looking on helplessly.

Blake and D'Arcy sprang out and stood in front of the ragers.

"Cheese it, you asses!" exclaimed Blake. "It's a bit thick, turning a chap out of the dorm—"

"Yah!" cried Trimble. "Mind your own business, Blake!"

"Out of the way, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus' eyes glinted.

"Bai Jove! I refuse to get out of the way!" he exclaimed. "I'm backin' up Hewett, and insist on you boundahs leavin' him alone! I— Oh! Yah! Ow!"

A pillow, aimed from the other side of the dormitory, struck the noble swell in the face, and he went staggering backwards. Blake was pushed roughly aside, and the dormitory door was dragged open.

D'Arcy was up in a trice, and he charged at his Form-fellows; but again he was thrown back, and Blake laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"No use chipping in here, Gussy," he said. "The fat-heads will have their own way. Hewett's in for it, I'm afraid!"

"I refuse to let the matter drop, Blake! I'm goin' to give Mellish a fearful thwashin' for throwin' that pillow at me!"

"Oh, sit on him, somebody!" said Macdonald.

Gussy was whirled over on his bed and sat on, with his head buried in the clothes, so that the only noises that came from him were muffled gurgles.

The reformatory lad's bed was dumped in the wide corridor outside the dormitory, and the prisoner was carried out, tied up in a blanket, and with a towel round his mouth to prevent him shouting.

He struggled fiercely, but was powerless in the hands of the ragers. He was thrust roughly into his bed on the corridor floor.

"There!" chuckled Mellish. "You can stay there till morning, Hewett. We shall sleep much better now you're outside. Now we'll hop back to bed, kids!"

The Fourth-Formers went into the dormitory and the door was locked.

Left alone in the chill darkness of the corridor, the outcast struggled to free himself.

At last the towel came loose and dropped down.

"Oh, the cads! What can I do?" muttered Ronald Lorne miserably to himself. "If only I can get free—"

He broke off. Approaching footsteps had sounded in the darkness.

A minute later he wrenched himself free from the blanket and jumped up. A flickering light broke through the gloom, and to Ronald Lorne's dismay he saw Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, walking towards him, holding a lamp.

The master halted in amazement when he saw the new boy standing in the midst of his bedclothes.

"Hewett!" he exclaimed in a startled voice. "Good heavens, boy, what are you doing here?"

There was a sound of hurrying footsteps in the dormitory, and Lorne heard the door being stealthily unlocked.

At the other end of the corridor a row of faces showed in the lamplight. Racke & Co., and practically all the boys in the Shell dormitory, knowing of the Fourth-Formers' intentions to turn Hewett out into the corridor, had come along to see the fun. They waited on tenterhooks of excitement to hear what the reformatory boy would say.

"Answer me, boy!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom angrily, as the outcast stood silent before him. "What are you doing out of your dormitory, and with all these bedclothes?"

"I—I—I—" Ronald Lorne was at a loss for words for a few seconds. "I was going to sleep out here, sir."

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Lathom stared hard at the junior. "Are you mad, Hewett? Do you seriously mean to convey that you are here for the purpose of spending the night in the corridor?"

"Yes, sir," said Lorne in a low voice.

A buzz of excited murmurings came from the Shell fellows, and gasps of astonishment were heard to proceed from inside the Fourth Form dormitory.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Leslie Clampe. "He hasn't sneaked!"

Mr. Lathom was regarding the reformatory boy closely.

"I hardly know whether to take this seriously or as a joke, Hewett," said the master in a stern voice. "What can be your motive in removing your bed from the dormitory?"

"I—I'm not wanted in there, sir!"

Lorne blurted out the words passionately, and with a depth of misery that touched many a heart among the listeners.

Mr. Lathom's look became grim.

"I am aware that there is a certain amount of antagonism against you in the school, Hewett," he said. "I am amazed, however, that you should go so far as to remove your bed away from the others. You will take these things back at once, and go to bed in your appointed place."

Ronald Lorne picked up an armful of bedclothes and turned the handle of the dormitory door. The door came open, and he walked in. The candles were still alight, and his tormentors were up. They looked queerly at him as, without a word, he proceeded to remake his bed.

When this task had been completed Mr. Lathom looked round the dormitory with a grim expression.

"Boys, return to your beds and extinguish those lights!" he rapped. "I shall listen for sounds of any further disturbance, but trust I shall not have to return."

Ronald Lorne was not molested again that night.

Perhaps a good many of the juniors who had taken part in the ragging felt ashamed of themselves. They had expected their victim to whine to Mr. Lathom, and bring down the vials of his wrath upon them. They had been greatly taken aback to find that the reformatory boy was not a sneak.

As for the outcast himself, he lay miserably in bed, his brain reeling with a multitude of torturing thoughts, and not until the first grey streaks of dawn were creeping in at the dormitory windows did sleep come mercifully to him.

CHAPTER 8.

The Refugee's Dilemma!

RONALD LORNE—or Hewett, as he was known at St. Jim's—was the cynosure of all eyes next morning. The story of the night rag had gone the rounds, and from all directions wondering looks were cast at his handsome, pallid face at the breakfast table.

Tom Merry & Co., watching him closely, found it difficult to associate him with the tales they had heard of his blackguardly past. The new boy did not look a rotter, and they could not help thinking that there must be a mistake somewhere.

Had the reformatory boy chosen, he could have got practically the whole Fourth into trouble with Mr. Lathom the night before. Yet he had remained silent, and shielded his tormentors.

Most of the juniors were more subdued in their manner towards him that day, although Racke & Co. persisted in jeering at him. Nobody associated with him, of course, with the exception of Lorne. Even Tom Merry & Co. kept aloof, but they all felt a growing compassion for the fellow whose tragic expression showed only too plainly how acute was his suffering.

At lessons he showed himself to be an apt pupil, and Mr. Lathom commented highly on his work.

Two days passed uneventfully. Those who expected "Hewett" to display blackguardly tendencies were doomed to disappointment. He remained quiet and subdued, and in his leisure hours was mostly in his study, on the door of which the red mark still showed, in spite of Alan Lorne's efforts to obliterate it.

Whatever the reformatory boy may have been in the past, no one could have found fault with his behaviour at St. Jim's.

Aubrey Racke, sauntering to the letter rack in the Hall one afternoon, caught sight of a letter there addressed to "G. Hewett."

The cad's eyes gleamed, and he took up the letter.

"What is it, Racke?" inquired Baggy Trimble, who was lurking near by. "A letter for Hewett? I thought the postman delivered one, you know."

Racke darted him a savage snarl.

"Hold your row, you little idiot!" he snapped. "Tom Merry and his crowd are over by the window, and I don't want them to know I've got this."

"Ho, he, he! All right, Racke. I say, I wonder what's in it?"

"Shut up!" hissed Racke, as a figure appeared in the doorway.

It was the reformatory boy himself.

He walked over to the letter rack and scanned the letters eagerly. An expression of dismay crossed his handsome face, and he turned round to Racke, who was grinning.

"I heard Trimble telling someone outside that there was a letter for me," he said quietly. "Have you seen it?"

"Why should I have seen it?" said Racke with a sneer. "I— Oh! Let go, you rotter! Yarocoooh!"

Ronald Lorne's quick eyes had caught sight of the envelope in Racke's hand, and detected the name written upon it. He grasped the cad of the Shell firmly by the arm.

"Give me that letter!" he said between his teeth. "Hand it over, do you hear?"

Juniors began to gather round and look on with great interest.

"Leave me alone!" panted Racke. "This is my letter, and— Ow! Yow-wow! Let go, you rotten reformatory lag! You dare, you soil me by touching me! Yarocoooh!"

A hard fist came out and struck Racke clean on the jaw, sending him reeling back. The letter fluttered from his hand, and next instant the new boy pounced on it.

"You cad, I'll smash you for that!" howled Racke, gaining confidence and bravado in front of the crowd, and he charged at Lorne with fists flying.

The reformatory boy turned quickly, and, squaring his shoulders, met Racke's wild onrush with a cool, clever defence. Then his left and right flashed out, and in a trice Racke went down like a log.

Crash!

"Yarocoooh!"

"Oh, good man!" exclaimed Tom Merry appreciatively.

"Yas, wathah! That's the way to treat Wacke!" said D'Arcy. "If I were you, I'd give him a fearful thwashin', Hewett, deah boy."

Ronald Lorne breathed hard through his nose.

"I'm willing to give Racke some more, if he wants it," he said.

Racke did not want any more, apparently. He struggled to his feet and slunk away, leaving the Hall in a buzz.

The juniors looked with a new interest at the reformatory boy.

There was not one in the Hall who, frankly, had not admired his treatment of the cad of the Shell.

Ronald Lorne turned on his heel, and without another word left the Hall.

He went straight up to Study No. 8. His cousin was not there when he arrived, so he closed the door, and, with trembling fingers, he opened the letter.

Written on a sheet of cheap notepaper, and in pencil, this is how the letter ran:

"Dear Lorne,—I am in desperate trouble, and must see you to-night. I am in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's, and will meet you by the woodman's hut in the Rylcombe Wood at eleven o'clock. Do not fail me, or there will be trouble.
"GEORGE HEWETT."

Ronald Lorne's face blanched as he read this missive. He stood like one thunderstruck. His cousin came into the study soon after, and he looked at his pale, stricken face in amazement.

"What's the matter, Ronald?" he asked.

For a reply, the other handed him the letter.

The Fourth-Former gave a gasp of dismay when he read it.

"Oh, crumbs! Hewett has turned up again, and he wants to see you. Goodness knows what this may lead to, Ronald! That cad has evidently got into a scrape and he means to bring you into it. What—what will you do?"

"I shall have to see him, that's all," said the other, in a low voice. "I dare not ignore this. You notice the threat at the end of the letter? It means I shall have to break bounds to-night somehow, Alan!"

The letter had struck fear and foreboding into the runaway lad's heart. What did Hewett want with him? Why

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had the young rascal returned? There was a sinister meaning in the latter part of the letter, and Ronald Lorne knew that, whatever happened, he would have to do Hewett's bidding. A fugitive from justice and a masquerader at St. Jim's, he was completely at the other's mercy.

CHAPTER 9.

In the Hands of a Rogue

THE outcast's expression during the rest of that day was more haggard than ever, and the haunted look in his eyes made Tom Merry & Co. wonder. They might even have spoken to him, but he avoided them.

There had been no further trouble in the dormitory since the first night of the new boy's arrival, and when the Fourth turned in that night they soon dropped off to sleep one by one.

Neither of the Lornes slept, however.

Half-past ten boomed from the old clock-tower, and Alan Lorne sat up.

"You chaps awake?" he asked cautiously.

There was no reply for some minutes, and then a whispered voice came through the darkness.

"Is everything all right?"

It was Ronald Lorne who spoke.

"I think so," replied his cousin, getting out of bed. "Hurry up and dress, and don't make a row, whatever you do!"

Alan Lorne did not dress, but slipped on his socks and a jacket.

The other, fully clothed except for his boots, which he carried under his arm, crept to the door.

The two traversed the silent, dark corridors, Alan Lorne leading the way to the lower box-room. Arriving there, he whispered instructions to his cousin as to how to get over the wall from the old oak-tree by the cloisters.

"I'll keep cave for you upstairs, Ronald," he said. "Go carefully, for goodness' sake! You know what a cad Hewett is!"

"Right-ho, old chap!"

Ronald Lorne clambered carefully down the ivy from the window and disappeared, whilst his cousin returned to the dormitory, to keep watch.

The reformatory-boy crossed the quadrangle in the heavy shadows and climbed the old oak. Slithering along the lower branches, he reached a point from which he was able to clamber down to the top of the school wall.

A leap, and he was on the soft turf in the lane below.

He thrilled as he realised that he was now outside St. Jim's—that he was breaking bounds in the dead of night!

There was no time for reflection, however. He must hurry to the appointed place and meet Hewett.

Glancing fearfully about him, and keeping well within the shadows, he made his way up the lane until he reached the wood. As he plunged into the silent, eerie blackness of the woodland path he could not repress the shudder that ran through him. The trees, towering like gaunt spectres out of the darkness, looked grim and forbidding. But he set his teeth and hurried on, and at last he reached the woodman's hut.

There was no sign of Hewett, and not a sound disturbed the night stillness except the occasional rustling of the trees in the wind.

Eleven o'clock struck from the village church clock in the distance. Where was Hewett? Ronald Lorne peered around him in all directions, and strained his ears to listen. He was alone in the middle of the wood.

The minutes dragged slowly by, and the reformatory-boy waited. A quarter-past eleven! Still Hewett had not come.

Lorne's heart was beating wildly now, and a swift succession of thoughts raced through his brain. Perhaps Hewett was not coming, after all, and he was running this grave risk for nothing. Each passing minute added to the awful suspense. Again he heard the village chimes. It was the half-hour.

The junior gritted his teeth, resolving to return to St. Jim's. Hewett had either not troubled to keep his appointment, or something had prevented his coming. Lorne was about to move away when a rustling in the trees sounded behind him, followed by swiftly-moving footsteps, crashing through the undergrowth.

He caught his breath and turned sharply. Next minute a figure scrambled out of the brambles and hurried into the small clearing in front of the hut.

It was Hewett at last!

The two boys faced each other in the gloom. Hewett was panting—gasping. He looked dirty and untidy, and his clothes were torn, evidently through scrambling among the thick brambles in the wood. He clutched a small parcel in his right hand.



"Now, take up your weapons, chaps!" said Racke viciously. "We'll give Hewett something to remember us by." Twigs and knotted handkerchiefs were brought to light, and the juniors formed a double line outside the barn. Then as Lorne was sent staggering forward between the lines blows were rained upon him from all sides, and he had to run the gauntlet down the field. (See page 11.)

"Lorne!" he gasped. "So you—you're still here! Thank goodness for that!"
 "I was just going," said the other, in a low voice. "It's turned half-past eleven now, Hewett. Where have you been?"

Hewett gave a harsh laugh.
 "You needn't ask questions, Lorne. I've got myself into a scrape, and I want your help."

"My help! How?"
 "You've got to hide me, Lorne! The police are after me, and I've nowhere to go. They haven't seen me, mind; but they're after me, and unless I get out of the way quickly I'll be caught. Mark you, Lorne, if I'm laid by the heels, your position at St. Jim's won't be worth the snuff of a candle. We swim or sink together. Understand?"

He thrust his chin menacingly forward as he said this, and Lorne took an involuntary step back. He looked in horror at his companion, realising how completely he was at Hewett's mercy.

"What can I do?" he exclaimed helplessly. "I can't hide you, Hewett!"

"You can, and you've got to—at St. Jim's!"
 "At St. Jim's?"

Hewett nodded grimly.

"Yes. There are plenty of hiding-places there, among the vaults," he said. "I've heard all about the place, and I know jolly well that a chap could hide there without risk of being discovered. You've got to find me a hiding-place at St. Jim's, Lorne, and keep me there until the coast is clear. If I'm caught, you're caught. Remember that! Now, what about it?"

Lorne clenched his fists hard.
 What could he do other than comply with Hewett's demand?

He was completely in the young rascal's hands, and he dared not defy him.

"We'd better be getting along there," said Hewett impatiently. "Every minute is precious, I tell you! Will you do as I ask, Lorne?"

"Yes, I—I suppose I must."

He led the way down the path, and the two runaways walked to St. Jim's together. Nobody accosted them on the way, and they got over the wall without mishap. Hewett was by far the more agile of the two. He amazed Lorne by his dexterity in scaling the school wall.

"Climbing comes in useful, you know!" he said, with a meaning chuckle. "Now, which is the way, Lorne? Buck up; I'm getting nerry."

Lorne took him into the cloisters, and thence to the ruined chapel. He knew the way to the vaults, his cousin having given him full details of the school on the day after his arrival. He raised the stone in the old chapel floor, and he and Hewett clambered down into the pitch darkness below.

"Ugh!" muttered Hewett. "Cheery sort of hole this is. I must say! But it's better than capture, for the time being. No need to strike matches, Lorne; I've got an electric-torch."

He withdrew the torch from his pocket and switched on the light. The two wandered among the grim old arches until Hewett selected a tiny vault in a corner of the west transept. There was a heavy oak door to the room, and the fugitive announced that he was satisfied.

"I can hang out here for the time being, and make the best of it," he said. "I rely on you to look after me, Lorne, or there'll be trouble. I shall want some grub in the morning—and some fags, if you can get 'em. Don't forget."

Lorne did not reply. He could not trust himself to speak.

Hewett extended the parcel he had brought with him.

"Take that, Lorne, and look after it for me," he said. "I shall want it when I go. No larks with it, mind!"

Lorne took the parcel, and, turning on his heel, strode away.

He struck matches to light his way back to the ruined chapel.

Arriving there, he replaced the stone and hurried across the dark quadrangle towards the School House. His brain was in a whirl; he could scarcely realise that the happenings of that night were real.

The clock boomed midnight as he clambered up the ivy to the box-room window. He climbed in and shut the window. Next minute there was a rush of feet, and a number of dark figures rushed at him.

He gave a cry as the light snapped up. Blinking in the unaccustomed brilliance, he saw Racke, Crooke, Gore, and a number of other Shell fellows, including Kangaroo and Talbot surrounding him.

Racke's sallow face was suffused with an evil grin. "There you are!" he said triumphantly. "The giddy wanderer has returned! Now, Hewett, how can you account for your absence since about half-past ten?"

"I—I—I—" "I happened to be looking out of our dormitory window, and I spotted you as you skulked across the quad," went on Racke, with relish. "I didn't know that it was you, but I went along with Talbot to the Fourth Form dormy, and found your bed empty. Then I woke these chaps, and brought them along here, just to catch you on the hop. Where have you been, you rotter?"

Lorne set his teeth. "That's my business!" he said. "Let me go!"

Kangaroo looked curiously at him.

"Can't you tell us why you broke bounds, Hewett?" he asked.

"No. I suppose I can do as I like? Hands off!" Talbot interposed between the captive and Racke. "Better let him get back to bed, Racke," he said. "There's no need to wake the house."

"We ought to take Hewett to the Head!" said Racke viciously. "I told you he wasn't the goody-goody he appeared to be. The Head ought to know about his breaking bounds!"

"Oh, rats!" said Kangaroo. "You're not above that sort of thing yourself, Racke! I expect you were on the same lay, as a matter of fact, and that was how you came to spot Hewett through the window. You were out of bed making ready for one of your little night jaunts to the Green Man!"

Racke scowled. "That's no business of yours, Noble!" he muttered. "I've bowled this cad out, anyway. Let him get to bed, then. We'll have it out with him in the morning."

Ronald Lorne was released, and he went to the Fourth Form dormitory, his head reeling.

The parcel that Hewett had given him was still in his pocket, where he had placed it. Most of the juniors in the dormitory were awake when he arrived there. Racke had seen to it that the reformatory boy's absence from bed had been noticed.

Alan Lorne shot him a despairing glance as he came in. He had been powerless to warn his cousin, or to help him in any way, and had been awaiting his return in an agony of suspense.

The outcast of the Fourth was bombarded with questions as to why he had broken bounds and what he had been "up to," but he maintained a tragic silence.

He went quickly to bed, and refused to enter into any conversation. And the Fourth-Formers gave it up at last, and, still wondering, went to sleep.

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CHAPTER 10.

Condemned!

"I SAY, you chaps, have you heard the news?"

Baggy Trimble could hardly contain himself for excitement as he tore into the Common-room next morning, before lessons.

There was a crowd of juniors in the room. All were discussing the reformatory boy and his mysterious absence from school at midnight.

They turned round in surprise at Baggy's boisterous entry.

"Bai Jove! What evah is the matter, Twimble?" exclaimed D'Arcy. "What's happened, deah boy?"

"Have you heard the news?" roared Baggy.

"No, ass!" snapped Blake. "What is it, anyway? It must be jolly important, by the look of things."

"Old Donnison's house was broken into last night!" gasped Baggy. "The old chap was savagely attacked by the burglar and half laid out, and practically all the valuables are missing from the house. And, what do you think, you chaps? The thief wasn't a man at all, but a schoolboy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Great pip!"

The juniors in the Common-room were astounded.

"I heard Kildare telling Darrell about it!" went on Baggy, in breathless tones. "The police have been hunting all night for the thief, but so far they haven't found him. It is believed that he's a schoolboy, in the neighbourhood of Rylcombe!"

"Whew!"

A tense hush fell on the Common-room.

All the St. Jim's juniors knew of old Major Donnison, whose house, a gaunt, lonely mansion, stood on the outskirts of Rylcombe. Not many of them had seen the major, as his age and infirmity had kept him indoors, and he was more or less a recluse. He was reputed to be very rich and eccentric, and was well respected by all the villagers.

It came as a shock to Tom Merry & Co. to hear this news.

"The major was struck on the head with a brass candlestick, and his condition is serious!" said Baggy. "His servant saw a boy climbing down the drainpipe, and gave chase, but the rotter disappeared."

"My hat! What a blackguard to strike an old man like that!" exclaimed Tom Merry, frowning. "I hope they don't think one of our school chaps did it—"

He broke off with a sudden catch of his breath.

All the others had been struck with the same thought at once.

"Hewett broke bounds last night!" muttered Lowther. "I—I wonder—"

"Of course! We haven't got far to look for the culprit, you chaps!" cried Racke, jumping up from his chair. "The thing's as plain as a pikestaff! That reformatory rotter was out from half-past ten till past midnight last night, and he wouldn't account for his movements when we caught him sneaking back. He's the one who burgled Donnison's house and struck down the old man!"

"Oh, jeminy!"

Looks of consternation and dismay were apparent on all sides.

Tom Merry flushed.

"Hang it all, it's a downright rotten thing to accuse a chap of!" he exclaimed. "Baggy may be offside in his yarn. He's usually full of cock and bull stories. Before we do anything, I vote we see Kildare and ask him."

"Here is Kildare!" said Blake.

The St. Jim's captain happened to be passing the door, and, hearing his name mentioned, he looked in.

"I say, Kildare, is it true about old Major Donnison being attacked last night and his house burgled—by a schoolboy?" demanded Gore.

Kildare's face was clouded and worried-looking.

"Yes; that is what the police reported to the Head this morning," he said. "They think it's a schoolboy either from here or Rylcombe Grammar School. It's a rotten business altogether, and I shall be glad when it's cleared up!"

"Well, we can soon clear it up!" said Racke eagerly. "Hewett, that blackguard from the reformatory, broke bounds last night!"

"What?" ejaculated Kildare.

"Hewett was out of bounds last night. Talbot and I watched him go. That was soon after half-past ten," said Racke. "I woke up the other chaps, and some of us waited for Hewett in the lower box-room. We had a jolly long wait, I can tell you. Hewett didn't come in till past midnight, and he refused to give an account of himself."

"Good heavens!"

Kildare turned to Tom Merry.

"Is Racke speaking the truth, Merry?" he asked.

"Yes, I—I think so, Kildare," said Tom in a low voice.

The captain set his teeth grimly.

"I'll find Hewett and question him," he said, and he strode quickly away.

He had not been gone long before Wilkins, happening to look out of the window, saw the reformatory boy walking across the quadrangle, from the direction of the cloisters.

"There's Hewett!" he cried. "He's coming indoors!"

"Right!" said Gore. "We'll catch him as he comes in!"

A rush downstairs was made. Tom Merry & Co. followed, and when they reached the Hall, they saw Ronald Lorne struggling in the midst of the angry juniors. His face was white and scared.

"Own up, you rotter!" Gore was shouting in his most bullying voice. "Tell us the truth! You're the thief and the hooligan the police are looking for!"

"Why can't the fellow speak up for himself?" cried Kerruish, when the crowd of juniors with the prisoner were safe in the Common-room. "If it isn't true, he's only got to tell us where he went last night, and clear himself."

"Speak up, Hewett," said Tom Merry quietly.

Ronald Lorne did not speak.

His tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. His lip was quivering, his hands working convulsively. His look was enough for the juniors.

"It's true!" said Kangaroo contemptuously. "He's a thief and a hooligan. He's commenced the same tricks at St. Jim's as he played at his other school before he was sent to the reformatory!"

"He must have his swag hidden somewhere!" said Kerruish. "I vote some of us go along and search his study, while the others hold him here."

"Good idea!"

"We'll find the swag, you bet!"

Ronald Lorne made a break for the door, but many hands were laid on him, and he was held back. Gore, Kerruish, and Racke headed a search-party that rushed away immediately to Study No. 8—the branded room.

Not long elapsed before they were back.

Racke held in his hand a brown-paper parcel.

The captive started when he saw it.

It was the parcel which Hewett had given him the night previous, to mind for him.

"Leave that alone!" he shouted. "It's not mine!"

"We know that!" chuckled Racke viciously. "We found it in your study, Hewett, and we've opened it. Look, Tom Merry! There's proof of this cad's guilt, if you like!"

He held out the parcel, open, for all eyes to see.

Wrapped in scraps of rag were articles of jewellery and small wads of notes. There was also a gold watch, and Racke opened the case. On the inside was engraved the name: "J. Donnison."

"There!" said Racke triumphantly. "That's bowled him out, hasn't it?"

"Good heavens!" muttered Tom Merry, looking in horror at the new boy.

Ronald Lorne seemed to have been turned to stone. An angry roar arose from the juniors.

"So that's the rotten thief!"

"We've proved it now!"

"Collar him!" shouted Gore.

There was a fierce rush, and violent hands were laid on the outcast of the Fourth. At the same moment there came a sharp, angry voice.

"Boys, cease this instantly!"

Mr. Railton strode into the room.

The juniors hung back, barely stayed by the voice of their Housemaster. Mr. Railton reached the side of the shrinking boy.

"He's a thief and a hooligan, sir!" roared Gore. "We've found him out. There's the loot he got from Major Donnison's house last night! We found it in his study, hidden behind some books in the desk."

"Bless my soul!"

Again the angry juniors surged forward, and Mr. Railton raised his arm commandingly.

"Back, boys! Let there be no violence here. You need have no doubt that justice will be done, if Hewett is guilty. Come with me, Hewett."

Mr. Railton dropped his hand on Ronald Lorne's shoulder and led him away.

CHAPTER 11.

Lorne's Desperate Move!

THE Common-room was in an uproar.

Alan Lorne, looking white and haggard, came into the room soon after the Housemaster had gone. He had passed Mr. Railton and his cousin outside, and guessed what had happened. Ronald had that morning confided to him all that had passed between him and Hewett the night before.

"Well, Hewett's found out!" said Racke sneeringly. "What about your precious study-mate now, Lorne—eh? He'll be kicked out and sent back to the reformatory, where he belongs!"

Lorne did not reply—he could not.

His brain seemed to reel as his schoolfellows told him what had transpired.

He staggered rather than walked away. All the world seemed to be tumbling and crashing about him. What could he do now, to save Ronald? He would be condemned as a felon; there seemed no hope, no way out of this tragic tangle of circumstances.

He went to his study to try to think things out, but his head was still in a whirl. At last, in desperation, he left the room and hurried blindly to Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, the headquarters of Tom Merry & Co.

The Terrible Three and Blake and D'Arcy were there. They stared at Lorne in amazement as he staggered in.

"My hat! What's the matter, Lorne?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You look ill, man!"

"I—I don't know what to do!" cried Lorne hoarsely. "I feel that I must have someone to talk to, and I've come to make a clean breast of it to you chaps, and ask your advice. You'll help me, I know, Merry. You're a decent chap."

With clear-cut words the unhappy junior blurted out the whole truth. He told the chums about his meeting the real Hewett at Lexham, and of the encounter in the train when his cousin, so unexpectedly escaped from the reformatory, came on the scene; of Hewett's suggestion and the subsequent hoax that he and his cousin had perpetrated at St. Jim's. Tom Merry & Co. listened to Lorne's confession in amazement. He told them of his cousin's past, of the circumstances that had led to his expulsion from school, and his being sent to the reformatory.

"Ronald deserved the chance that Hewett had offered him, and I made up my mind that he should have it. Ronald is one of the best, and I thought that—that things would turn out all right in the end," said Lorne bitterly. "So they might have done, but for that cad Hewett. He sent Ronald a letter yesterday, asking him to meet him in the wood last night at eleven, and threatening trouble if he didn't go. So my cousin broke bounds, as you know, and he went to the wood to see Hewett. The rotter wasn't

there at eleven, and he didn't turn up till Ronald was about to return to the school again—that was half-past eleven. He said that the police were after him, and made Ronald hide him at St. Jim's in the vaults."

"Bai Jove!"

"Then the real Hewett is skulking in the school vaults now!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes; Ronald took him there last night," said Lorne. "He was under the cad's thumb, you see, and had to do everything he asked, for fear of exposure. He saw Hewett down in the vaults early this morning, and took him down some grub. Hewett told him that he had been robbing different places since escaping from the train, and that his last theft was at Wayland. He said the police were after him for that, and so he had to lie low here until the hue and cry had blown over. The scoundrel did not mention anything about last night's robbery. It was he who gave that parcel to Ronald to mind. Ronald didn't know that it contained stolen property. It was Hewett, of course, who robbed Major Donnison's place last night—that's why he kept Ronald waiting in the wood. He had just been chased from the house. My cousin is not a thief!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Then it was your cousin, Lorne, whom we've all been taking for Hewett?" he exclaimed. "I knew there must be something wrong somewhere. He didn't impress me as being the usual type of person from a reformatory."

"What did I say, dear boys?" said Arthur Augustus, jamming his monocle into his eye. "I told you Hewett—I mean Lorne's cousin—looked true-blue! As a fellow of fact and judgment—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Blake impatiently. "What we want to know is how to get Lorne's cousin out of this fearful tangle. We'll do anything we can to help him, of course!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry looked grave.

"The only thing for you to do, Lorne, is to go straight to the Head now and tell him the truth as you confessed it to us," he said. "It won't be difficult for you to prove that your cousin is not the thief. Meanwhile, we'll go down to the vaults and collar Hewett, and bring him up to face the music."

Lorne made a hopeless gesture.

"It means that Ronald will be hauled back to the reformatory," he said miserably. "All our plans will come to nothing, and—the Head will be wild."

"Yes, the Head's bound to get his rag out when he finds out how he's been spoofed," said Tom. "But it can't be helped, Lorne. If you don't own up things will probably turn out worse. Besides, you can't let Hewett go scot-free."

"No; he shall suffer for what he's brought on Ronald!" said Lorne, clenching his fists. "I'll do as you say, Merry. I'll go to the Head and tell him everything."

"It's the best way," said Tom gravely. "The Head won't hand your cousin over to the police, of course, but I dare say he'll be kept in the punishment-room till somebody from the reformatory comes for him."

A sudden gleam entered Lorne's eyes.

"Then perhaps, even now, there's a chance for Ronald to escape!" he exclaimed eagerly.

The other juniors looked quickly at him.

"You mean, Lorne, that you'd still take the risk of helping your cousin to get free?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, I would!" exclaimed Lorne grimly. "He's my cousin, and my best pal, and I'd do anything rather than see him sent back to the reformatory. If I could get him away from St. Jim's to-day he might succeed in keeping his freedom."

"But if you helped your cousin break loose the Head would be down on you like a hundred of bricks, Lorne," said Tom Merry. "It would mean a flogging, at least."

"I'd stand that," said Lorne. "It would be worth it, for Ronald's sake. You say Ronald will probably be kept in the punishment-room to-day, Merry?"

"He'll be put there, for a cert!" said Tom.

"Then isn't there some means of getting him out of there?"

The Shell captain shook his head.

"It's practically impossible for a chap to escape from Nobody's Study," he said. "The door is made of heavy oak, and the lock can't be picked, and no one but a prefect can get the key. The window is protected on the outside by iron bars, so I'm afraid it's no go, Lorne."

Lorne's breath came quickly.

"There's one way—a trick I've just thought of," he exclaimed. "I won't ask you chaps to help me because I don't want to bring you into trouble afterwards. All I want is a file. Could you let me have a small, strong file, Blake?"

The amateur carpenter of St. Jim's stared.

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"A file? Yes, I've got one or two in my tool chest," he said Tom Merry. "It would mean a flogging, at least."

"Never mind about asking me the reason," said Lorne hastily. "Can you let me have the file now, Blake? It's urgent."

"Right-ho, Lorne!"

Blake and Lorne walked away to Study No. 6, and Lorne selected a small, stout file. He then scribbled a short note on a page torn from his pocket-book, and wrapped it round the file. Thrusting this into his pocket, he turned to go.

"I'm going to the Head now," he muttered. "Will you and the others go down for Hewett?"

"You bet!" said Blake promptly.

They parted, Lorne hurrying to Dr. Holmes' study.

He entered in response to the Head's grave voice.

Mr. Railton and Kildare were with Dr. Holmes, and before them stood Ronald Lorne, looking pale and miserable.

Lorne reached his cousin's side, and he faced the Head.

"Well, Lorne?" said Dr. Holmes quietly.

"I have come to tell you the truth, sir," said the junior, in a firm voice. "I have been hoaxing you all the time—this fellow isn't George Hewett at all, but my cousin, Ronald Lorne."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head.

"Then this lad's story is true!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

"Fantastic though it seemed, I was inclined to believe him, Dr. Holmes."

The Head rose from his chair, his brows knitting close together.

"Then you confess, Lorne, that you have deceived me?" he exclaimed. "You admit that you allowed the boy Hewett to decamp and brought your cousin to St. Jim's instead—a boy who had just broken away from Broadheath Reformatory?"

"Yes, sir," said Lorne. "I'm sorry, sir—"

"I have never heard of anything more outrageous in my life!" thundered the Head angrily. "You abused my confidence, Lorne, by perpetrating this disgraceful trick! It means that I have been harbouring a runaway at this school, whilst Hewett has remained at large."

"Hewett didn't deserve the chance to make amends, sir!" cried Lorne passionately. "Your kindness was wasted on him. He's an out-and-out blackguard, and nothing will ever break him of his mania for stealing. His people happen to have influence, and that is why he was favoured and sent here. My cousin, who is poor, and is innocent of what they accuse him of—"

"Silence, Lorne!" Dr. Holmes made an imperious, angry gesture. "Your comments are unnecessary and superfluous. This lad's past is no concern of mine. He had no right to come here, and now that he has been exposed I shall take steps to have him taken back as soon as possible to the place where he belongs. When you came in here, Lorne, he had already given an explanation of his movements and revealed his duplicity, although he did not implicate you in any way, neither did he inform me of your relationship. I was under the impression that you, also, had been deceived, and had taken him for Hewett. For your part in this affair, Lorne, you shall be punished severely."

Lorne did not reply.

Dr. Holmes turned to the school captain.

"Kildare, will you have the vaults searched, and, if you apprehend the fugitive, bring him to me?" he said. "If this young rascal has spoken the truth Hewett should be found hiding in the corner vault in the west transept."

"Very well, sir!" said Kildare.

As Kildare left the room Alan Lorne took the opportunity of slipping the file and the paper into his cousin's pocket. The act passed unnoticed by either the Head or Mr. Railton, and he darted a warning look at Ronald.

Kildare went downstairs, and shortly afterwards he and a party of seniors set out for the school vaults, followed by a curious crowd of juniors.

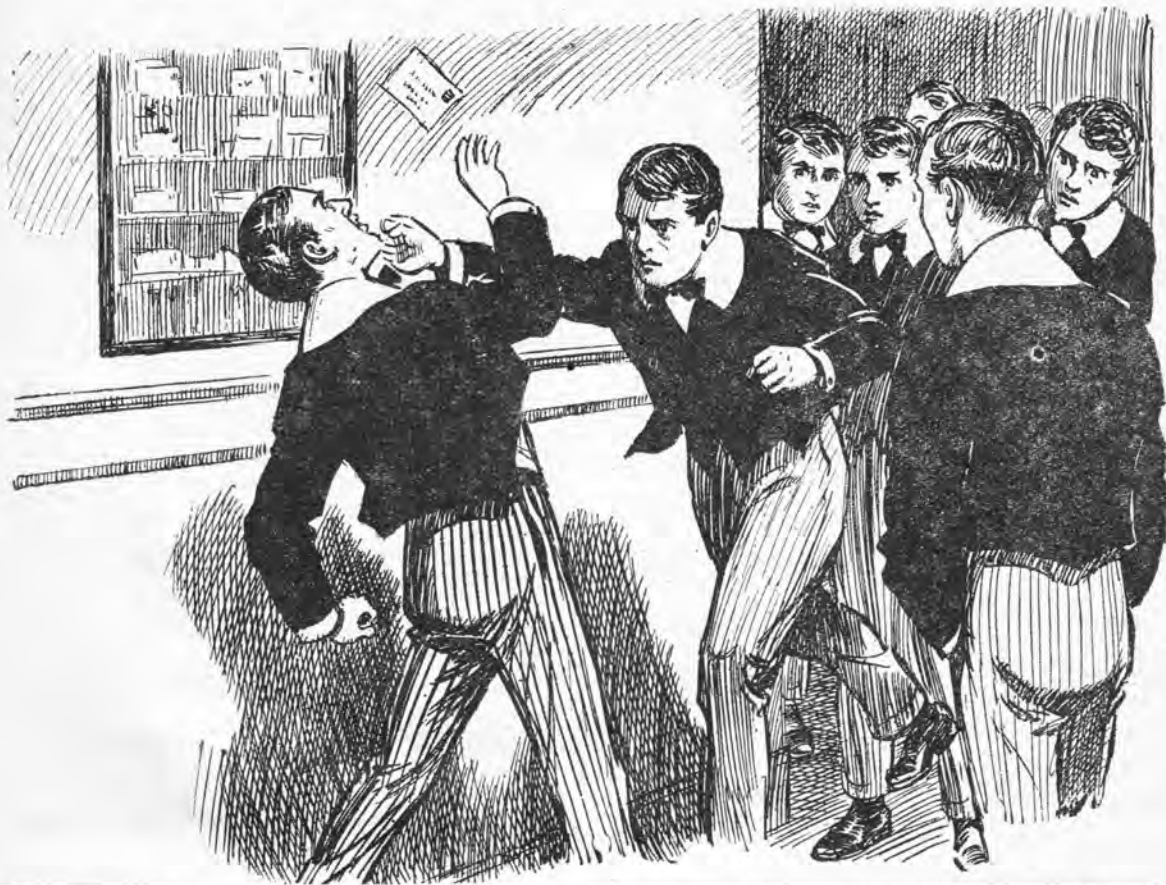
Tom Merry & Co. were just emerging from the ruined chapel when the seniors arrived. They looked dusty from their ramble in the vaults.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "If you've come to look for Hewett, Kildare, it's no go. The rotter isn't here."

"We've scoured the vaults, but there isn't a sign of him anywhere," said Tom Merry quietly. "I expect he got wind of our coming and he's made off. I don't suppose you'll find him in the vaults, Kildare. We're going to look elsewhere for him."

The juniors hunted high and low for the fugitive, whilst Kildare & Co. made an exhaustive search of the vaults. Both parties at last had to admit themselves baffled. Hewett had made good his escape. Only the remains of the food that Ronald Lorne had taken him in his hiding-place had been found. Of the young hooligan himself there was no sign.

Dr. Holmes telephoned to the reformatory school, and Ronald Lorne was taken upstairs and locked in the



"Give me that letter!" cried Ronald Lorne, between his teeth. "Hand it over, do you hear?" Aubrey Racke did not comply, and a hard fist came out and struck him clean on the jaw, sending him reeling backwards. The letter fluttered from his hand, and the next instant the new boy pounced on it. (See page 14.)

punishment-room—Nobody's Study, as the juniors grimly termed it.

The bell rang for lessons, and all Forms went to their class-rooms. The amazing story of Ronald Lorne and Hewett had come out, and the boys of St. Jim's could talk or think of nothing else.

Speculation was rife as to the real Hewett's whereabouts. Had he left St. Jim's altogether, or was he still lurking on the premises, lying low until he saw a chance of escape? That was the question that occupied the minds of everyone at St. Jim's that morning.

CHAPTER 12. Hewett's Last Card!

LORNE took his seat with the rest of the Fourth, and he found himself the centre of attraction. Even Mr. Lathom stared hard and meaningly at him when he came into the class-room.

The junior sat at his desk, looking downcast and worried. Jack Blake & Co. felt sorry for Lorne. At the same time, they wondered what plan he had in mind for his cousin's escape.

They knew how desperately determined he was that the runaway should not be taken back to the reformatory. They believed what Lorne had told them concerning his cousin's past, and they fervently hoped that whatever Lorne had in mind the plan would succeed.

But he would have to act quickly. Even now the Broadheath officials might be on their way to St. Jim's to apprehend the prisoner in Nobody's Study.

Mr. Lathom found Lorne quite unable to do his work that morning, but he was an easy-going master, and he did not press the lad.

Half-way through the lesson Lorne stood up. Mr. Lathom, who was in the midst of construction with Trimble, looked at him over the rims of his eyeglasses.

"Well, Lorne?" he asked.

"If you please, sir, may I be excused lessons this morning?" faltered the junior. "I—I don't feel up to work, and—and—"

"You do not look well, Lorne," said his Form master,

not unkindly. "I think that—ahem!—under the circumstances, you may be excused."

"Thank you, sir!" said Lorne quietly.

He put his books in his desk and walked from the room, followed by the curious, wondering looks of his Form-fellows.

It was not often that Mr. Lathom excused a junior from lessons, except in the case of illness. Lorne, to do him justice, did look pale and ill that morning, and the master had taken compassion on him.

Lorne made his way down the quiet, deserted corridors. He went to his study, took a ball of string from his desk, and then hurried upstairs.

St. Jim's seemed strangely empty, for all the boys and masters were at work in the class-rooms and the domestic staff was busy in the regions below stairs. The junior went softly up the back staircase, and, creeping on to the landing where the Punishment-Room was situated, he listened intently.

A faint, regular grating noise came from inside Nobody's Study, and Lorne's eyes gleamed as he heard it. He walked up to the great oak door and tapped on it.

He heard a gasp within.

"Who—who's that?" said his cousin's voice.

"Only me—Alan," replied the Fourth-Former softly.

"Oh!"

"You're cutting through the window-bars with the file I gave you, Ronald?"

"Yes," came the reply from the other side of the door. "You were a brick to take that risk, Alan! It's my last chance to get free, and I think it will succeed. It's a good file, and the first bar is nearly through. I shall have all three cut before morning lessons are over. I must get out before the fellows leave the Form-rooms."

"I've got some string here, Ronald," said Lorne. "I'll pass it through the keyhole, and you can pull it from inside. There's more than enough to reach from the window down to the quad. You can tie your pocket-knife on the end of it to weigh it down. When I wave from below, drop out the string, and I'll tie a length of rope on

the end of it. I can get plenty of rope from the gym. Then, when you've sawn through the bars you can get down easily. The ivy there isn't safe, and it would be too risky to climb down without a rope."

"All right, Alan. You're a real sport!" said the prisoner huskily. "This will mean fearful trouble for you!"

"Never mind that. I can stand a flogging. Take the end of this string as I push it through the keyhole."

His cousin did so, and Lorne paid out the string swiftly as the boy on the other side pulled it in. When all the string was gone Lorne hurried downstairs, and, leaving the School House, he crossed to the gymnasium. There he procured a large coil of rope. He ran back to the School House, and, standing beneath the Punishment-Room window, he waved his hand. A few minutes later the string, with a knife dangling on the end to weight it, came down, and he fastened the rope to it.

Another wave of the hand, and the string was pulled up. Lorne heaved a sigh of relief when he saw his cousin's hands draw in the rope through the bars. Everything would be plain sailing now, so long as Ronald succeeded in sawing through the bars before morning lessons finished. If he failed, then all hope of escape must be abandoned.

The junior concealed himself behind a buttress, so that he could watch the Punishment-Room window without fear of being seen from any of the other windows.

He waited, on tenterhooks of anxiety, whilst Ronald, far above, filed desperately at the bars that kept him from his freedom.

Half an hour passed, then an hour! Lorne watched the school clock in a fever heat of excitement. The time was getting very close now. Would Ronald do it?

Suddenly the junior gave a low cry of amazement. Happening to glance towards the Head's study window, he saw a dark, lithe figure clamber out. Lorne watched fascinatedly as the marauder paused and looked round furtively.

It was George Hewett!

Satisfying himself that he was not observed, Hewett commenced to clamber hand under hand down the ivy. Lorne looked at him in amazement. The fellow had the agility of a monkey.

Then Lorne started forward with a cry.

Now Hewett had come out into the open he must not be allowed to escape! Lorne, his mind grimly set on capturing the young rascal, dashed towards the spot where Hewett would land.

The marauder heard his running footsteps, and, hanging on to the ivy, he looked down.

He snarled when he saw Lorne.

"So it's you! And you think you'll catch me? Try it, if you can, then!"

He continued his downward climb, and when within a short distance from the ground, he sprang savagely at Lorne. His arm encircled the junior's neck, and they both crashed to the ground together.

Lorne fought desperately, but he was no match for Hewett. He tried to cry out as his assailant held him down, but a heavy hand was clapped over his mouth.

"You won't stop me, Lorne!" snarled Hewett. "I'm more desperate than ever this time. So you gave me away, and sent a gang down the vaults to rake me out! I was hiding under the elm-trees at the time, and I got into the house from the chimney lab. roof. I hid in the lab, until everyone had gone into the class-rooms, and then I got out. I found my way to your Head's room, and, seeing his safe there, I couldn't resist the temptation to open it. One of the elder fellows at Broadheath told me how to open locks, and I found your Head's safe easy. I've got a nice little haul here!"

He tapped his jacket pocket, and Lorne saw, to his horror, that it was bulging with a large cloth packet. Hewett grinned. "I couldn't very well leave here without money, and I've cleaned out the

Head's safe," he said. "Now, Lorne, I've got to settle with you!"

Like a flash, the brute's heavy fist came crashing down on the helpless junior, and Lorne gave a loud, choking cry.

The junior's brain was reeling, but, as through a mist, he saw a figure clambering down a rope. His cousin, then, was free at last!

"Ronald! Ronald!"

"Shut up, hang you!" snarled Hewett. "I—"

"Help! Help!"

Lorne's cries rang out shrilly across the quadrangle.

He heard a pattering of feet, and saw Ronald dashing to the spot. Hewett in the same instant jumped up, and, with a last brutal kick at his prostrate victim, made off.

Lorne raised himself on one elbow.

"After him, Ronald!" he managed to cry out. "He—he's robbed the Head's safe!" His voice trailed off, and he fell back.

Ronald Lorne did not waste a second. He tore after Hewett, who was making for the gates.

Lorne managed to stagger to his feet. He tried to run, too, but could not. He saw Hewett disappear through the gates of St. Jim's, with Ronald in full chase.

CHAPTER 13.

The Silver Lining!

"LORNE! What has happened?"

Tom Merry's voice sounded as if from a distance, yet the Shell captain was actually behind Lorne, supporting him.

Minutes that seemed hours had passed, and juniors, seniors, and masters had come running out of the School House, alarmed by the cries they had heard.

"The chap in the punishment-room has escaped!" Baggy Trimble shouted. "The bars across the window have been sawn through, you chaps, and there's a rope hanging down!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, who had hurried up. "Can it be, Lorne, that your cousin, in breaking away, attacked you in that ruffianly manner?"

"No, sir," replied Lorne, his head throbbing with pain. "It was Hewett!"

The name was echoed by a score of throats.

"Yes, Hewett came climbing down from your window, sir. He has robbed your safe, and when I tried to stop him he—he tried to knock me senseless. Oh, my head!"

"Good heavens!"

"Then Hewett's gone!" shouted Blake. "And he's had a good start, too! Come on, chaps—there's no time to be lost! We'll find that rotter, if we have to hunt all day!"

Dr. Holmes took Lorne by the arm. The boy was half dazed, and could scarcely stand. Tom Merry dashed off with the pack of excited, angry juniors who made for the gates.

Taggles was standing at his lodge door, looking greatly amazed.

"Which way did he go?" demanded Herries.

"Across them fields, young gents. Wot I says is this ere—"

Tom Merry & Co. did not wait to hear what Taggles had to say. They tore off in the direction he had indicated.

Beyond the fields was a road that led down to the Rhyl. Two countrymen were talking by the stile, and from them the juniors gleaned the information that their quarries had been seen running towards the river.

Reaching the towing-path at last, Tom Merry & Co. looked up and down. No sign of Hewett or of Ronald Lorne was to be seen.

"I wonder which way they went!" said Blake frowning.

"I reckon we'd better split up into parties, and—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Kangaroo suddenly.

In the distance sounded a faint cry:

"Help!"

"There's somebody in the weir!" cried Tom Merry.

"Come on!"

They raced along the towing-path towards the weir. This was the most treacherous part of the river, and boards, warning people of the weir, could be seen on either bank. Anyone caught in the strong current that flowed in midstream would inevitably be carried down into the deadly, whirling waters of the weir.

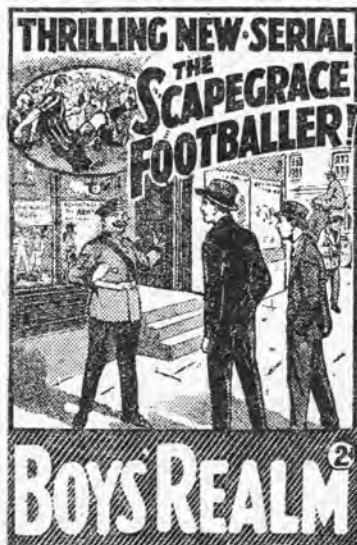
Now the river was swollen from the recent heavy rains, and the current was stronger. The weir was boiling and frothing, and its roar could be heard a long distance away.

As the St. Jim's juniors dashed to the bank they saw a boyish figure struggling in the water. He was being buffeted from side to side by the raging torrent, which all the time drew him nearer to the weir.

The boy was Ronald Lorne!

On the opposite bank someone was clambering out of the water. Tom Merry & Co., though they had never seen the fellow before, guessed that it was Hewett.

Hewett, like the coward he was, thought only of his own



skin, and was leaving Ronald Lorne at the mercy of the river!

"After him!" cried Tom, turning to the others. "You can get over the bridge a little higher up. That's Hewett, right enough. I'm going in for the other chap!"

Tom Merry flung off his coat, and plunged into the roaring stream.

Immediately he was caught up by the current and swept onward. This helped him a little way, and then he struck out to the spot where Ronald Lorne was fighting a losing game with the seething water.

None but the strongest of swimmers could have held his own in the swift cross-currents of the Rhyll. Tom Merry battled his way steadily, but his strength and endurance were taxed to the uttermost.

Ronald Lorne had been swept to the brink of the weir, and he had clutched a part of the projecting stonework in the nick of time. There he clung with all his failing strength whilst the plucky St. Jim's junior fought his way through the raging torrent towards him.

"Huwah!" A joyful cry came from Arthur Augustus in the distance. "We've got Hewett!"

The water swirled over Tom's head, and he could hear no more. But he was at Ronald Lorne's side now, and he flung an arm round him.

"Hang on!" he shouted, his voice choking and gasping. "I'll work my way round to that stone."

The other did not lose his grip of the stonework, although Tom could see that he was on the verge of collapse and might give way at any minute.

With teeth set grimly, and exerting all his strength, Tom worked his way through the frothing, angry water until he was able to grasp the stonework.

Almost as soon as he did so he saw Ronald Lorne's grip relaxing. He took the half-unconscious lad in a firm, strong grip.

"Merry, take this—" The other's voice came half-coherently to him through the noise of the water, and Tom saw that in one hand he held a cloth packet. "Take it! I got it from Hewett before we fell in—"

Tom bent forward and gripped the cloth between his teeth. Jack Blake & Co., Kangaroo, and Talbot were running along the towing-path with a rope.

"Hold on, Tommy!" shouted Blake. "We'll throw this out to you in a tick!"

Tom Merry worked his arm round so that he could support Lorne, and at the same time hold the stonework with his hand. That left his other hand free to catch the rope.

Four times the rope was flung out before he caught it. He flung the end round his waist, and managed, after a struggle, to secure it with a double-knot.

Then, with the packet still dangling from his clenched teeth, and with one arm supporting Ronald Lorne, who had fainted, the dauntless junior plunged again into the roaring waters. He managed to keep afloat whilst his chums on the bank hauled in the rope. He reached the side at last, after what seemed an eternity, and clambered out.

Willing hands relieved him of his burden.

"We caught Hewett skulking in the timber-yard by the mill," said Blake. "Are those the valuables the rotter took from the Head's safe?"

Tom nodded as he examined the contents of the packet that Ronald Lorne had given him. A large sum in bank-notes was represented, and, beyond being wet, the notes were unharmed.

"I'm jolly glad we've got this lot back safe and sound!" said the Shell captain. "Hewett would have got clean away with the loot had it not been for this poor beggar!"

"He's comin' wound, deah boys," said D'Arcy softly.

Ronald Lorne opened his eyes and looked round wonderingly. Then he sat up, supporting himself on one elbow.

"Where is Hewett?" he exclaimed. "Did he get away?"

"No; our chaps have got him all right!" said Tom.

He pointed to where, a little way off, Clifton Dane, Grundy, and Lennox were sitting on the struggling runaway.

"Good!" breathed Lorne. "I'm glad he's caught! And—and I want to thank you, Merry, for saving me from that horrible weir! Hewett would have left me to drown—"

He shuddered as he looked at the raging waters.

"Oh, never mind about that!" said Tom. "I'd like to know how you came to be in the river. I suppose there was a fight?"

The other nodded.

"Yes; I chased Hewett from St. Jim's, and caught up with him just here. We had a terrific fight, and I managed to get that bundle from him."

"Good man!" breathed Blake.

"That seemed to make a madman of Hewett," continued Ronald Lorne. "He went for me with the idea, I suppose, of throwing me in the river. But, as it happened, he lost his footing, and he went in as well. Even in the water he tried to get the bundle from me, but when he got caught

in the midstream current, all he thought about was saving himself. He's a stronger swimmer than I, and so managed to get out."

"The rotten cad!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Anyway, we've got him safe and sound, and I think we'd better be getting back to St. Jim's."

Ronald Lorne hesitated.

"I can't go with you," he muttered. "I—I broke loose from the punishment-room, you know. I've made up my mind not to go back to Broadheath."

"Bai Jove! This is wathah a difficult posish, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "What can we do?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to go back to St. Jim's," said Tom Merry. "Here comes Kildare and the prefects."

Kildare and a number of seniors ran up.

"So you've got both the young rascals!" exclaimed the captain.

Tom Merry smiled.

"I don't think you'll call Lorne's cousin a young rascal when you hear what's happened, Kildare," he said quietly.

"It was through him that we caught Hewett and recovered the stolen property."

"Great Scott!"

The juniors explained all that had transpired.

Kildare assisted Ronald Lorne to his feet. All the brusqueness had disappeared from his manner.

"You'll have to come back with me to St. Jim's, kid," he said kindly. "I, for one, shouldn't like to see you sent back to the reformatory, but—well, all I can do is to speak to Dr. Holmes. You understand that it's my duty to take you back?"

Ronald Lorne nodded.

"Yes, Kildare, I understand," he said. "I'll go quietly."

Kildare turned to the others who were holding Hewett.

"Bring that young hound along!" he rapped.

"Right-ho!" said Kangaroo cheerfully. "Get a move on, Hewett!"

The captive struggled fiercely, so Herries brought his large boots into play, thus effectively helping him onward.

Kick! Kick!

"Yarooogh! Yah! Oooop!" howled Hewett.

He was driven back to St. Jim's in a far from gentle manner.

Arriving there, Kildare and Tom Merry & Co. took the captives up to Dr. Holmes' study. Baggy Trimble, who met them on the way, grinningly informed them that the reformatory officials had arrived, with Sir Marcus Royce.

Sir Marcus and the master of Broadheath and an overseer in uniform were in the Head's study.

"Ah!" Dr. Holmes rose quickly to his feet when Hewett and Ronald Lorne were brought in. "So these boys have been apprehended. And Hewett is here!"

"That is Hewett, the boy whose temporary reprieve I secured!" said Sir Marcus, looking at the cowering young rogue before him. "He is undoubtedly an incorrigible scoundrel. What of the valuables he stole from here? Have they been recovered?"

"Yes, sir," replied Kildare quietly. "And here is the boy who recovered them, and nearly lost his life in doing so."

Dr. Holmes, Sir Marcus, and the two reformatory officials looked in amazement at Ronald Lorne.

"Bless my soul! Both boys are soaking wet!" exclaimed the Head. "What has happened?"

Tom Merry, at a look from Kildare, told the Head all that had taken place.

His listeners thrilled when they heard of Ronald Lorne's desperate plight at the weir, and how, even when at the last ebb of his endurance, his sole thought had been for the safety of the packet he had wrested from the thief.

"What a mercy these lads came along in time to save him!" exclaimed Sir Marcus Royce fervently. "So Lorne, instead of making good his own escape when he had the chance, followed Hewett to recover your property, Dr. Holmes."

"The lad has behaved most gallantly," said Dr. Holmes, in a quiet voice. "I cannot help but think, Sir Marcus, that he would have made a far better subject for your experiment than Hewett."

Sir Marcus' handsome face went red.

"I hardly know how to contain my anger, Dr. Holmes, when I think of how that young scoundrel deceived me!" he exclaimed. "Prison would be a better place for him, not a reformatory. I will see to it that he goes back to Broadheath at once and meets his just deserts. As for Lorne, his escapade constitutes a very serious offence, especially in view of the audacious hoax he perpetrated here. I am sorry that you were so deceived, Dr. Holmes, and regret the trouble you have had."

"Pray do not apologise, Sir Marcus," said the Head, a little dryly. "I have no doubt that bad Hewett himself came here I should have been put to considerably more trouble. On the other hand, Lorne, whom I believed to be

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the boy you sent, conducted himself here in a most exemplary manner. Indeed, both Mr. Lathom, his Form master, and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, spoke very highly of him to me. I was naturally very angry when he confessed his duplicity, and when I discovered how he had escaped from the punishment-room a little while ago I was astounded at the recklessness of the lad. He has, however, rendered me an invaluable service by recovering the property stolen from my safe, and, so far as I am concerned, his conduct is forgiven. By the way, Sir Marcus, this lad's cousin, who belongs to the Fourth Form here—the boy whom you met at Lexham, you remember—has shown me a letter which impresses me very much. I should like you to see it, and—discuss the matter with me.”

“Very well, Dr. Holmes.”

Tom Merry & Co. were dismissed from the Head's study, and they found a throng of excited juniors waiting outside.

“Well?” demanded Gore. “What happened? Are they both going back to the reformatory?”

“What did the Head say, Merry?”

Tom Merry & Co. were hard put to it to answer all the questions asked by their eager schoolfellows. Tom went to the bath-room for a rub down and a change, and left the others in the Common-room to explain matters.

He came downstairs feeling refreshed and as fit as a fiddle again.

Alan Lorne, his head in a bandage and looking very pale and haggard, was standing in the Hall.

“Hallo, Lorne!” said Tom. “How do you feel now, old chap?”

“I—I'm all right,” was the quiet reply. “I'm worrying about my cousin. I'm glad he was able to save the Head's valuables; but—but they've caught him again, and he'll be taken back to Broadheath.”

“Cheer up, Lorne!” said Tom. “Things may not be so bad, after all. The Head's forgiven him for spoofing the school, and he's sticking up for him now. I believe he's going to put in a good word for him with Sir Marcus Royce and the reformatory master. The Head mentioned something about a letter you had given him.”

An eager light crept into Lorne's eyes.

“Yes, that's the letter my cousin sent me, telling me the truth about his expulsion from St. Corbyn's,” he said. “While you've been gone, Merry, I've been in the Head's study, and he gave me a chance to speak to him about Ronald, and I gave him the letter. I tried to make the Head see that my cousin isn't a rotter, and that it was an injustice that he ever was sent to the reformatory. Ronald did not actually steal money from St. Corbyn's.”

Tom Merry listened gravely while Lorne told him of the plot that had encompassed his cousin's disgrace at his old school.

Tom drew a deep breath.

“My hat! What a rotten trick! I believe it, Lorne, of course. If only it could be proved—”

“That's just it,” said the Fourth-Former bitterly. “Ronald has never been given the chance to prove it. The Head of St. Corbyn's was against him—they were all against him—and no one took any notice of his explanation. I—I wish Dr. Holmes could do something. He jolly well ought to, considering that Ronald risked his life and gave up his liberty to get his valuables back.”

“The Head hasn't forgotten that, Lorne,” said Tom Merry quietly. “Perhaps that is why he wanted to discuss your cousin's letter with Sir Marcus Royce. Our Head's a brick, you know, and if he thinks an injustice has been done he leaves no stone unturned to put it right. Why don't you go along and see him?”

“I will,” said Lorne.

He hurried away to the Head's study and tapped at the door.

“Come in!” called out Dr. Holmes, in a grave, quiet voice.

Lorne walked into the room, and the first person he saw was Ronald.

The lad's eyes were shining, and there was a happy smile on his pale, handsome face.

Lorne caught his breath eagerly and turned to the Head.

“Well, Lorne?” asked Dr. Holmes gravely.

“I—I want to know, sir, whether my cousin will be punished for—for breaking away?” stammered Lorne, scarcely knowing what to say. “He ought to be given a chance, sir—”

“Your cousin will be given a chance, Lorne,” said the Head. “I have been discussing the matter with Sir Marcus Royce, and your cousin has told us certain things concerning his past which we are inclined to believe. His case will be investigated thoroughly, and searching inquiries will be made at St. Corbyn's School. Meanwhile, he will return to Broadheath, but will undergo no punishment until this matter is settled. I need hardly say that, if his story is proved to be true, he will be released immediately, and Sir Marcus Royce has undertaken to provide him a new start in life.”

“Oh, that will be topping!”

Sir Marcus Royce smiled kindly at him.

“I am confident that what your cousin says is true, my lad,” he said. “And now that his case has been brought to my notice, I think I can claim that some good, at any rate, has come of my experiment. As for Hewett, he shall suffer as he deserves for his trickery and wickedness.”

Lorne left the Head's study with a new happiness in his heart, and feeling that he was walking on air.

On the following Saturday afternoon a youthful figure, clad in a neat tweed suit, walked in at the gates of St. Jim's and inquired for Alan Lorne.

Taggles, who met him at the gates, almost fell down when he saw his face.

“My hey!” he gasped. “Ho! My hey!”

Lorne was standing by the ropes of the junior playing-field, watching a footer match between Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. of the New House.

He jumped when a hand clapped him heartily on the shoulder.

“Hallo, Alan!” said a well-known voice.

Lorne turned round, and then gave a shout of joy.

“Ronald!”

The two cousins shook hands.

“I'm free now, Alan,” said Ronald Lorne, in a quiet, throbbing voice. “Sir Marcus Royce has been a brick. Those rotters at my old school have been properly shown up, and my story has been proved true. I left Broadheath yesterday, and Sir Marcus has given me a job in his office in London.”

“Oh, good!” breathed Lorne happily. “I've been wondering how things were panning out. What about Hewett?”

His cousin smiled.

“That rotter's at Broadheath, and he's likely to remain there for a jolly long time yet,” he said. “The master gave him a fine birching when he got back. I don't bear him any malice, rotter though he is. After all, it was his idea that I should take his place here, and from that everything has turned out O.K.”

Tom Merry & Co., retiring victorious from the muddy arena, greeted the visitor cordially.

And Gussy, whose noble pater had forwarded a “fiver” that morning, stood a whacking feed in Study No. 6 afterwards, at which feed Ronald Lorne was the honoured guest.

THE END.

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HAROLD CHESTER, a well-knit youngster in his teens, and a member of the Kingsdown Football Club. His love for football earns for him the disapproval of

JAMES HENSON, his stepfather, a Nettingham grocer, in whose employ Hal Chester is. Like the rest of the employees at Henson's, Harold finds his stepfather a very hard taskmaster. First of all, his stepfather dislikes him; secondly, James Henson hates football; and, thirdly, he believes that he—Harold—is an idler.

An important match is down for decision on Saturday for which Hal had already been granted permission to assist his team. But when the great day comes Mr. Henson cancels his promise. Hal has pledged himself to play for his team. He was considered one of the best players in the club, and could not very well let his side down.

Suffering from a sense of injustice, Hal is determined to turn out for his team, come what may.

But luck is against the lad, for in the match he is badly hurt by one of the opposing backs. It is late when he returns home,

weary and in great pain, and he finds the door locked against him. He meets an old friend, however, in Tommy Bell, who is well in with the management of the Nettingham Town Football Club. Hal is given a trial with the professionals, but the older players, envious of his play, starve the lad, and he is turned down.

Still convinced of his chum's prowess, Tommy Bell interviews the manager of the Nettingham United, and Hal is given a chance with them. Hal shows brilliant form, and there is an immediate cry for his signature. Hal, anxious to be with his chums, signs on for the Town.

Having realised his ambition, Hal pays a visit to his sick mother, who gives him a very warm welcome. Hal also learns that his stepfather's business is beginning to show signs of failure.

Later, an injury to the Town's centre-forward finds Dawson given the position. Hal is expressing his opinion on the change, when Dawson, who has always envied the lad's prowess, sneers bitterly.

"I suppose George Bliss always consults you before he selects the team?" he says sarcastically.

(Now read on.)

Two Goals Down!

HAL coloured hotly and bit his lip. Dawson need not have taken his friendly advance that way, he thought.

"And, look here," the new centre went on, "mind you play up for me. I'll give you the ball if you can make any use of it. But if you're too big to send a pass to me and mean to try and get through on your own you'll have to sing for the ball. I know Tom Bell and Dicky Double are potty over you, but I think it's a shame grown men have to give way to kids like you in a League team."

Tommy Bell, who had begun to change, listened to Dawson in open-mouthed astonishment. Who did Dawson imagine he was, anyway?

"The captain of the Town strode straight up to Dawson. "Look here, Dawson," he cried, "if you ever make as good a player as young Chester is now you'll be lucky. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. It's up to you to extend the harmony that exists in the Nettingham Town team, not to try and cause friction. You're in the centre-forward position on trial, let me tell you that. If you make good George Bliss will persevere with you. If you can't pull your weight, then you'll be put back into the Reserves again. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, rounding on Chester as you did just now. You're only one of eleven players, you know, and not the whole team."

It was Dawson's turn to colour hotly and look uncomfortable. His face expanded in a sheepish grin. Dawson was twenty-two years of age. He was one of the few men attached to the Town Football Club who had resented the inclusion of a boy like Tommy Bell in the side, and he had never ceased to envy the centre-half his rare ability.

He had always derided Tommy Bell, and when Tom had been made captain of the team—ay, and led it admirably—Dawson was one of those who had prophesied the

utter failure of the youngster. Bell's natural gift of leadership had cut the ground away from Dawson's feet. Dawson remained a utility player, while Bell was spoken of to-day as the best captain the Town team had had for many years.

"What I've got to grumble about," snapped the centre-forward, "is that there is too much favouritism in the club to-day. Chester may be all right, but he's not as good a player as Atkins—and Atkins, as a reward of his long and loyal service, has been put in the Reserves."

Tommy Bell looked at the irate Dawson with an amused smile.

"Why don't you go and tell George Bliss that?" he suggested. "Perhaps he'd be so grateful to you that he'd put me in the Reserves, appoint you captain of the League team, and generally alter his whole outlook. Why not?"

Dawson was so wooden-headed that he actually took Bell seriously.

"Well, why not?" he shot back. "He might do worse than that!"

Tommy Bell stared at Dawson in amazed silence for a moment, then burst into a laugh.

"All right," he said. "Remember what I said. Keep your position, feed your wings impartially, don't get injuring yourself with those barging rushes of yours down the field, and let us see whether we can't weld our forward line into a complete whole. If you pull your weight properly it ought to be the best the Town has had for years."

Bell, linking arms with Hal, led him away.

"Dawson doesn't like you, Hal," he said. "But don't worry your head about him and what he thinks, for he isn't worth it."

Hal smiled, somewhat sadly perhaps, for he wanted to be liked. He changed into his football kit as quickly as he could, and then, when the call came, hurried out on to the muddy pitch, to find a crowd of over 25,000 people

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gathered in the stand, the enclosure, and on the banks, whilst the turnstiles were still clicking merrily.

Having run to the far end of the field, Hal stood with arms folded, shivering slightly in the driving wind, his eyes wandering round the now familiar scene.

Years ago, when he had played football for his school team, he used to dream of some such day as this, when he would turn out for a big League club and score goal after goal.

The sight of the crowd thrilled him.

He believed, as he searched the banks and the stand, that he would never grow stale or tired of it. To him it was the game that mattered, not the wages he earned by playing it.

That was the saving grace of the paid player, Hal knew—the enthusiasm with which most of them tackled the game they played.

There were some who did not care a rap about it, but they were so few as to be a negligible quantity.

Now the Bury players—the modern representatives of the Shakers, of famous memory—came out on the field, and it was time for the match to begin.

A hearty cheer greeted them. As it died away a man standing near the goal towards which Hal was facing swung above his head an enormous rattle, from which streamed ribbons of the Town's colours.

"Good old Hal! You're the boy!" he bawled as he whirled the creaking instrument. "Show 'em how you got the goals for Kingsdown!"

Hal's face stretched in a happy smile.

It was Jim Burrows, his admirer. Jim had evidently become a firm supporter of the Town now. Smiling still, Hal waved his hand, and then Tommy Bell called to him. Tommy had spun the coin, and lost the toss.

"Bury are going to play with the wind," he said.

The teams crossed over, the referee glanced at his watch, and, to the call of the whistle, Dawson touched the ball forward.

He did not give it to Hal, but sent Seymour away, and the nippy inside-right, speeding down the field and combining cleverly with the right-winger, Kirton, got right into the danger zone.

He shaped for a shot, found the way blocked, and squared the ball to the middle of the field.

Dawson was in the way of it, but so well covered by the Bury centre-half, Finney, that he had no opportunity of dealing effectively with the pass.

"Let it go, Dawson!" yelled Tommy Bell, as he came rushing up.

A quick glance showed Dawson that Hal Chester was standing unmarked and in a fine position for scoring.

Did he let Hal have the ball? Not he! He just stopped it and tried to get through, with the result that he was instantly tackled by Finney, who sent the ball swinging far down the field. Ball, Bury's inside-left, speeding down the field as fast as his legs could carry him, came right at the leather and banged it hard and true past Dicky Double, who floundered helplessly in the mud as he tried to get his hands to it.

The game was a minute and a half old, and Nettingham Town were a goal down.

Tommy Bell's face flamed.

"That was your fault, Dawson," he cried angrily, "and you'll have to get a mighty good goal to make up for it!"

Dawson's face darkened. His fault! He liked that! Was he to be blamed if he failed to beat Finney?

He had as much right to play the ball as Hal Chester. Who was to say that Hal would have done any better with it if it had gone his way?

Sulkily Dawson moved to the centre line, and as he kicked off he banged the ball viciously out to the right wing.

It was the Bury left-back who played it, volleying it far down the field with a perfect kick. At once the white-shirted players swarmed down upon the Town's goal.

Their outside-right got to it, and, cutting in, beat Smart with a splendid piece of trickery; then he raced in and squared for Bullock, the Bury centre, to take the ball on the run.

Tommy Bell instantly challenged, but, as he tackled, Bullock back-heeled the leather, and Ball, backing up, scored the second goal for Bury with a rising shot.

It was all so unexpected that the home crowd stared aghast, unable to raise a cheer or a shout of protest.

Only the little knot of supporters who had come from Bury to watch the game cheered, and they gave voice with a vengeance.

Tommy Bell, going up to Dicky, smiled ruefully at the goalkeeper.

"You had no chance with either of those shots, Dicky," he commented.

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"You're right," agreed the fat goalkeeper. "What's the matter with us all, boy?"

"Oh, we've to thank that swollen-headed Dawson for this!" murmured Bell as he swung up the field again.

Dawson perhaps by this time was himself aware that he had had not a little to do with the visitors having scored two goals.

He began to try and play, but wherever he went he was shadowed by Finney, the Bury centre-half. Finney stuck to him like a leech. Dawson was helpless in his hands. The harder he tried the less effective he became. Soon he degenerated into kicking the ball anywhere in an effort to get rid of it. But never once did he give Hal a pass, although the inside-left was by this time unmarked, the Bury players being swift to see that Dawson intended to let Hal remain in splendid isolation.

Nor did the outside-left, Small, get many opportunities of showing what he could do.

Occasionally he and Hal would speed down the field in a clever combined run, but as they became dangerous so did the Bury halves and backs put paid to the movement.

Tommy sighed as he backed up.

"Try and get Dawson on the move, Hal," he advised.

Hal tried. Twice in the course of the next ten minutes he managed to trick a half-back and give Dawson an ideal pass. On the first occasion Dawson trod on the ball, and, losing his balance, floundered in the mud. On the second occasion he dashed for goal at top speed, but finding himself likely to be challenged, shot far too soon and without bothering about direction. To his dismay the ball skidded off the side of his boot, and, spinning as it flew, found a resting-place among the crowd on the bank behind the corner flag.

The howl of derisive laughter which rewarded him for this performance only succeeded in unsettling him the more.

He had come on to the field bent upon showing the crowd what a great centre-forward he was, and now, conscious of failure, he floundered and plunged about in the adhering soil, chagrined, depressed, and down.

Seeing which, Tommy Bell ran up to the inside-right, Seymour.

"When you get the ball, Bert," he cried, "either make use of Kirton and take it down-field in a combined run, or else chance a shot yourself. You might also feed Hal Chester if an opportunity offers. Dawson can do nothing."

Bert Seymour was not a selfish player. Perhaps he was prone to be jealous of the prowess of another, but he would not let that interfere with his work for his side.

He nodded, and Dawson after that was seldom in the picture.

What pressure the Town applied came from the two wings.

Several times Seymour shot, but Richardson, in the Bury goal, was in great form.

A Gruelling Tussle!

SEYMOUR, being obviously dangerous, was now closely marked.

Aware of this, he fed his outside-right consistently for a while, ignoring Hal. Then when he had lulled Bury into a feeling of security with regard to the left-wing, he very cleverly worked an opening, and sending the ball wide of Dawson, gave Hal a chance.

Instantly Hal was away. Shaping to feed Small on the wing, he cut in, and in a zig-zag dribble, carried the ball well into the penalty area. Then this way and that he dodged in an attempt to find an opening.

"Get rid of it!" howled the excited crowd, all on edge at the failure of the side.

Harold paid no heed. A little more dribbling, and then he let fly.

With a powerful kick Hal Chester sent the ball flying goal-wards, but just at that moment the Bury half-back came running across, and his swinging arms touched the ball before it entered the net.

Instantly the referee blew his whistle, and pointed to the penalty spot.

In a moment the Bury players were swarming round him, protesting. The full-back, his face blank with dismay, appealed in vain that it had been an accident. The referee was inexorable, and Tommy Bell came up to take the kick.

The area was cleared. Tommy ran back a few yards, then rushed at the ball, hitting it with such tremendous power that it almost broke the netting as it went home.

The goalie had no chance.

The Town were now only one goal behind, and the prospects of the side had materially improved.

The crowd was waking up now. Every movement of the home players were cheered to the echo. The Town began to press, Dawson being the only forward who didn't pull his weight. For five minutes they continued to have by far the better of the exchanges, and then the second goal came. Tommy Bell, writing Dawson down a failure, took the ball down-field and gave it to Hal, with a cheery "Here you are, Hal boy!"



With a powerful kick Hal Chester sent the ball flying goalwards, but just at that moment the Bury left-back came running across, and his swinging arms touched the ball before it could enter the net.

Off went the new forward, keeping perfect balance on the mud. On he ran until he found the way barred. Then cleverly he waited until he was tackled, and at the crucial moment back-heeled the ball to Thomas, the left-half, who was backing up. The half-back, touching it down the line to Small, sent the outside-left away, and right across the goal-mouth he drove the ball, just before he was bundled over the touchline by the Bury right-back.

As the ball dropped, Bert Seymour rushed in, and getting to it, drove it into the goal with an unstoppable shot, the goalie again having no chance. The scores were level.

How the crowd cheered then.

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" screamed Jim Burrows, the enthusiast, as he swung his rattle round his head. "One more goal, boys!"

The Town were having far the better of the game now. But half-time was drawing to a close. The ball was touched repeatedly over the line, both sides being glad of a breather. Then in a single-handed run Kirton forced a corner.

So accurately did he place the flag-kick that the ball dropped right on to Hal's head, or so it seemed.

Hal, standing firmly on his feet, judged the flight of the dropping ball to a nicety, and, heading it downward, had the pleasure of seeing it bounce into the corner of the net to give his side the lead.

"Of all the luck!" muttered the chagrined Dawson, as he strode up-field.

"If you played football half as well as Chester," answered back Tommy Bell, who overheard the ungenerous remark, "you would do. You've been a washout this half, Dawson. You'll have to do a sight better next half, if you want to remain in the side."

The welcome half-time whistle shrilled at last, and the players trooped off to the dressing-rooms to loud cheering and deafening handclapping, the half having provided many thrills.

It was expected that the Town would score more goals in the second half of that game, especially as they had an ever-freshening wind at their backs; but it was not to be.

Dicky Double had a complete rest. Low and Smart, the backs, and Warren, Tommy Bell, and Thomas, the half-backs, tackled in deadly fashion.

It was seldom that the Bury forwards were dangerous, and whenever they did get near goal, the perfect understanding that existed between the members of the Town's defence soon put paid to their efforts.

At the other end two effective wings, that were never welded into a complete line, because Dawson was a washout at centre, did their best to win further goals for the Town.

But the Bury backs were on their mettle now. Richardson of the sure hands saved some difficult shots brilliantly, and with the pitch getting more and more churned up as the game progressed, foothold was so difficult that the handicap proved too much for both sides.

Sound the football was, but goals never looked like coming either way.

Towards the end of the game, Dawson, slipping down, complained of having damaged a knee, and went limping

off the field to a rather sympathetic, if somewhat lukewarm, cheer. He was fed-up with it. The Town had won the game, but he hadn't scored, and he hadn't shown off, either.

Hal Chester and the others had had all the luck.

Swiftly he bathed, then, after a change, he gave himself into the hands of Ben Robinson, who examined the injured knee with skilful hands and keen, calculating eyes.

"Do you know the sort of damage you're suffering from, Geoffrey lad?" he asked.

"I know my leg's pretty bad, if that's what you mean!" answered the centre in a disgruntled voice.

"It's funk! The trouble's mental—not physical! You're as sound as a bell!"

"You fool!" howled the enraged player, as he flung himself on to his feet and paced across the dressing-room, forgetting his limp for the moment, so intense was his disgust. "You don't know what you're talking about!"

An Enemy in Ambush!

THE final whistle found the Town winners of that game by the odd goal in five. It had not been a wonderfully impressive victory, but still the side had settled down to some sterling play once they had got over their rattled period.

The failure had been Dawson. But the centre-forward did not remain behind long enough to come in for any sort of lecture.

Off home he went as fast as his tired legs could carry him.

Home was the best place in the circumstances, he thought. After all, the Town had won the match, and the directors and the manager would have forgotten about his ineffectiveness by Monday, Dawson thought.

Next week he would give a better display, and consolidate his position at centre-forward.

If only he had some other player than Hal Chester at inside-left, a player he would find pleasure in feeding!

Dawson felt disgusted with Thomas, the left-half, with Bert Seymour, and with Small for playing up to Hal, when they had virtually promised to starve him.

As he stepped through the wicket gate and pushed on through the crowd, Dawson suddenly found himself face to face with a man who had lurched in front of him.

The fellow had barred the way deliberately, and his face was inflamed with passion, Dawson noticed.

"Here, wait a moment!" said the fellow, gripping Dawson by the coat.



"Jim!" cried Hal, recognising his old friend. "What's the matter?" Jim Burrows caught the boy by the arm. "Don't go out there, Hal," he pleaded excitedly. "Bill Stevens is lying in wait for you! He'll kill you!"

Dawson thrilled. The man was powerfully built, and seemed to be under the influence of drink. Dawson was not a plucky chap. He hated a brawl.

"What do you want?" he challenged.

"Is Hal Chester—that slip of a boy—still in the dressing-room?" demanded the other.

Dawson's eyes lit up. He laughed. He had recognised the man. It was Bill Stevens, the player who had been suspended for life upon the complaint of Hargreaves, the referee.

"Yes, Chester's in there," answered Dawson. "And, I say, if you're waiting for him and mean business, you might give him one or two for me, will you?"

Stevens laughed savagely.

"I'll do that all right!" he muttered, as he drew back to let the centre-forward pass. "I'll do that. It's through him I've lost my livelihood, and I ain't likely to forget it!"

Dawson hurried away, his heart bounding, as he thought of the trouble that was awaiting Harold Chester.

Dawson knew Bill Stevens, of Staverdale, late of Bangley Football Club. The fellow was a pretty ugly customer at the best of times.

So much the better. The thought that it would be only fair of him to go back and put Harold on his guard came to him, but he put it aside without hesitation. Let Stevens do what he liked with Chester.

If Harold were hurt, it would give the other players a better chance. And so he went on his way smiling at the thought of the likely result of a meeting between the inflamed and unreasoning Bill Stevens and Harold Chester, whom he felt he hated.

Ignorant of the trouble that was brewing for him, Harold took his time changing, and when at last he was ready to leave the football ground, he felt as happy as a sand-boy.

"Good-night, Dicky!" he cried. "So-long, Tom—see you later! I shan't be late for dinner. Good-night, boys!"

"Why not wait for me, Tom?" asked Tommy Bell.

"Can't, Tom; I want to run along and see my mother before dinner."

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It was a more than reasonable excuse. "Right you are, old man!" said Tommy. "You played a fine game to-day. We're proud of you, Harold."

Hal swung through the hall, down the tunnel, to the ground behind the stand, wished the attendants whom he passed a cheery good-night, and was almost at the wicket-gate when a man who had been talking to the attendant in charge of it pushed his way through.

Very excitedly he caught Harold by the arm.

It was Jim Burrows, bedecked with the Town colours, the rattle he had used sticking out of his overcoat pocket.

"Why, Jim!" said Harold, recognising his old friend. "What's the matter?"

Jim Burrows caught the boy by the arm.

"Don't go out there, Hal, my lad!" he pleaded excitedly. "Bill Stevens is lying in wait for you. He's been drinking! He'll set about you. Don't go out there now—he'll kill you!"

Hal, raised his eyebrows in surprise, thought a moment, then, frowning, pushed his way gently to the wicket-gate and stepped through it.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of Bill Stevens, or any other man!" he cried. "I can take care of myself, Jim."

The football enthusiast, uttering a groan, reeled back a step.

"He's mad to have gone!" he muttered. "Mad! Stevens will kill him!"

Then he tottered to the gate and wriggled past the groundsmen, who held it open for him.

The Boomerang!

THE thing that made Jim Burrows, Harold's admirer, stop and gasp was the sight of Bill Stevens towering over the boy, while Hal, with both hands in his pockets, was facing his enemy as unconcerned as if he had just met his greatest chum.

Stevens upraised and threatening right fist might have been unseen by Harold for all the notice the boy took of it.

By this time the street was almost deserted. The crowd that had hung about the gates of the football ground for a while had dwindled away. Only a few gaping boys remained, and none of these were of the type that might be expected to interfere in a row.

When they saw Stevens leap unsteadily out of the shadow of the wall and stop in front of Harold their eyes opened a little wider, but that was all the notice they took of the incident. They crept a little nearer, waiting, wondering. Then Jim Burrows, feeling that Hal was in a tight corner—really up against it—sprang forward.

He could hear Stevens shouting, and Harold replying in the quietest of tones.

"Here, you leave the boy alone!" cried Jim truculently, as he came between them.

Bill Stevens, staring out of filmed eyes at Burrows, grinned from ear to ear.

"I know you," he jeered. "You're the lunatic who used to cover yourself with the Kingsdown colours and follow the team wherever it went. Well, mind your own business, or it'll be the worse for you!"

"And I know you, Bill Stevens!" Jim Burrows shot back. "You leave Hal alone. I won't stand by and see you bully him. He's only a boy, and you're a big, powerful man! It's not a fair match. You keep your hands off him, see!"

Stevens grinning savagely, pushed Jim aside.

"Shut up!" he rasped. "I'm going to take it out of the kid. He's got me suspended for life. He's done me more than one bad turn. Now the Bangley Football Club have fired me, and just when I'd got a chance of making good. But I'm going to make him pay for it!"

"One moment, Bill," said Harold, stepping forward, his good-looking, boyish face set and a trifle pale, for Stevens was in a vicious humour, and ripe for mischief. "You accuse me of doing you a bad turn. Is that fair? I didn't make

you foul me when I played for Kingsdown Athletic and you for Staverdale. You hurt me then, and you were punished for it. Also, when I played for Nettingham Town, at Bangley, I didn't make you foul me, did I? Nor was it my fault that you afterwards attacked Mr. Hargreaves, the referee. It was all your own doings, the result of your losing your temper, as you've always done. I read about your suspension in the papers. I'm sorry about it. I know it must be hard on you to be prevented from earning money at football. Yet you can't put that down at my door."

Stevens' ugly face set in vicious lines.

"Sorry, are yer?" he jeered. "You'll be more sorry in a minute. I won't 'ave you preach at me. It's a fine thing when kids like you are lugged into football to do honest men out of a job!"

Jim Burrows shot a glance back at the closed gates of the football ground, which were now screened by a rapidly-thickening mist. The wicket gate stood open, but nobody was coming out. If Stevens were to set about Harold, could the two of them—he and Harold—tackle the brute successfully? He doubted it, for Bill Stevens was a heavily-built and powerful man, who had the reputation of being a bruiser. Jim knew the type. Stevens would fight foully into the bargain, if it came to a fight—that could be banked upon as a certainty.

The policemen who had been on duty at the ground during the match had been dismissed. Not a single one remained. And these bits of boys, who began to gather round, attracted by the altercation, would be too scared to interfere.

Still, Jim courageously intervened a second time. "Stevens," he cried, "be sensible! You can't know what you're doing. Hal's told the truth. You're the victim of your own actions. Don't make matters worse by attacking a boy. You'll have to pay for it if you do."

"I don't care two pence, as long as I make 'im pay for it first!" howled Stevens, as he dodged away from Burrows.

At the same instant he sprang forward, and, although Harold was on his guard, struck the boy a vicious blow in the face that sent Hal reeling back on his heels.

Stumbling over the kerb and into the road, Harold scrambled on hands and feet in the mud, regaining his balance cleverly, and then, sprinting back on to the pavement, he met Stevens' next rush.

The bully was out to hurt him—that much was manifest. Harold, with hands raised, did his best to ward off the brute's vicious blows, and in a measure succeeded. But

Stevens, crowding him back to the wall of the football ground, held and hit him there, so that Hal's head swam, and stabbing pains shot through his body where the bully landed his slinging punches.

Jim Burrows, choking with indignation, sprang to the rescue, and even as Harold fell from a nasty punch that robbed him of all powers of resistance, Jim caught Stevens by the shoulders, swung him backwards and hit him as hard as he knew how.

It was as well, for the savage brute had launched a kick at Hal, which might have very seriously injured the boy had it landed. Stevens' aim had been the head.

Glaring at his new opponent, and taking stock of Burrows' size and weight, Stevens laughed mockingly.

"You!" he jeered. "I've eaten chaps like you before, breakfast! You want a fight, do you? Put 'em up, then, and take your medicine!"

He hurled himself at Burrows, hitting out wildly.

Poor Jim rocked to the heels by left and right-hand swinging blows that landed with terrific force. Being no fighting man, he did not know how to effectively guard them, and so fell heavily to the ground, even as Harold, pulling his wandering senses together, rose to his feet and prepared for Stevens' next attack.

"Shame! Shame!" came in an echoing shout from the onlookers, but they were scared to death of the powerful-looking bully, and none of them made any attempt to interfere.

This was the sort of thing Bill Stevens liked. He could always fight more effectively if there was an audience to watch him.

With a laugh he put his hands up again and, espying Hal as the boy stood with his back to the wall, eyes glazed, knees bending weakly under him, he leapt towards him.

"You'd get me suspended for life, would you? You'd rob me of my livelihood? Well, I'll show yer—"

"Leave the kid alone!" yelled Jim Burrows, trying to scramble up. Poor Jim's mouth was bleeding, one eye was closing fast, his feet refused to help him, and still he would have protected Harold from the coward if he could. His feet slipped; he could not rise. With a groan he realised his helplessness.

But even as Stevens leapt in to thrash his victim there was a swift rush of fast-running steps, and a burly figure towered between Stevens and Harold. Stevens' blows were taken upon great rounded arms that were as strong as iron.

(Continued overleaf)



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With a push, rather than a blow, in the face the new-comer sent Stevens staggering backwards.

"What's the trouble, Hal? What's he been doing to you?" exclaimed Dicky Double, who, having heard the sounds of the scuffle as he passed the gates, had run rapidly to the rescue.

A glance at Hal's face and a look at Jim Burrows, told him all he wanted to know. He recognised Stevens instantly.

Stevens, not relishing an encounter with Dicky Double—for there was as much difference between Dick's weight and size and his as there had been between his and Harold's—looked for a way of escape. But he found himself hemmed in now by a yelling crowd.

Dicky Double was big enough and strong enough to deal with the bully, even if none of them had been. They began to tell the Nettingham goalkeeper what happened in harsh and indignant voices. Stevens stood revealed for the coward he was.

Jim Burrows, limping up now, added his protests to the rest.

Dicky, grinning from ear to ear, nodded understandingly. "I see, I see!" he said. "Well, you thought it great fun knocking a kid about, you great hulking coward! Suppose you tackle me?"

"I've got no quarrel with you, Double," spoke up Stevens, looking sober now.

Some other members of the Town team came up just then, Tommy Bell and Bert Seymour among them.

"You don't want to soil your hands by touching a brute like him, Dick," said Tommy Bell. "Boys, let's get hold of him and duck him!"

Stevens started. "Here, keep your hands off me!" he yelled. "Don't you touch me! Don't you!"

His protests and his cries for mercy were alike unheeded.

Dicky, leading the attack, brushed his blows easily aside, and, gripping hold of him, bent him down beneath his strong right arm, holding him to his side with an ease that made the onlookers smile.

Tommy Bell and Bert Seymour got hold of his kicking, plunging legs.

Along the street they carried the brute, followed by the shouting, yelling, and thoroughly hostile crowd. In the wake of the procession came Harold, mopping his damaged face with a handkerchief, and Jim Burrows, who, despite the injuries he had received, was able to laugh at the justice that was about to be administered to the howling brute who

was glad enough to use his size and strength to strike a boy, but had not the courage to face anyone who could tackle him on equal terms.

"Hal, lad," Burrows cried, "it might ave bin worse. And do you see what they're going to do now? They're going to chuck the big bully into the horse pond!"

The horse pond, a railed-in affair, which was used by kindly drivers and grateful horses, was in Half Moon Street, a turning a little way beyond the Nettingham Town's football ground.

To this pond Dicky Double and his chums bore the struggling rascal.

"He's drunk, or he would never have been so mad as to attack poor Hal in that savage way, Dicky," cried Tom Bell. "But it's no excuse. Throw him in for a cooler."

"Let him go, boys! Leave him to me!" cried the young giant.

Seymour and Bell released their hold of the struggling Stevens. Then Dicky Double, without a second's delay, swung the thirteen stone man high above the iron rail and hurled him out into the pond.

Splash!

Beneath the water Stevens vanished, to rise spluttering and kicking, his hair straggling over his forehead, his cap floating on the muddy surface.

He waded towards the railings, tripped over some object on the bottom of the pond, and floundered into the water again.

"It's not fair! It's not fair!" he howled. "Fight one your own size!"

The crowd laughed uproariously at that. Stevens had a very one-sided humour, it seemed.

"Come on, Hal," said Tommy Bell, setting an arm round his chum. "Let's get along."

Dicky Double nodded agreement. The footballers swung along the street, while the crowd, hanging over the railings of the pond, began to jeer at Bill Stevens.

The cowed and blubbery bully slunk out of the water, mounted the rise to the road, and, muttering to himself, turned into a by-way, dripping with water.

His heart was black with longing for revenge.

Shivering and raving, and with water oozing from his clothes and squelching in his boots, he vanished up the street.

(Has the rascally Bill Stevens learnt a lesson, or will he again try conclusions with Hal Chester? Be sure you read next week's instalment of this powerful serial, chums.)

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