

"THE FAITHFUL FAG!"

THIS WEEK'S POWERFUL STORY OF
TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^d

LIBRARY

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**AT THE MERCY OF THE
STORM!**

(See the Grand School Story Inside.)



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.

EXPENSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY!

"LOYAL READER" writes to tell me that he's taken up photography, but he finds the hobby a very expensive one. Now, photography can develop into a very expensive hobby if the camera is not treated properly. It does seem so easy to release the catch that controls the shutter, and so many enthusiasts pay more attention to this simple movement than to the focussing of the picture they wish to take. Often the result is that only half the picture appears on the negative. How many of us have seen, for instance, a photo with half the head of the subject missing. It's amusing, in its way, but it means that a perfectly good film has been wasted. That's one item of unnecessary expense. Then there's the case of the chap who will allow the light to nose its way into the new roll of films he's putting in his camera, or alternatively the used roll which he is taking out of the camera. Unless the chap using the camera is an old hand at the game, it is advisable that he should do these jobs in the safety of his dark-room. While we are on this subject I must mention, too, the case of the fellow who will insist on covering with his hand a portion of the lens when he's taking the picture. Really, his surprise when he sees the developed film and the print therefrom is extraordinary; he can't make it out. This same sort of individual is usually so keen on his new hobby that he forgets to wind the film after he has exposed it, with the result that he takes another exposure over the film that has already been used. Sometimes the results from these lapses of memory are very interesting, but I don't recommend the practice to the fellow who would cut down his photographic

expenses. For the beginner I would recommend the use of a simple, cheap camera. Let him take one roll of films and wait to see the results before he starts on another roll, otherwise the mistakes he may have made in exposing the first roll may occur in the second roll. "Loyal Reader" may be able to glean a few tips from the above. If there's anything else I can help him with he has only to say the word.

HE'S STARTED TO SHAVE!

A Birmingham reader writes me a jolly lengthy letter in the course of which he tells me with great pride that he has started to shave. Well, well, 'twas ever thus. But my Birmingham chum will be wishing later on that he hadn't been so keen to wade in with a razor. It's a thankless job, is shaving, and once the youngster starts clipping away those few bits of fluff on his chin he has to go on with it. It may appear "mannish" to say that "I shave," but I'll guarantee if you could ask a hundred men their opinion on this subject they'd say "toot sweet" that shaving is a nuisance, and a job to be avoided as long as it is decent to do so.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"SAVED FROM THE SACK!"

By Martin Clifford.

That's the title of next week's grand new extra-long story of Tom Merry & Co., the cheery chums of St. Jim's. I'm not letting on at this juncture the identity of the fellow or fellows who are saved from the sack, but I'll tell you this much—Ralph Reckness Cardew has a lot to do with this splendid treat. 'Nuff said!

"BEYOND THE SILVER GLACIER!"

By Arthur S. Hardy.

There's another topping instalment of this popular adventure serial on the programme for next week. Also another jolly poem from our St. Jim's Rhymester, entitled:

"AT THE CINEMA!"

Don't miss this fine issue of your favourite paper, chums. Order early. Chin, chin!

Your Editor.

REBELLION AT ST. JIM'S!

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NOW ON SALE :: :: :: :: PRICE TWOPENCE.

A LONG MEMORY! Some prefects are unpopular, some are bullies, some are blackguards. Sefton of St. Jim's, alack, is all these, but in a "weak" moment he does a good turn for young Joe Frayne of the Third—and young Joe doesn't forget it!



THE FAITHFUL FAG!

A Powerful and Dramatic New
Long Complete Story of Tom
Merry & Co., the Cheery Chums
of St. Jim's.

BY
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. A Good Turn!

"ST. JIM'S kid! Chase him!"

At that call half a dozen of the small fry of Rylcombe rushed upon Joe Frayne, of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

It was plainly a case in which discretion was the better part of valour. Joe was alone, and six to one is heavy odds.

So Joe bolted.

He could not make towards the school, for the village boys were between him and that. He could only bolt, and trust to luck that he might find some harbour of refuge.

Feud between the St. Jim's fags and the youngsters of Rylcombe might slumber at times, but never quite died out. There had been no trouble of late, to Joe's knowledge. But something must have blown upon the smouldering embers.

Joe ran fast, and three of the six tailed off. But the other three were but a few yards behind him.

Ahead of him was the Green Man, an inn very much out of favour with the St. Jim's authorities. Any part of the premises of the Green Man was out of bounds.

But at such a crisis, bounds are apt to be forgotten, or, at least, ignored.

Joe dodged round a corner, saw a weak place in the hedge of the inn's garden, and scuttled through.

Then he flung himself down behind the thicker part of the hedge, and tried not to make too much noise in panting for breath.

The pursuers were at fault. There was another corner some fifteen yards away, and at first they imagined he must have got round that, though they had been so close upon his heels that it seemed unlikely.

They passed. Joe might have made a dash for safety, but now he heard the three laggards coming up, breathless but vengeful.

By the time they had passed the first three had reached the corner, made sure that their quarry had not gone that way, and were coming back.

"Ang it all!" murmured Joe. "I wouldn't mind standing up to the best man among 'em. But I can't fight the 'ole blessed 'arf dozen!"

He would have emerged and offered single combat, but that he knew the complete hopelessness of any such proposal.

There was little chivalry among the small fry of Rylcombe at best. There was none at all when Bodger was their leader, and Bodger led now.

Bodger was a biggish fellow, fully a head taller than Joe. That would not have mattered. Against Bodger alone Joe would have had some chance.

He had none against the six.

They would doubtless throw him down, turn his jacket back to front, and button it up behind. Very likely they would hobble his legs. Possibly they would drop him into a ditch.

It was not a pleasing prospect. So Joe lay still behind the hedge of the Green Man, comforting himself with the thought that if his pursuers did not twig where he was it was hardly likely anyone else passing would notice him.

He heard the villagers whispering together. Joe's ears were sharp, and he caught enough of what was said to make him wary.

They meant to withdraw a small space and lie in ambush for him.

"Rats to that!" muttered Joe.

But things did not look hopeful when the little band split into two.

Joe cautiously lifted himself to his feet. It was a fine summer day, but there had been rain during the night, and the grass was very wet.

The hedge was high enough to screen Joe, but Sefton's head showed above it as he passed.

Sefton, a prefect, was one of the black sheep of the Sixth. He was not as bad as his chum Gerald Knox; but in many respects he resembled Knox, whom practically every junior at St. Jim's hated.

Like Knox, he seemed to imagine that severity towards them for the slightest breach of discipline would help to blind people to the fact that he himself abused his privileges as a prefect.

Joe ducked.

But he did not duck in time.

"What are you doing, skulking there?" demanded Sefton harshly.

"I—Honest Injun, Sefton, I didn't mean no 'arf!" protested Joe, who when excited was apt to go back to the speech of his early days as a wail.

"Well, come out of it!" snapped Sefton.

At another time Joe, who was as quick as most to notice things, would have perceived a certain suggestion of alarm in the prefect's voice.

He was too agitated now to perceive it, and it would never have occurred to him that Sefton could suspect him of spying. That sort of thing was quite outside Joe's line.

Through the weak place in the hedge he emerged, with a glance to right and a glance to left for the enemy.

"You'll have old Joliffe jumping on you if he finds you

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damaging his property in that fashion!" said Sefton, taking Joe by the collar. "And if he lays a complaint you'll be in the cart for breaking bounds—see? What were you doing there, you young idiot?"

Sefton's momentary alarm had passed. Something in the honest eyes that the fag lifted to his face made him sure that here was no spy. And even if Joe had been watching him, he had seen nothing that mattered.

True, Sefton was on his way to the Green Man. But he was still outside the premises.

"I 'id," answered Joe. "Some of the village kids chased me, and I got in through the 'edge and dodged 'em."

Sefton's lip curled.

He was no hero. Those who knew him would have smiled at the notion of his facing odds of six to one. But it was not he who was in question, but only a wretched fag.

"Why didn't you put your fists up to them?" he asked.

Joe flushed.

"I ain't a funk," he said. "I'd 'ave fought any one of 'em willing. I wouldn't much 'ave minded trying to take on two. But that ain't their game. They wouldn't fight. They'd just roll me over an' jump on me!"

A slight gleam of sympathy came into Sefton's face. After all, this kid was a St. Jim's fellow, like himself. It was confounded cheek of the village lads to go for St. Jim's fags thus.

"Where are they?" he asked. "I passed three young bounders just round the corner there."

Joe pointed to the other corner.

"That's where the rest are," he replied.

"Well, you walk just ahead of me. I won't make any row. When they grab you I'll attend to them!"

"I say, Sefton, you are a good sort!" said Joe gratefully.

And Sefton, who was not much in the way of doing kind actions, felt that Joe was saying no more than he should say.

Joe marched ahead. He made no secret of his coming. But Sefton kept his head low, and walked softly.

Behind them three of the enemy peeped round the corner. A warning whistle sounded.

It came just too late.

"Got yer!" howled Bodger, clutching Joe round the neck and trying to drag him down.

Sefton seized Bodger, tore him from Joe, and flung him down. Joe grabbed the other two. Next moment Sefton had them, and was banging their heads together.

Bodger lay groaning.

"You've bust my leg, you brute!" he wailed.

"I say, Sefton, you'll be smashing their skulls, you know!" Joe protested.

There was a vein of cruelty in Sefton. He enjoyed knocking together the heads of those two small boys. But he recognised the fact that such pleasures have their limits.

He let them go, and they bolted like rabbits.

Then he yanked Bodger to his feet.

"Bust your leg, have I?" snapped Sefton. "I don't think! There's no one to whack your head against, and I guess it's too thick to feel anything if there was. So—"

The St. Jim's prefect had been carrying a stick when he came along. He had let it fall when he seized Bodger. Now he nodded towards it, and Joe picked it up and handed it over to him.

"So," said Sefton again; and as he spoke he thrust down Bodger's head, so that his back became horizontal instead of perpendicular.

Whack!

Upon the tightened trousers descended the stick.

"You! Yoooop! Ow! Stoppit!" howled Bodger.

But he took half a dozen before Sefton stopped it.

That flogging would not have made Joe, or any of Joe's chums in the Third, howl. Holding Bodger thus, Sefton had not full play for his right arm. Still, there was no doubt it hurt. Sefton had a knack of putting wrist-work into a stroke that increased the pain.

Joe could not find it in his heart to pity Bodger. But he was not sorry when Sefton had finished.

"Now you can cut, young Frayne," said the prefect. "I'll stand here till you're far enough away to be safe, though I don't fancy there's any more yearning to meddle with you in these three, anyway."

"Oh, thanks awfully, Sefton! You are a good sort!" said Joe.

He went off, whistling gaily. The two whose heads had been knocked together were visible in the distance. Bodger, still howling, withdrew himself farther from Sefton. The other three hovered in the rear.

Joe had no fear now of any one among them. The prefect had come to his rescue, had dealt with his assailants, and had not said another word about his entering the forbidden ground of the Green Man garden.

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"Good chap, Sefton!" murmured Joe.

He was full of gratitude.

In his place, Wally D'Arcy or Reggie Manners would have been thankful to Sefton for what he had done, but without enthusiasm. They would have said that they knew Sefton too jolly well to believe that he had turned over a new leaf and was going to be kind to fags in the future.

Curly Gibson or Frank Levison would have felt more as Joe did. But with Curly the feeling would not have lasted. And Frank, though no shrewder than Joe in most matters, was a better judge of character. In Levison minor there seemed to be a touchstone that told the false from the true. His gratitude to Sefton would not have made him idolise that somewhat dingy senior.

"Wish I could do something for him!" Joe said to himself, as he trudged towards the school through the gathering dusk.

CHAPTER 2.

The Third has its Back Up!

"WHERE'S Joe?"

It was Wally D'Arcy who asked that question.

Frank Levison replied:

"Gone along to Rylcombe for a stroll. He was the only one of us who wasn't kept in, you know."

"Well, we can't keep the meeting waiting for him!" said Wally, with a snort.

And the chums of the Third hurried towards the Form-room. Tea was over, and there was still time for what they had in mind before prep.

Most of the Third had already assembled. But as Wally & Co. came in, Reuben Piggott made for the door.

"Don't go, Piggy!" said Wally.

Piggott was the black sheep of the Third, and between him and Wally there was neither friendship nor pretence of it.

But Wally held that in such matters as this the Third should be as one man. The unanimous voice of the Form should speak. That was why he had inquired after Joe Frayne. Joe mattered more than Piggott, of course, for Joe was one of Wally's staunch supporters. But Piggott counted, if only as a member of the Form.

"I suppose I can do as I like?" returned Piggott sulkily.

"Not so jolly sure about that!" answered Wally.

"Well, I'm going. I've nothing in particular against Sefton."

"Rather a pal of yours, isn't he?" put in Reggie Manners.

"No, he's not, then. I don't have pals in the Sixth!"

"You surprise me!" said Jameson. "I should have thought that's where you would have them."

"It's the Fifth," said Curly Gibson. "Cutts and St. Leger, and Gilmore—they're Piggy's pals!"

In point of fact, the black sheep of both the senior Forms made use of Piggott occasionally. The biggest and oldest boy in the Third, he had a knowledge of the things he had better not have known far beyond his years. The Green Man was a familiar place to Piggott, and he had carried many a message to Mr. Banks, the bookmaker, there.

"You shut up, or I'll punch your head!" snarled Piggott, who thought himself Curly's master.

"Punch mine!" invited Wally thrusting it forward.

But Piggott did not respond. He edged nearer the door.

"Oh, let him go!" said Levison minor. "What's the good of trying to make a chap stay for a meeting that he says he's not interested in?"

"He'll very likely go and tell Sefton," Manners minor answered.

"What if he does? We're not afraid of Sefton, are we?"

Most of them were. But no one was ready to admit it.

Piggott slunk out. He did not go and tell Sefton. It seemed best to him not to do that. He could keep the news till later.

If Sefton were told now, he might descend in wrath upon the meeting. Then there would be trouble, Piggott knew. Many might cave in at the sight of the unpopular prefect; but not the Hon. Walter Adolphus D'Arcy or his liege men.

They would stand firm. Of course, in the long run, they must get the worst of it. But, meanwhile, Sefton might meet with treatment that would not exactly please him, and he would hardly be grateful to Piggott.

So Piggott stored up his knowledge of the meeting for possible future use, but did nothing at the moment.

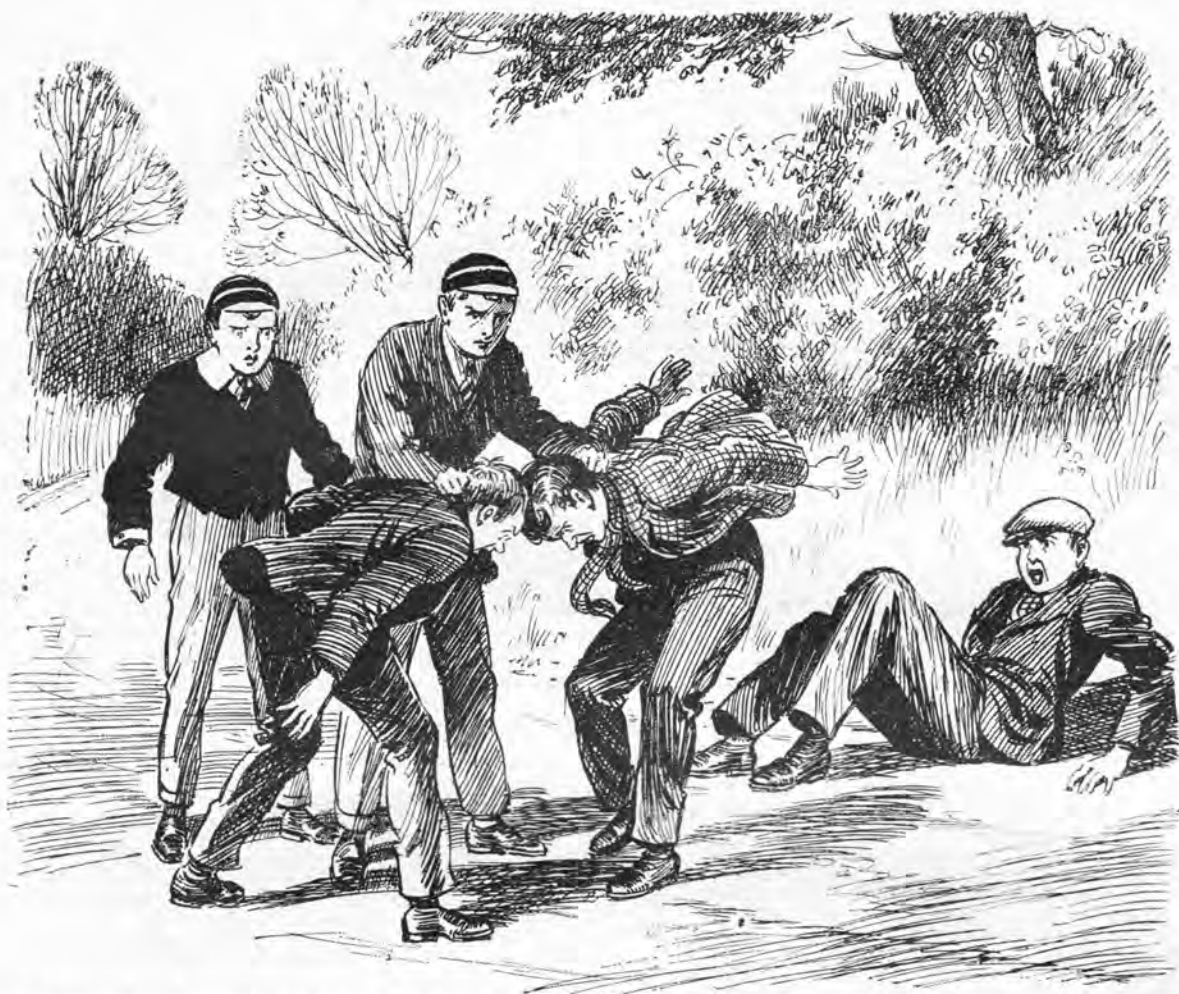
"I vote Wally takes the chair!" said Reggie Manners.

"Thanks for nothing, young Manners! I was going to, anyway," Wally answered.

And he took the chair—otherwise Mr. Selby's stool behind the rostrum.

But the stool was not high enough for his liking. He jumped up on the desk itself.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen," he began, "lend me your ears—"



Sefton seized Bodger, tore him from Joe Frayne, and flung him down. Frayne grabbed the other two villagers. The next moment the St. Jim's prefect had them and was banging their head together. "Yow!" "Yoooo!" There was a chorus of yells and lamentations. (See Chapter 1.)

"Look here, you know, Wally, you don't want to borrow any ears," objected Jameson. "You've got the biggest pair in the blessed Form, anyway!"

"That's a lie, young Jameson! They aren't half the size of yours!" yelled Wally.

"We shan't get much forwarder like this," said Frank Levison.

"Cut the cackle, Wally, and get to the horses!" Reggie Manners chimed in.

"That's it!"

"Not so much rot, Wally!"

"We're serious, you know!"

The last speaker wriggled as he spoke. He had tasted of Sefton's ashplant that day, and the flavour still lingered.

"Of course we are! Who said we weren't? Show me the boulder, and I'll give him a thick ear!" returned the chairman.

"Well, get to business, then," said Jameson.

"The business before this meeting is the rotten and cad-dish conduct of Sefton of the Sixth," said Wally. "Does anyone deny that?"

No one denied it.

"If you could only bury Sefton, like they did old Julius Cæsar, it would be all right-ho," suggested someone.

"Well, we can't bury him. I don't know what we can do to him. But something's got to be done," said Wally.

"We all know that. At least, we know that we'd like to do something. Question is, what can we do?" returned Cosby.

Cosby was a mild-faced youth who seldom lifted his voice in the councils of the Third. He lifted it shrilly now.

For Cosby had the misfortune to be Sefton's fag, and his life was a burden to him in consequence.

"That's the question," Wally admitted. "Now, will every fellow who has been lammed or clouted or kicked by Sefton this term put up his hand?"

Wally put up his own. In the whole crowd were only three or four who did not elevate theirs.

It really seemed that there was plenty of justification for the strong feeling the Third had against Sefton.

"There you are!" said Wally triumphantly.

"But where are you?" objected Reggie.

"Just where we were before!" replied Jameson. "If you can't do any better than that, Wally, you'd just as well let someone else take the chair."

"Question is, you see, Wally, not so much what Sefton's done to us, as what we are going to do to him—or, anyway, going to do to stop him," said Levison minor reasonably.

"Well, I'm coming to that, you duffer! Hallo, Joe, old son, you're late for the meeting!"

Joe Frayne had just come in.

"What's the meeting about?" he asked. "I fancied there must be something on, for Piggy had his ear to the keyhole. He didn't hear me, but he felt me, the rotter! I kicked a goal."

"It's about Sefton!" returned Wally.

Joe had been grinning broadly. He had taken Piggott unawares, and had felt it only right to show his opinion of the black sheep's conduct by using his foot to him. It tickled Joe to think that Piggott, taller and heavier and stronger than he, had not pluck enough to resent, except verbally.

But the grin faded from Joe's face as he heard Sefton's name.

His hand would not have gone up a minute or two earlier. It was merely chance that he had not happened to come into collision with Sefton. But so it had been. Joe had no recent wrongs to embitter him; and if there had been anything in the more remote past he did not remember it now.

To him at the moment Sefton was kindly, and something of a hero.

"What about Sefton?" he asked, breathing hard.

"Don't you know what a brute he is?" snorted Wally.

"No, I don't, then! I don't call Sefton a brute. I reckon he's a good sort!"

"Eh?"

"My hat!"

"Listen to him!"

"Oh, he's potty!"

"A good sort—Sefton! Dash it all, you'll be telling us next that old Selby's a good sort!" roared Reggie.

Mr. Selby was the Form-master; and no one's unpopularity—not even Sefton's—could vie with his in his own Form. The Third hardly believed Mr. Selby human.

"I'm not talking about Selby—I'm talking about Sefton," said Joe, sticking to his guns.

He might tell his own special chums later his reason for holding that faith. But he did not feel that he could tell the whole crowd.

"And you say Sefton's a good sort?" queried Jameson.

"Yes, I do!" answered Joe stoutly.

"Oh, he's potty!"

"Clean off his rocker!"

"It's Sefton we're talking about—S-e-f-t-o-n!" said Reggie, spelling out the name as though he could not believe that Joe understood.

"That's right!" Joe said. "I didn't know you could spell as well as that, young Manners. It's Sefton I'm talking about—capital S-e-f-t-o-n. Seems it must be the same chap, doesn't it? Well, I suppose there's room for a difference of opinion."

"Not in this room, there isn't!" cried Wally.

"Hear, hear!"

Everyone appeared to be in agreement with Wally on that count.

"If you think Sefton's such a good sort," said the mild-faced Cosby bitterly, "perhaps you'd like to take on my job and fag for him?"

"Shouldn't mind a bit!" answered Joe.

They stared at him. Lacking the clue to his attitude, some of them thought him an utter idiot, and others a traitor to the Form.

"Do you mean that?" asked Cosby eagerly.

"Shouldn't have said it if I hadn't!" returned Joe.

Cosby pushed his way towards the latest comer.

"Let's shake hands on that!" he said. "I'm on! I don't care whose fag you are; I'm bound to be better off if you change."

If Cosby did not know for whom Joe fagged, everyone else there did.

Darrell was his fag master, one of the nicest fellows in the Sixth.

Kildare, the skipper of St. Jim's—Langton—Darrell—seniors such as these were prizes. They were always decent to their fags, and often generous. Where the unlucky youngsters who were bondslaves to fellows of the type of Knox and Sefton got frequent tastes of the ash-plant, casual cuffs, and kicks, the fortunate ones had the reversions of feasts and no rough treatment.

A fellow like Kildare might take an erring fag by the ear and admonish him for his own good. Joe, who was not the most satisfactory of fags, had been told off by Darrell more than once or twice. But he had never been struck or cruelly scolded.

Joe put out his hand and gripped Cosby's. He felt a fleeting pang at the thought of deserting Darrell. But the notion of serving Sefton, who had come to his rescue by the Green Man, comforted him.

"Of course they've got to agree to it," said Cosby. "But I don't think Sefton will mind losing me."

Frank Levison suddenly appeared by Joe's side.

He and Joe were special chums. They had more in common than any other two of the six. Their way of looking at things was much the same.

Wally and Reggie and Jameson were all hot-headed and impetuous. Carly was unstable, not to be relied upon at a pinch, though he always meant well.

But Frank and Joe were steadfast, not easily rushed into hasty action. They were not paragons of wisdom or reason. But it was seldom they did a thing first and considered it afterwards, whereas that was the usual course of procedure with their chums.

"I say, Joe, you don't mean it?" whispered Frank.

But he knew that Joe did mean it. He would not have said it if he had not meant it.

Of all the fags there, none but Cosby had better reason for detesting Sefton than had Frank.

Sefton had fallen foul of Ernest Levison, of the Fourth, Frank's major; and Sefton, after the manner of his kind, had taken part of what he considered he owed Ernest out of Frank.

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The youngster had not really been at fault. But Sefton would not listen to him. He had called him a young liar; and that had shut Frank up. He was not a young liar; he told the truth always, and Sefton knew that he was not lying. Frank gritted his teeth and went through with it.

He had never told his chums the story. He had never even mentioned it to his brother. The only fellow who knew all about it was Cardew, his brother's chum, who had come upon him just after Sefton had done with him.

It was queer; but Frank could tell Cardew things that he would not have told Ernest, or Ernest's and Cardew's chum, Clive, though the fag worshipped his brother, and was as fond of Clive, in a different way, as of Cardew.

He had pledged Cardew to secrecy. But Cardew had not forgotten.

This was the sort of thing that was apt to stick in the memory of Ralph Reckness Cardew. If ever he saw a chance of paying off Frank's score with Sefton he would not hesitate to seize it.

If Frank had told anyone else it would have been Joe. But since he did not mean to tell the others, he had thought it best to leave Joe also in ignorance.

Now he wished he had told him. For it seemed obvious that Joe was utterly deluded as to Sefton's true character.

"I've promised," said Joe.

And he did not say it as if he were sorry. There was a queer shining in his eyes that puzzled Frank, though not so utterly as it would have puzzled Wally or Reggie.

Frank somehow grasped the fact that Joe had a reason for thinking better of Sefton than others thought.

Well, it was queer. They said there was some good in everyone. But Frank was utterly unable to perceive any good in Sefton.

"I'll tell you later," Joe whispered. "Sefton is a good sort—really he is!"

"Third-Formers all," said Wally, from the rostrum, "let us agree that Comrade Frayne is potty, and proceed to business. We—"

"D'Arcy minor!"

"Oh, my only Aunt Sempronia!" gasped Reggie. "If this isn't just like old Selby! My word, Wally's in the soup now!"

For the harsh voice that came from the door, sounding more like the bark of an angry dog than the tones of a man, was the voice of Mr. Henry Selby!

Wally jumped down. Some untimely japer thrust out a leg, and Wally, stumbling over it, cannoned head-first into the mid region of the Form master's anatomy.

Perhaps it did not matter much. Wally's offence was already so great that even butting his Form master in the waistcoat could hardly add to it.

Mr. Selby gasped and struck at Wally's head. Wally dodged, and the untimely japer received the blow, which sent him reeling up against the nearest desk, with his head buzzing like a bee-hive.

"A thousand lines, D'Arcy!" snapped the master. "Two hundred lines, everyone else here! And now we will at once start preparation."

Just like Selby! He had come along a quarter of an hour before his proper time, had caught them out, and now was adding an extra fifteen minutes to preparation!

And just like Piggott, though it was not at the moment that any of them thought of suspecting Piggott; and when they did think of it they had no proof. But it was to Piggott that Mr. Selby's unexpected advent was due.

CHAPTER 3.

A Change of Fags!

"WELL, as you like," said Darrell. "But what's it for, kid? On the whole, you're a middling bad fag. I won't say I've never had a worse one, but I've certainly had better."

Joe had thought it only decent to speak to Darrell first. He was a trifle embarrassed. Darrell had always been ready to overlook small faults.

Joe's faults as a fag were usually small. He did his best, but he did not happen to be blessed with a talent for cooking, which was one of the chief gifts in a fag. He was not specially tidy, either; and Darrell liked things just so.

"Cosby wants to change," answered Joe, shifting from one foot to another, and only kept from scratching his head because he had been jumped on once or twice by Darrell for doing that.

"Who's Cosby?"

"Sefton's fag—chap who's going to fag for you, if you agree."

"Then you're going to fag for Sefton?"

"Yes."

Darrell looked long and keenly at Joe.

He had never seen any signs of mental weakness in his fag before, unless an inability to distinguish between blackened bread and true toast might be considered such a sign.

But he had much the same opinion as the Third about a fellow who wanted to fag for Sefton. And the Third said Joe must be potty.

Joe flushed under the prefect's gaze. But he was staunch. He did not care what Darrell thought about Sefton, or what anyone thought.

Sefton had been good to him.

"Very well," said Darrell at length.

He was sorry. He liked Joe, in spite of Joe's unhandiness. He was sure that no youngster would get any good from Sefton.

But he did not see what he could well do. He did not care to keep Joe against his will. And, anyway, Joe Frayne was such a straight and decent youngster that even Sefton was hardly likely to lead him far astray.

Darrell knew of the little games in which Knox and Sefton and one or two more in the Sixth indulged. Kildare knew of them—of the betting, the billiards, the card-playing, the occasional drinking.

They had done their best to stop them. As they saw it, the utmost they could do did not include recourse to the Head or to Mr. Railton, the Housemaster. They may have been wrong in that view, but it was a natural one, all things considered.

Well, Sefton would not easily persuade young Frayne to carry messages to the Green Man for him, Darrell thought.

"I—I do 'ope you won't think that I—well, you know, Darrell—that I ain't grateful to you, an' all that," faltered Joe.

"Really, you haven't anything in particular to be grateful for, Frayne. In a way, I'm sorry you want to leave me. But that's all right. Cosby may very well turn out a better bargain than I can honestly say you are. Send him to me."

Joe grinned cheerily. He knew that he was not the perfect fag.

It did not occur to him that Sefton might be far more critical than Darrell, or that, while Darrell's criticism was never accompanied by hard knocks, Sefton's might take that form rather than words.

Cosby was waiting outside.

Cosby had made special preparations for this momentous occasion. He had indulged in a wash at an hour when most of his Form would have scorned to be seen in company with soap and towel. His hair was nicely parted and brushed down flat. He had even put on his second best suit.

He dug Joe in the ribs.

"I can see it's all right," he said. "Good old Frayne! But you don't know a bit what you're letting yourself in for, old top."

Joe contemplated Cosby with some disdain.

"Reg'lar little knut, you are, ain't you?" said Joe. "Well, I dunno. P'r'aps that's the way Darrell likes 'em done. Go along in, I've put it all serene for you. But if I was you, I wouldn't let Wally an' that crowd see you lookin' such—such a reg'lar little knut!"

Cosby did not mind a scrap about Wally & Co. at that moment. He was in the seventh heaven of delight at the prospect of having done with Sefton and being taken on by a good fellow like Darrell.

"Cheerio, Frayne!" he said. "You'd better cut along to Sefton's study. If he's kept waiting for his tea, the lions at the Zoo just before raw meat time are nothing to him. Wish you luck. But I shan't change back!"

Cosby tapped at Darrell's door, and Joe made his way the few yards up the passage which took him to Sefton's.

He thought it better to tap. That formality was not required of a fag in an ordinary way. But Joe was not yet Sefton's fag.

"Come in!" growled Sefton.

Joe entered.

"What do you want?" demanded the prefect, in no very amiable tones.

"Come to fag for you," replied Joe.

"Young Cosby pegged out, then? I hadn't heard of it, but if it's so, I shan't mourn. He wasn't a bad hand at making tea and toast; but his face always reminded me of a lamb with the chicken-pox or something."

"He's fagging for Darrell now," said Joe.

Sefton flared up at once.

"Like Darrell's cheek, I must say! What in blazes does he mean by bagging my fag?"

"He didn't," explained Joe. "I wanted a change, and—and so did Cosby. So I spoke to Darrell for him. I thought you wouldn't mind, you know, Sefton."

"Arranged it all between you, did you? Darrell and I didn't count, I suppose? Next thing we know the Sixth will be put up at auction at the beginning of term, and the little bounder who has the most cash will bag Kildare for his fag master. But even if that happened, I should be going pretty cheap. Kildare, one pound-five; Langton, nineteen-and-six; Darrell, nineteen shillings; working own to Sefton, fivepence-halfpenny; and Knox, no bidders, or something like that. Well, you're the fivepence-halfpenny to the good, Frayne, and perhaps a bit more. What did you screw out of the lamb-faced Cosby for swapping?"

Sefton's speech was sheer cynicism. But to Joe it only seemed funny. Sefton knew where he stood in the estimation of the fag tribe generally. But Joe saw Sefton with other eyes than those of his chums.

"He didn't give me anything, honest Injun, he didn't," answered Joe. "And now, do you want your tea, Sefton?"

"What do you suppose?" snapped Sefton. "If you're going to ask such idiotic questions as that you and I will soon part company!"

He occupied half of the table, busy with a notebook. Joe laid a cloth on the other half, put the kettle on the fire, opened a tin of sardines on his own responsibility, and cut slices of bread-and-butter. Joe had not prinked himself out after the fashion of the egregious Cosby, but he had taken care that his hands should be beyond reproach.

On the whole, he thought he would say nothing about toast unless Sefton asked for it. He knew that toast-making was not his strong point, and the prefect's fire was not lit.

He was very careful about tea. Darrell had taken quite a lot of trouble to make him understand that it was not of much use measuring out the spoonful if, after doing that, you slopped in the water by guess. Darrell had never got much benefit out of that tutoring, but Sefton had now what he had missed.

"It's ready, Sefton," said Joe.

Sefton cast an eye at the other half of the table.

"You haven't made any toast," he said.

"No fire," explained Joe.

"Oh, well, bread-and-butter will do! You haven't made a bad job of that."

That qualified praise was very welcome to Joe.

"Let's look at your hands! Clean! Ye gods! The Third's reforming! I do like my bread-and-butter without mud on it. Where's the vinegar?"

Joe looked in the cupboard.

"Bottle's empty," he said.

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"Go along to Knox, and borrow some, then. Oh, and where's the cake?"

"Doesn't seem to be any," answered Joe.

"No cake? You're a fine fag, I must say! Tell Knox I want a slice of his. He's pretty sure to have some. If he hasn't you must cut over to the tuckshop and buy one. I haven't any change now, but I'll settle up with you later."

Joe went along to Knox's study, devoutly hoping that cake might be in evidence there. He had only sixpence, and he doubted whether the Sixth recognised the existence of sixpenny cakes, though, of course, Dame Taggles had such things for sale.

He tapped at Knox's study door.

"Please, Knox," he said, "I've come to borrow a drop of vinegar and a slice of cake, if you've got any."

Knox was doing himself very well. He had just started on a sausage-roll, and there were two more before him.

"You can tell Darrell to go and fry himself in oil!" was Knox's polite reply.

"But I haven't come from Darrell," said Joe. "Sefton sent me."

Knox stared at him.

"Oh!" he said. "That's another pair of boots. But surely you are Darrell's fag?"

"Not now. I've changed over to Sefton."

"Hope you'll like the change, I'm sure."

But Knox did not speak as if he thought it likely, or as if he really minded how Joe fared.

He put a large piece of sausage-roll in his mouth, and turned his attention to a sporting paper by his side.

Joe waited.

"What do you want?" snapped Knox, looking up a moment later.

"I told you," said Joe. "Vinegar and a slice of cake, please!"

"Well, get the vinegar, and cut the slice of cake, you young ass! Don't stand there like a graven image!"

Joe had not liked to go to the cupboard without special permission. But he went now, and managed to get a small quantity of vinegar from Knox's bottle into Sefton's crier without spilling any—a feat which rather encouraged him, for Joe was very apt to spill things.

Then he cut the slice of cake.

Knox looked up again just as he had completed that job.

"So that's the Third Form notion of a slice of cake?" he asked sarcastically.

"Yes, Knox. I say, have I cut too much?"

"I don't suppose Sefton will think so. But personally I'm wondering how you tell the cake from the slice after you've done the cutting in the Third. Never mind! Clear out! If Sefton doesn't want it all—but Sefton will, so you're clean off it if you think you've done yourself a bit of good!"

Joe resented that. He had not thought of himself at all. He was only anxious that Sefton should have enough.

He had reached the door when Knox called him back.

"See here, young Frayne," said Knox. "I want someone to take a message for me to the village in about half an hour."

"After lock-up," answered Joe.

"What's the odds? You can easily shin over the wall, and get there and back before prep. You know the Green Man?"

"Yes," Joe replied. "But I'm not going there."

And he slipped out of the door on the instant.

Knox was a rotter! Pity Sefton should be friendly with a fellow of his sort, Joe thought.

Sefton's eyes gleamed at the sight of the slice of cake.

"Knox cut that?" he asked.

"No; I did," Joe answered.

"Knox say anything about it?"

"Bit of sarc about not knowing which was the cake and which was the slice after the first fellow had helped himself in our Form—that was all."

"He wasn't nasty?"

"No."

"Well, you'll do, kid?"

Sefton chuckled as he poured the vinegar over his sardines. He was hungry, and that hunk of cake appealed to him. Cosby, told to use the knife, would certainly never have dared to cut half as much.

But his good humour did not last long. Good humour never did last long with Sefton.

"What are you waiting for?" he snapped.

"Only—"

"You're dead off it if you think there will be any remnants! Cut!"

Joe cut, somewhat hurt that Sefton should have misunderstood him thus. He had not even thought of any reverend of the feast, even after what Knox had said.

In the passage he met Cosby.

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Cosby's hair was as smooth as ever. But his face had lost some of its smugness.

There were crumbs of cake about his mouth, and he held in his right hand quite a considerable section of the comestible. Cosby beamed.

"Darrell's the right sort," he said, his utterance somewhat impeded by an over-generous mouthful. "Doesn't like stale cake. So I had to go and get a new one, and he gave me what was left of the old one. I don't call it stale—it's jolly good!"

"Luck for you," returned Joe soberly. "But Darrell's always like that."

"You are a mug, you know," said Cosby. "If I'd been in your place I'd jolly well have seen you hanged before I'd have changed over! A mug, that's what you are, young Frayne!"

It seemed to Joe that the hitherto meek and mild Cosby, who was in his first term at St. Jim's, was taking rather a liberty in talking like this.

They had now, side by side, got beyond the sacred Sixth Form passage. Joe felt considerably disgruntled. Young Cosby had better not try any more of his cheek on Joe!

"A mug, that's what you are, you know, Frayne!" said Cosby, with hateful complacency.

It was too much to be borne.

"Yooo-oop!" roared Cosby, as Joe seized him by the collar. "Lemme go! You're choking me— Ooooh! The cake's gone the wrong way! Yaroooh!"

Joe shook him hard, then let him go. Cosby, almost in tears, bent to pick up the fragment of cake still remaining, which he had dropped.

Joe put his heel on it and ground it into an unwholesome mass.

"Beast!" spluttered Cosby.

"You can call me a beast if you like!" retorted Joe. "But don't you call me a mug again, or you'll be sorry for it!"

Joe Frayne knew that he was not a "beast." In the ordinary way he would not have treated roughly even the smug Cosby.

But, though he did not admit it to himself, perhaps Joe was not quite so confident that he was not a mug!

CHAPTER 4.

"One Good Turn—"

"YOUNG bounders!" said Wally. "Tell you what, Joe, we'll go down to Rylcombe in force and get even with them!"

Joe had told his chums of what had happened in the village, and of how Sefton had unexpectedly come to his rescue.

It surprised him that none of them—not even Frank—seemed to consider the part Sefton had played of much consequence.

Wally had even said that it was the least he could have done.

He was St. Jim's, wasn't he? Well, then, if he was not an utter rotter he was bound to stand by another fellow from the school in a tight place.

But they had ceased to rag Joe about his insane desire to fag for Sefton. They did not even ask how he was getting on, taking it for granted that if he experienced a rough time he would be sure to tell them.

That, however, was not one of the things which should have been taken for granted. For Joe looked at Sefton from a very different angle from theirs; and that difference made him shy of saying anything about the prefect to them.

Already he had discovered that fagging for Sefton was less easy than fagging for Darrell.

Darrell had put up with quite a lot of things without more than the mildest of grumbles. Long experience had convinced Darrell that the perfect fag was a very rare bird indeed. A fag who meant well and was reasonably clean and honest was good enough for Darrell.

But not for Sefton. Sefton expected something very near perfection. He had been unmerciful to the mild-faced Cosby. But Cosby was a better fag than Joe, and a very short time served to convince Sefton that he had made a bad bargain—if, indeed, he could be said to have made any at all.

Those two youngsters had made the bargain behind his back. It was not worth while taking it out of Cosby for that. But it seemed worth while, and was easy enough, to take it out of Frayne.

Sefton might have felt differently had he guessed at the passion of gratitude Joe cherished towards him. But it is not certain that he would have done. He was not himself at all a grateful person, and he would very likely have thought it absurd. Even so, it might have made him a little less rough in his dealings with Joe.



"Please, Knox," said Joe Frayne, "I've come to borrow a drop of vinegar and a slice of cake, if you've got any." Knox, who was doing himself very well, glanced at the fag and scowled: "You tell Darrell to fry himself in oil!" he replied politely. (See Chapter 3.)

Thus far, though, Joe had not suffered anything very drastic at his hands. He had been cuffed and snapped at and abused. But few of the Third were very sensitive to small matters such as these; and in Joe's early life hard knocks and abuse had been his daily portion.

Joe remained faithful, and had a wistful hope that before long he would improve on his present form, and Sefton would come to like him better.

The notion of sallying out to deal with Bodger and his tribe made instant appeal to Joe.

"That's the stuff, Wally!" he said. "I'm on, you bet!"

"So am I," said Reggie Manners. "Bags Bodger for mine! He's the sandy-haired lout, isn't he?"

"You can't have Bodger, young Manners," objected Wally. "Bodger's mine. There isn't one of the others that's up to my mark."

"Well, I like that!" snorted Reggie. "Anybody might think—"

"Anybody else might!" Wally broke in. "Not you. You can't. The apparatus was left out of you."

"All I know—"

"If you were only going to tell us all you know it would take about fifty seconds, if so long!" cut in Jameson. "But you'll start in telling us what you think you know, and there's no end to that—it's for ever and ever, Amen!"

"If you want a thick ear, Jimmy—"

"Dry up!" snapped Wally. "What's the good of squabbling among ourselves when there's an enemy in the offing?"

"That's right enough," agreed Reggie. "But if I get near Bodger first you bet I'll go for him!"

"Right-ho! I'll pick up the pieces when Bodger's finished with you, and anyone who jolly well likes can pick up the pieces when I've done with Bodger! What do you think about it, Franky?"

"Sounds all right," said Levison minor. "If we can get them together, that is. There's not much fun in collaring one village kid and putting him through it."

"That's what they were going to do to Joe," Curly Gibson said.

"All the more reason why it should be a bit off for us to do it to any of them," answered Frank.

There was something in that, and they saw it.

This was another matter from the feud with the Rylcombe Grammar School fags. When one got down to bedrock in that one found there a queer sort of good-fellowship. The Grammarians, capturing a lone St. Jim's fag, might treat him in somewhat the same way as the village lads would do. But in it all there would be no spite. There was spite behind the activities of Bodger & Co.

"That's right," Wally admitted. "If they don't know how to play the game it's up to us to teach them. But we may have the luck to come on a gang of them."

"Then we mustn't let them see us first," said Frank.

The six went down to the village that afternoon on foot, and in pairs. Wally and Curly started first. Jameson and Reggie followed them within a few minutes. Joe and Frank were the last couple.

Wally had worked out an elaborate plan of campaign, which pleased him so mightily that it was really of no use to raise objections to it.

The village lads were to be rounded up. Wally and Curly would work from one point, Jameson and Manners minor from another. To Joe and Frank was intrusted the neighbourhood of the Green Man.

"But don't you go breaking bounds again by getting into the Green Man garden, young Frayne," said Wally, in grave warning. "Hide in the hedge opposite. I rather fancy you may be the first to come on them, for that Bodger bouncer lives somewhere near the pub. Rush out on them if you do—they won't know how many there are of you—and drive them towards us. Got that?"

They got it all right; but they were not greatly struck by the plan. The division of forces certainly did make it more likely that the village youngsters might be met in force—which meant anything from half a dozen to double that number.

But if they were so met no pair of the Third adventurers could hope to hold their own against them for many minutes; and the St. Jim's forces would be so scattered that the other four might not arrive upon the scene till too late.

All that had to be chanced, however; and Joe and Frank, though they agreed that Wally's plan was nothing very great, fell in with it, and made their way to their appointed station.

Frank and Joe reached the neighbourhood of the Green Man without catching as much as a glimpse of the enemy. The hedge opposite the garden of the inn was thick enough to provide good cover, and they ambushed themselves.

Five minutes passed. No sign of the enemy—nothing to break the monotony.

Then Frank's elbow took Joe in the ribs.

"Railton!" whispered Frank.

The two fags pushed themselves farther back into the hedge.

They were committing no offence. It was not breaking bounds to be on the opposite side of the road from the Green Man.

But they did not want the Housemaster to see them there, and they particularly barred the notion of being questioned by him as to why they should be lurking thus.

His presence in that corner of Rylcombe rather puzzled them.

He would hardly be going to the inn. Even if there had been trouble—as had happened before—and he had come along to speak straight words to the stout landlord, he would have entered by the front door, which faced the green. Other people from St. Jim's might make use of the back entrance. They had their reasons. But Mr. Railton would not have held it consistent with his dignity.

"We'd better clear out as soon as he's round the corner," Frank whispered.

But just as they moved forward to make a bolt Mr. Railton swung round and retraced his steps.

The two fags pressed back into the hedge again.

Mr. Railton's actions grew more puzzling than ever. Half a dozen times he paced up and down the short path that ran alongside the inn's garden hedge. Then he stood for two or three minutes at the corner of the garden which was nearest the back.

It began to dawn upon the fags that he was waiting for someone.

They ought to have guessed it sooner, perhaps. But their own position had claimed their thoughts at first.

Waiting for someone!

It was of Knox that Frank thought first, for Knox was notoriously the worst black sheep at St. Jim's.

But Joe thought first of Sefton.

Frank did not care if Knox was caught—or if Sefton was, for that matter. He held them both bullying beasts. His sympathies were all with the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton was not doing this because he liked it.

He hated it, Frank was sure. But he did it because he counted it his duty.

Joe's whisper sounded in Frank's ear.

"You jest stay 'ere, Franky," said Joe. "I'm going to creep along by the 'edge. I do believe it's Sefton 'e's after, and I must warn 'im if 'e comes!"

And Joe had gone before his chum could protest.

Frank stood still. He could see nothing of Joe, naturally. But he could still see Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster resumed his measured march. Frank looked towards the green.

No one showed there.

Up and down paced the Housemaster.

Frank wondered where Joe was? Whether either of the erring Sixth-Formers would show up? What had put Mr. Railton on their track? What would be the outcome of it all?

Less than twenty yards away Joe, still keeping to the shelter of the hedge, had but a single thought in his mind. If it was Sefton who came he must warn him—at any risk!

He would not run himself into danger for Knox. He cared nothing about Knox. A week earlier he would not have thought of doing this for Sefton.

If a fellow persisted in "blagging," it was his own lookout. St. Jim's hung together; but decent fellows drew the line at giving active aid to such as Knox against authority.

One's own chum, however far wrong he might have gone—that was up to one. But it was a different matter when a rank outsider was concerned.

But this was Sefton—Sefton, who had come to Joe's rescue within a few yards of where Joe now lurked.

It was Sefton who came!

The margin of time was one of mere seconds. Joe had to peer back to find out which way Mr. Railton's face was turned, and could not make sure, after all, though he saw that the Housemaster was stationary.

Joe's heart beat fast as he darted across the narrow road and met Sefton at the corner.

"Bunk—quick!" came his agitated voice to the prefect. "Railton's waiting for you!"

Sefton made no pretence that the news was of no importance to him. He paid no heed to his dignity as a prefect.

He bolted like any fag.

"Stop!" rang out Mr. Railton's voice.

Joe could have got clear, too. But that would have meant leaving Frank behind, and it might also mean pursuit.

He halted.

Mr. Railton strode up.

"You, Frayne?" he said sharply. "It looked to me like someone much bigger."

"No, sir," returned Joe.

It must have been he whom the Housemaster had seen, for Sefton had not actually turned the corner. Mr. Railton could only have heard him. So Joe did not hold that a lie.

"What are you doing here?"

Frank Levison came up. He thought that it might be well for Joe to have support at this critical moment.

It was Frank who answered.

"We were just lying low for some of the village fellows," he said. "They got at Frayne when he was alone the other day, and we wanted to get our own back."

Joe gasped.

Frank had nerve, there was no doubt of that!

He had told nothing but the truth. But it was not the sort of truth one told voluntarily to a master.

But Joe understood.

Frank was playing up on his side.

"I will not have this sort of thing!" said Mr. Railton in a tone of irritation unusual to him.

He knew that they must have seen him pacing up and down like a policeman on his beat. His job had been very much that of a policeman, indeed. It annoyed him to have been watched while upon it.

They had not expected him to approve of their foray, however, and the sharpness of his speech was no surprise.

He took out his watch.

"If you are to be back before lock-up, you must hurry," he said. "There will be punishment if you are late, of course. Otherwise, as nothing seems to have come of your punitive expedition—which was hardly in sufficient force to do much, in any case—I shall take no more notice of the matter. But you are to understand that this sallying out to look for warfare does not please me."

"Yes, sir," said the fags meekly.

They scurried off, in great relief.

Mr. Railton resumed his beat. To the fellow for whom he waited the hour of lock-up did not matter, and if he had any suspicion that Sefton had come and gone he dismissed it quickly, for he trusted those two fags.

On the other side of the green the pair found their comrades.

All three details had drawn blank. There was nothing doing with Bodger and Bodger's tribe that day.

"Railton's about!" said Joe. "He saw us, and said we'd better cut back this moment or we'd get locked out."

"I say, though! Did he catch Sefton?" asked Wally.

"Course he didn't! We saw Sefton running for his life, didn't we, Reggie?" said Jameson. "He wouldn't have been scooting like that if he'd been nabbed—nothing in it."

Wally and Curly, it appeared, had seen Sefton just before Joe had; the other two a minute or so after.

Sefton, from this point of view, was, however, of minor

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interest to those four. They wanted to get their own back on Sefton, as most of the Third did; but they would not have exulted at his capture and expulsion.

"We shall have to scoot, no error about that!" said Wally. "Come on, you cripples! Bet you I get to the gates first!" They ran their hardest; but they did not catch up Sefton on the way.

That did not prove he was already at St. Jim's, however. Quite likely he had stopped and turned aside when he felt himself safe from pursuit.

CHAPTER 5.

An Idol with Feet of Clay!

SEFTON had done Joe a good turn. Joe had done him one.

If the balance was not even, no one could have doubted on which side it was weighted down.

Sefton had risked nothing. He had actually got some pleasure out of championing Joe.

Joe had taken a risk, and that no small one. If Sefton had been allowed to get round the corner Joe would have been in hot water with the Housemaster. It might have meant something worse than a stiff imposition to have thwarted Mr. Railton thus, had he come to be sure he had been thwarted.

But Joe did not see it in that way.

The notion of wiping out the debt hardly occurred to him, and the old adage as to one good turn deserving another had not come into his mind.

He was pleased and proud that he had been able to help Sefton.

Yet he was glad that Frank had not told the others of his warning.

"Best not," said Frank. "They'd only say you were a young fathead!"

"Do you think so?" snorted Joe.

"I'm not sure that I don't. But I'm not going to quarrel with you about it," replied Frank, with his disarming smile. As far as Darrell, Joe had seldom been required after tea was once prepared. But Sefton expected him to come along when prep was over, and usually had something for him to do.

Joe went along that evening in a state of high expectancy. Sefton could hardly ignore what he had done. The least word of thanks would mean much to Joe.

He got more than he had anticipated.

Sefton stood in front of the fire, smiling. He was far from being a bad-looking fellow, and his face now was at its best.

"That was dashed decent of you, kid!" he said.

"It wasn't much," answered Joe. "After what you did for me I wasn't going to let Railton nab you—not jolly likely!"

"You think he was on the look-out for me?"

"Seemed like it, didn't it?"

"It did. All the same, I can't think how he got on to it. And I don't just make out what you were doing down there again. I should have thought you'd have given that neighbourhood a clear berth after what you ran your head into there before."

Joe grinned.

"It was just that," he explained. "We were lying low for Bodger and his crew."

"We? Who else besides you?" asked Sefton sharply.

"There was only Levison minor with me. D'Arcy minor and the rest went the other way."

"But I suppose you told them all about it?"

"No. Why should I? Frank Levison knew, of course. He couldn't very well help knowing. But we didn't say anything to the rest about you."

Sefton's face had changed. The smile had faded from it, and the look of suspicion which was so often there had come back.

Sefton walked in slippery paths, and because of that he was apt to suspect without good cause.

His mind was busy now with Frank Levison.

He did not think Joe capable of betraying him. Besides, Joe had given him warning. Young Levison had been in Joe's company; and, on the face of it, the reason Joe had given for their presence near the Green Man was good enough.

But Sefton had not forgotten how he had dealt with Frank. He knew that Ernest Levison, treated as his minor had been, would neither forget nor forgive till he had had revenge. He did not know how very different the Levison brothers were in many ways. Frank might not forget, but he would not brood and scheme vengeance.

Yet how could Frank know enough to put the Housemaster on the track?

Unless Joe had talked, without meaning any harm.

But what did Joe know?

Nothing—from Sefton.

But there was Knox.

Knox and Sefton were mixed up together in all this Green Man business. They might not always be in quite the same position with the stout landlord and his shady allies. Just now, for instance, Sefton was being dunned for money owing to Banks, the bookmaker, on account of bets, while Knox had had some luck with the gee-gees. But, while they were in no sense partners, they were comrades in blackguardism.

"Knox ever say anything to you about the Green Man, Frayne?" Sefton asked abruptly.

"He wanted me to take a message there for him, or something like that," Joe replied.

"When?"

"First night I lagged for you, when I went to borrow some vinegar and a slice of cake."

"What did you tell him?"

"Said I wasn't taking any."

"And what did he do?"

Joe grinned again.

"Nothing. Didn't get the chance. I was near the door, and slipped out directly."

"That's right. Don't you let Knox persuade you to do that kind of thing for him. What's he ever done for you?"

That really called for no answer. One would not expect Knox to do anything for anybody, unless he saw his profit in it.

"Did you tell anyone about his asking you?"

Sefton was still not quite easy in mind. Someone must have put Railton on the trail. It might have been for Knox, not for him, that the Housemaster was waiting. But that would not have made matters any easier for Sefton had he been caught.

"No."

Joe could not quite comprehend what all this questioning meant.

But Sefton's next query gave him a clue.

"Not even Levison minor?"

"No. Might have done; he's my best pal. But if I had it would have been safe enough. Frank Levison never sneaked in his life!"

"I wouldn't trust him, or any of your crowd, except you, Frayne! I know you're straight. But don't you go letting out to them anything you may learn here, or from Knox."

"I'm not likely to. Is there anything I can do for you, Sefton?"

"No—yes, there is. You can finish up this cake."

He went to the cupboard. It was the larger half of quite a good-sized sultana cake that he handed over to Joe.

"Oh, I say, Sefton, you are a brick!"

That gift from Sefton was far more to Joe than it would have been coming from Darrell. Darrell had often given him things, but this first donation from Sefton was bigger than any of them. But it was not for its size that Joe so greatly valued it.

Yet he was not quite happy as he went off to find Frank Levison and share the cake with him. There was hardly enough for five or six, but quite a whack for two.

Joe wished that Sefton would keep away from the Green Man. He did not want to think of his hero as one like Knox. This Green Man business must be all wrong, or Railton would not be so down on it.

Frank was found—luckily, as Joe considered—before any of the rest of the Third happened along.

At the sight of the cake Frank's eyes gleamed. He was not a greedy youngster, but he had a healthy appetite, and he was hungry just then.

"Half for you, half for me, Franky," said Joe.

"Oh, good egg, Joe! Where did you get it?"

Sefton heard that. The two lads had met at the end of the Sixth Form passage, and Sefton had left his study to look in on Knox the moment Joe departed.

And Sefton heard what followed.

"Sefton gave it to me," answered Joe. "Jolly decent of him—eh?"

Frank had stretched out his hand for his share of the cake. He withdrew it now. His voice changed as he said:

"I won't have it, thanks, Joe. I don't care to eat Sefton's cake."

"Fathead!" exclaimed Joe. "What have you got against him?"

"That doesn't matter. I won't eat anything that has belonged to him!"

"Young fool!" muttered Sefton. "If he feels like that about me, who's to know what nasty trick he may not try to get even?"

"Well, you are a young fathead!" said Joe. "But do as you like. Wally and the others won't say 'No,' I bet!"

Wally and Curly and Reggie—Jameson being of the New House, had to clear out after prep—asked no questions about the cake. They probably guessed whence it had

some, but liked it none the worse. Even when divided among four it made quite a fair whack, and it was undeniably first-class cake.

"Aren't you saving any for Frank?" asked Curly.
"Franky don't want any. He's not hungry, or something," answered Joe.

Frank had not accompanied him back to the Form-room. By the time he came in only the crumbs of the cake were left.

When Joe saw Sefton next morning the prefect was moody—quite a different person from the fellow of the night before.

A dozen members of the Sixth had tried him. Darrell was the only one who had expressed any regret at losing him. The others had, in fact, taken some pains to get rid of him.

Sefton called to him.
"Come to me here after classes are over this morning," he ordered.

Mr. Selby, who liked nothing better than dropping on to any one of the brotherhood of six, had frequent opportunities to drop on to Joe that morning, and did not waste them.

He caned Joe twice, and gave him three hundred lines in all—a hundred the first time, two hundred the second. Joe simply could not keep his mind on his work.

He was wondering what Sefton could want with him, sure that it was something out of the ordinary way.

No, he was not really wondering about that, but rather whether he could refuse to do what Sefton wanted. Something told him what it was.

He did not see how he could refuse. He had said "No" to Knox without a second's hesitation.

But he owed Knox nothing. This was different.

Only his notion as to what was the straight and decent thing to do stood in the way. And before twelve came he had more than half-persuaded himself that there was no harm in doing what Sefton wanted.

There was risk, of course. That was his affair. But there could be no harm, for he would not even know what it was all about.

He did not want to know. But it did worry him that Sefton should have these dealings with the Green Man gang.

What was the good of it all? Why couldn't a fellow like Sefton, who played games better than most, and could make himself popular anywhere, chuck playing the goat?

But perhaps, after his narrow escape, he meant to drop it all. Very likely he only wanted Joe to carry a note saying so.

"Come along to the nets, Joe," said Wally, when Mr. Selby dismissed the Form.

"Can't," replied Joe. "Got something else to do."

"Oh, those blessed old lines! Never mind about them. We'll all help you, and jolly soon polish them off."

"It's not that—Sefton wants me."

Joe saw Frank Levison dart a glance at him, and flushed under it.

It seemed to him that he had never before in his life done so much flushing as during the last few days. But then he had not often before had weighty secrets to keep.

Wally lifted a forefinger in an admonitory gesture. It might have been more impressive had the finger, and especially the nail, been cleaner. But even as it was it made Joe feel uncomfortable.

"Don't you get too pally with Sefton, my son!" said Wally. "The fellow's not in our class. Kildare—yes! I wouldn't refuse an invite of his myself. Darrell—Langton—Monteith, though he is New House—you have my permission to chum up with any of them. But 'ware Sefton, and 'ware Knox!"

The other five went off, and Joe wished that he were going with them. Wally's rot had been only partly rot. There was sound sense in it.

Frank Levison did not change for cricket. His chums thought that he had altered his mind at the last moment. But Frank had made up his mind not to play that morning as soon as he had heard what Joe said.

Frank did not show up, however, when Joe got out his bike and started for Rylcombe.

Joe had a letter addressed to Mr. Banks at the Green Man in his pocket. He was to drop it into the letter-box at the inn, and to hang about on the green until the bookmaker sent someone with an answer.

There did not seem much harm in that, and he would be helping Sefton. Sefton had said so.

But Joe's heart was heavy. It was being impressed more and more strongly upon him that his idol had feet of clay.

Perhaps it was not surprising that fellows who did the things Knox and Sefton did should be ready to send a youngster of thirteen into risk to make themselves safer.

But it could not be fitted into Joe's notion of Sefton.

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CHAPTER 6.

Sefton at His Worst!

FRANK LEVISON saw Joe go, and then started after him, taking care to keep far enough behind to avoid being spotted.

He had no definite notion of how he could help Joe, in any case. But a chance to help might arise, and the will was there.

Anyway, by meeting Joe on the return journey he would know sooner that all was well.

Or that all was not well! For a heavy dread lay upon Frank.

A few yards from the end of Rylcombe Lane, out of sight of the wide village street and the green, Frank dismounted, and sat down to wait.

Joe crossed the green, leaned his bike up against one of the big trees that grew close to the inn, advanced boldly, and dropped Sefton's note into the letter-box.

The door was open, for this was during the midday spell of business. But there seemed little doing. The place was very quiet. Joe heard the note hit the wall and fall to the ground, and hoped that someone inside had also heard.

He turned away at once. But a raucous voice hailed him.

"Hi, you! St. Jim's kid, ain't you? Come inside and 'ave er—er lemonade!"

The speaker was Mr. Banks himself, a dingy-looking creature, who always looked as though his last shave had been the day before yesterday.

Joe saw him, and knew him, but would not answer. He seized his bike, and mounted. Not even for Sefton was he going inside the Green Man.

Mr. Banks did not pursue. The grin on his red face suggested that the offer he had made was due to a desire to tease rather than to real hospitality.

He pulled the door back, and took Sefton's note from behind it.

As he read what Sefton had written, he frowned blackly. He had begun to frown even before he began to read, in fact. For he had expected an enclosure besides the note in that envelope. And there was none.

"More of his blessed excuses!" muttered Mr. Banks. "Gets a bit too thick, that's what it does. What's he want to bet for if he ain't got the oof to pay with?"

This was Mr. Banks' usual attitude towards one of his schoolboy clients who got behind.

But it was not the habit of Mr. Banks to make inquiries as to the ability to pay of any new St. Jim's fly who entered his spider's parlour.

They could always be made to pay if only the screw was applied hard enough. That was Mr. Banks' simple faith. In it he lived, and he had seldom found it fail him.

He meditated now the quickest method of bringing the unpunctual Sefton to the point of payment.

Sefton had suggested a delay which did not fit at all with the views of the bookie.

He had also asked that Banks should reply to him in writing, and send someone out to the messenger, who would wait on the green. This precaution was quite as much for his own safety as for Joe's. If Joe were caught out he must inevitably be dragged into the trouble.

Mr. Banks hated writing letters. Had Sefton enclosed even as much as a pound note he might have done what was asked of him. But there was nothing in the envelope but words, and words were mere air.

Without ever having tried living on air, Mr. Banks was quite sure it would not suit him at all.

He glanced out of the old-fashioned bow-window of the inn, and saw that the messenger had not gone far. He had merely ridden fifty yards or so along one of the paths that crossed the green, and had then dismounted.

Mr. Banks had left a half-finished drink in the bar. He went back, drained the glass, and then sallied out to speak to Joe.

Joe cast a hasty glance round as he saw the bookmaker approaching.

Along the road which skirted the edge of the green a fellow in a St. Jim's cap pedalled lazily. Joe recognised Cardew, of the Fourth.

Well, Cardew did not matter much. If he happened to see Joe in conversation with Banks he might chaff the Third-Former—that was all. If Cardew took a high moral tone about anything he was pretty sure to be pulling someone's leg.

Mr. Banks rolled up.
"Well, young shaver?" he said.

Joe did not answer. He objected to being called "young shaver" by this dingy-looking blackguard. Why couldn't Sefton see what an utter outsider Banks was?

"Well?" snapped Mr. Banks.

Joe held out his hand.

Mr. Banks inspected it narrowly.

"Middlin' clean, for a kid of your age," he said. "But

that ain't my business. I ain't your nursery-governess, y'know. What are you showin' me that for?"

"Sefton expected a note from you," replied Joe, forced to speak at length.

He saw that Cardew had dismounted, and now stood looking across the green, one elbow on the saddle of his bike, his chin in the palm of his hand.

He was not near enough for Joe to discern the expression on his face. For all that the fag could tell, Cardew might merely be contemplating the green from an artistic point of view.

It made quite a pleasant picture in the summer sunshine, though a discriminating painter bent on putting it on canvas would certainly have cut out the figure of Mr. Banks.

Cardew was puzzled. He had passed Frank Levison at the end of the lane, and it was evident that Frank was waiting for someone.

Now it seemed that the someone was Frayne, and Frayne was talking to Banks, the bookie.

It would be no pleasant task. Sefton would rage, he knew, and very likely blame him for bringing a merely verbal message.

But Joe was not going to ask favours of Mr. Banks.

"You're sure you got it right?"

"Yes!"

"Don't you snap at me, my lad!" said Banks, with a leer. "I could put a spoke in your wheel—what?"

"I don't see how," answered Joe boldly. "I don't owe you anything, do I?"

"Ain't broken no bounds this mornin', have you, cock sparrow?"

"Yes, I have. If you think you can do anything about that, just try it on!"

"I've a dashed good mind to clout your impudent young head!"

"You do it, and I'll jolly well butt you in the waistcoat!"

Mr. Banks retreated a step or two. To a man of his sort



CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE.

BAGGY TRIMBLE'S CENTURY!

KILDARE, the skipper of the "First,"

Was seized with consternation;
It seemed that Fate had done its worst
To fill him with vexation.

The match with Greyfriars was at hand,
And Darrell had contracted
A beastly chill, you understand,
So Kildare was distracted!

He came to me on bended knees,
In earnest supplication.
"Play for us, Trimble, pip-pip-please!"

He wailed in agitation.
"I know you are a schoolboy Hobbs,
A brilliant bat, and brainy."
The stalwart skipper shook with sobs,
His cheeks appeared quite rainy!

"Big, blubbering boobey!" I exclaimed,
My voice was cold and dignified.
And then, while Kildare stood ashamed,
My willingness I signified.

"I'll play in Darrell's place," said I.
"And pile the runs up merrily;
As for the Greyfriars fellows, why,
They will be licked, yes, verily!"

My fellow juniors were amazed
When I turned out for fielding;

At my colossal form they gazed,
Their wonder scarcely shielding.

I caught the opening batsman out,
Clean bowled the next man neatly,
And fairly put the side to rout,
Conquering them completely!

But when I batted with Kildare,
I staggered all humanity;
Flogging the leather everywhere,
Filled with a fierce insanity!
The score rose up by leaps and bounds
Before my lusty smiting.
"A century!" (How sweet it sounds!)
The scene was most exciting!

I single-handed won the game,
They gave me great ovations;
Carried me off, extolled my fame,
And showered congratulations.
"Trimble, you played a hero's part!"
Kildare exclaimed, with relish.
Then I awoke, with such a start!
"It's rising-bell!" cried Mollish.



Ralph Reckness Cardew was not particularly concerned with Joe. He had on the whole a friendly feeling towards Wally & Co—the D'Arcy's were distantly related to him—except that he rather barred Manners minor. But the only one of the six for whom he really cared much was Frank Levison; and his affection for Frank went deeper than he himself guessed.

Frank seemed to be in this, somehow. That was why Cardew waited and watched, careless whether Joe Frayne saw him or no.

Joe withdrew his eyes from the distant figure of Cardew, to fasten them upon the nearer one of Mr. Banks.

The bookmaker stood over him in an attitude that was almost threatening.

"Ho! Sefton expected a note from me, did he?" he sneered. "Well, you just tell Sefton that it was like his dashed cheek an' impudence to expect anything of the blessed sort. You can add as I expected more'n one note from him—unless the one was a fiver at least—an' I ain't got 'em, an' there's goin' to be the dickens an' all to pay for him if he don't begin to put things right within twenty-four hours!"

"I'll tell him," said Joe.

that was a dire threat. And this youngster looked quite capable of carrying it out.

"Nasty young spitfire!" said Mr. Banks. "You tell Sefton he'd better not send you along to me again, for I won't have no more to do with you—that's flat!"

"Suits me!" returned Joe, mounting his bike.

His mind was made up now. In a moment, while he stood facing the obese bookie, he had realised that this was altogether too much for Sefton to ask of him.

He was still grateful to Sefton; but he saw more clearly now, and though he had not definitely framed the thought, there had been born in his mind a vague suspicion that, perhaps, Sefton was trading somewhat more than was fair upon his gratitude.

He rode off. He had forgotten all about Cardew. But Cardew stood and watched him go, stood and watched Banks roll back to the Green Man.

Then he mounted, and made his leisurely way along the fringe of the green towards Rylcombe Lane.

Meanwhile, Sefton was drawing near from the opposite direction.

Sefton was very anxious about Banks' reply.

At best it would not be cordial. At worst it might threaten ruin. The prefect came round a bend of the lane just as Levison minor halted and dismounted.

Instantly suspicion awoke in Sefton.

He had no doubt that Frank had come along with his fag. He had not yet reached the length of believing Joe treacherous. But Joe and this other youngster were chums, and Joe might have told more than he ought.

Piggott had told Sefton that Levison minor had bragged among his chums of the Third that he meant to get even with Sefton.

The prefect knew Piggott untrustworthy. But he believed him in this. How should he have known anything about it if Levison minor had not talked?

But Piggott had ways of his own in the gathering of news.

Now Sefton, sure that the youngster ahead had not seen him, dodged back round the bend. He opened a gate, wheeled his machine through, left it standing against the hedge, and stole towards Frank.

Past the bend, the lane began to run between high banks. Sefton moved uphill, but always behind the hedge which crested the bank.

Presently he came directly above Frank, and looked down through the hedge upon him.

The youngster sat with his feet in the shallow gutter that ran at the foot of the bank. He had laid his bike down by his side. His elbows were on his knees, and his chin was cupped in his palms.

Frank was thinking hard.

Sefton imagined him brooding on vengeance. But nothing of that sort was in Frank's mind.

It was of Sefton he thought, but only because Sefton was mixed up with the problem of Joe.

Frank could foresee nothing but the worst. Joe had gone on one of Sefton's shady errands. He was sure of that.

Having gone once, he would go again, thinking less of it each time. And sooner or later he must be caught.

The others would be sorry if Joe was sacked. But their attitude even now, when expulsion was the merest possibility, might be expressed in a question that belongs to one of the oldest stories of all the world's stories:

"Am I my brother's keeper?"

Somehow, Frank could not look at it in that way.

Frank jumped up. Joe had appeared in the lane.

"Hallo, Franky!" said Joe.

Frank's reply was an unfortunate one.

What he wanted was to come straight to the point, to let Joe know that he understood, and to make sure that nothing untoward had happened.

"Seen Banks?" he asked.

Joe gasped. That question got him under the fifth rib, as it were.

Before he could find words to answer it he was given fresh cause to gasp.

For, like a whirlwind, seeming to come from nowhere, Sefton was upon them!

With a sweep of his arm he sent Joe to earth.

He was angry with Joe. But he was far angrier with Frank.

Joe might have let things out unintentionally; but to Sefton that query of Frank's seemed a sure proof that the speaker was scheming to get his number taken down.

He snatched up Frank by the collar. It came away in his hand, and the youngster fell in a heap.

Sefton caught him up and dashed him down again. Joe struggled up and grabbed at Sefton's arm. But this time the sweep of that arm hurled him right across the lane, and as he stumbled against the opposite bank his head struck a stone, and for the moment he was stunned.

Frank had scrambled up. There was blood on his face. At any other time the sight of that pale face, with the red marks on it, and the candid blue eyes so plainly asking what all this meant, would have disarmed Sefton.

But he was at his worst now, maddened by anxiety and suspicion.

He struck at Frank with his fist, as he would have struck at a fellow of his own weight. Frank ducked, and the blow did not land.

"Stop that!" rang out a clear voice.

And Ralph Reckness Cardew made in to the rescue!

CHAPTER 7.

Defeat More Honourable than Victory!

AT the sight of Cardew some of the mad rage passed out of Sefton.

He was not yet sorry for what he had done, though he might come to be that.

But he was very sorry indeed that Cardew had seen.

It was one thing to punish a couple of cheeky fags with a

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clouting. It was quite another to knock one of them senseless and use your fist to the other as if he were your own size.

There was no junior at St. Jim's whom Sefton would not have preferred to Cardew as a witness of his brutality.

Plenty of others, even though alone, as Cardew was, would have rushed in to the aid of the fags, as Cardew did.

But no other had a tongue that could lash as Cardew's could when he was roused.

Sefton dropped his hands as Cardew rushed.

"No affair of yours, Cardew!" he snarled.

Cardew promptly smacked his face.

"Does that make it so?" he demanded.

"You've asked for it, and you'll dashed well get it!" roared Sefton, attacking him furiously.

Frank, with the blood still running down his face, staggered to Joe and lifted his head.

Joe opened his eyes upon a spectacle which made him wonder whether he was not dreaming.



Joe Frayne darted across the narrow road and met Sefton at the voice. "Railton's waiting for you!" "W"

For Sefton and Cardew were at it, hammer and tongs! The prefect had forgotten that his opponent was altogether below his weight, and was going for him as he would have gone for a fellow of his own size.

Cardew held his own manfully as yet.

He knew that only the most astonishing of flukes could possibly give him victory.

Even had Sefton been comparatively a duffer the odds of weight and strength and reach would have outbalanced Cardew's skill.

But there was nothing of the duffer about Sefton. He was at least as clever with his fists as the Fourth-Former. That for a brief space Cardew was able to hold his own was due to the fact that Sefton saw red, while Cardew's rage was of the icy sort that left his brain cool.

The junior guarded cleverly, and got home with a good deal of effect on Sefton's ribs. More than once the prefect winced. He was not as fit as he should have been, and those body blows hurt.

He punched mainly at Cardew's face, believing that the quickest way to end the fight was to begin marking that.

Cardew was a good-looking fellow, and his best chums would not have defended him from the charge of being vain of his good looks.

But he was not thinking of them now. He remembered what Sefton had done to Frank Levison a fortnight or so before, and he saw the youngster's eager, pale face, full of anxiety for him, with the blood upon it that suggested yet more brutal treatment. It may be that it suggested more than was true. Sefton had certainly been rough with Frank, but he had not hurt him as much as he had hurt Joe Frayne.

Sefton fought for his own hand, more than half ashamed after his first madness of rage had passed.

But Cardew fought not for himself at all, but for the pale-faced fag, who watched with bated breath, and for his chums, Ernest Levison and Sidney Clive, who, in his place, would have gone for Sefton just as he had done.

Three times Cardew had lowered his head suddenly and taken on the top of it punches meant for his face. It was a dangerous dodge, for he had not the skull of a nigger. But

eager to inflict as much damage as possible upon an opponent not his match, was outside the range of Joe's sympathy.

But the prefect had reason for his ire with Frank and Joe.

It did not occur to Joe that if Sefton had not been spying he would not have heard Frank's question. Joe thought only of the fact that he had heard it, and that it was absolutely certain to make him rage.

What could Sefton deduce from it but that Joe had brought Frank along with him, and had told him all about the affair on the way?

"Seen Banks?" Frank had said.

Sefton could hardly have doubted that Frank had known of his chum's carrying a message to the bookmaker.

Enough to make a fellow mad!

But this was rotten! Cardew had no chance. He was being driven back, fighting hard still. If he could not beat Sefton, he could at least hurt him; and he was grimly determined to hurt him as much as he could before the end came.

Cardew's lips were cut, and blood trickled down his chin. Both eyes were closing. His face was badly out of shape.

But he pounded away, and took his punishment with stoic courage. Not once all through that unequal fight did so much as a grunt come from Cardew. Sefton grunted and wheezed and groaned and cursed. But Cardew fought in dogged silence.

The combat had lasted fully five minutes before he went down, and when he did fall he was on his feet again in a flash. His face was as chalky-white where it was not bruised or reddened with blows, as his jacket, which was covered with the dust of the lane; but that face was no less resolute than ever.

"Haven't you had enough, confound you?" snapped Sefton.

Cardew's only reply to that was to rush in under Sefton's guard and deal an uppercut very near the point of the jaw. An inch or two to the right, and the all but miracle of a victory for the Fourth-Former might have been witnessed!

But Sefton only shook his head, and smashed at Cardew with both big fists, reckless of guard now, seeking only to finish as soon as he might. For he was utterly ashamed, and his shame only made him the bitterer against Cardew.

A crashing blow took Cardew on the mark. He staggered back, then toppled forward, and lay on his face in the chalky dust.

"You'd better see to him," said Sefton. "I'm not going to touch him. He asked for it, and he's fairly got it. If there's any trouble over this, Levison minor, you can bear witness that he smacked my face before I hit him. Was I going to stand for that? Not likely! Frayne, as soon as you're back at the school you'd better come to my study."

He strode away. The two fags, kneeling by Cardew, saw the prefect fetch his bike from the field in which he had left it; and both knew now that he must have been spying when he heard those unlucky words from Frank.

Joe rushed off, and came back with some muddy water in his cap. It was soaking through fast, and he was in such a hurry to make use of it before it had all gone that Frank got it. For Cardew was in time to put up a hand to stop it, and the hand smote the bottom of the cap and caused what was left of the water to shoot up into Frank's face.

It did not matter much. The muddy water mingled with the blood and the tears that ran down Levison minor's cheeks.

He could not speak what was in his heart, and his feelings found vent in tears. Cardew's face was a sight to behold, and for a dreadful moment Frank had dreaded that his champion was dead.

Frank was far from being the crying sort, as a rule. His tears then did him no more dishonour than Cardew's defeat did him.

The dishonour was with Sefton.

And only Joe saw that after all, there was something to be said for Sefton.

For Cardew could see no possible excuse for the brutality with which the prefect had treated the fags. And Frank was unable to comprehend how a big fellow like Sefton could so deal with an enemy in no way his match.

But Joe perceived that Sefton, thinking himself betrayed, had excuse for his rage, and that it was not to be expected he should accept meekly that smack of the face.

Joe was very grateful to Cardew, nevertheless, and more than willing to do anything he could for him.

But Cardew would not have anything done.

"If that water you brought along is a specimen of the pure an' bubblin' springs that Rylcombe Lane yields, Frayne," he said, "I think I'd better wait till I get back before I wash my face. Some mud, I believe, has valuable

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corner of the hedge. "Bunk—quick!" he gasped in an agitated a-a-a-at!" gasped Sefton. (See Chapter 4.)

he cared nothing about the risk. He exulted inwardly to see how Sefton was knocking up his knuckles. Those of his left hand were raw now.

Sefton used language that did not become a prefect.

Cardew never spoke. He had no breath to spare.

"My hat!" said Joe. "I never thought Cardew could fight like that! But what's the use? 'E's bound to be licked!"

"That isn't it, Joe! I hate to see him hurt! I'd do anything to save him from being licked! But—what's the use?—it's all wrong."

And Joe understood, though Frank could not have explained.

* It was all wrong to ask "What's the use?" because when a fellow stood up against oppression it was not what he could do that mattered, but the spirit that moved him to resistance.

Joe had never thought so well of Cardew as he did then.

But he could see Sefton's side, too.

Sefton would never be again to him the idol he had been for a few days. Sefton, towering over Cardew, viciously

healin' qualities. But I'm not sure that your mud is that sort, an' I'd rather not risk it—thanks all the same!"

Joe growled something, and turned to his bike. Cardew's seeming gaiety after what he had been through gave Joe a queer lump in the throat. Not many fellows would have taken defeat like this.

Cardew put his hands on the shoulders of Levison minor, and looked him straight in the face.

That face was a muddle of blood and mud and tears. But from it the candid blue eyes looked out with their old, brave, straight look.

"Did that brute hurt you much, Franky?" asked Cardew.

"Not much. Nothing like he did you, Cardew!"

"What he did to me is of no consequence, my son. What was it all about?"

The candid blue eyes fell. Frank could not answer. This was Joe's secret.

But Cardew understood. To Frank it seemed sometimes miraculous how Cardew did understand when no one else would have done.

"I see! Not your bizney—eh? I won't ask more."

Cardew started back to St. Jim's before Joe and Frank did.

"We'd better not go together," he said. "Two faces like yours an' mine, Frank, might give rise to remarks if seen in conjunction. You wouldn't like the school to think that you'd done this to me, would you?"

And, with that whimsical gibe, Cardew rode off, beaten, still a trifle faint, but quite himself.

CHAPTER 8.

A Narrow Escape for Sefton!

SEFTON got back to his study to find on the table a note addressed in a handwriting which he recognised at once as Mr. Railton's.

The sight of it gave him a shock. His hands shook as he tore it open.

Kildare or Darrell—any prefect with a clear conscience—would not have been shocked or particularly surprised at getting a note from the Housemaster. Such communications came the way of most of them at times.

If they did not come to Sefton or to Knox, it was because Mr. Railton looked for no real help from those two in the discipline of the House.

He knew them for what they were. Their office as prefect gave them special privileges, which they abused. Their notions of keeping the House in order ran chiefly to jumping hard upon juniors who had incurred their dislike.

Sefton read.

The note was very brief and very formal.

"The Housemaster will be glad to see Sefton in his study at Sefton's earliest convenience."

That was all.

Sefton bit his under lip.

What did it mean?

Nothing pleasant, of course. But, thanks to Frayne, Mr. Railton had certainly not seen him the evening before. Whatever he might suspect, he could hardly have any definite proof.

There was still time to go to Mr. Railton's study before dinner.

Sefton glanced at himself in the glass.

His face was flushed, and it bore one or two slight bruises. But Cardew had not managed to get home upon it often or heavily.

The prefect applied plenty of water, brushed his hair, and saw no reason why he should not pass muster.

He tapped at the door of the Housemaster's study.

"Come in!" shouted Victor Railton's voice.

It rang out in friendly fashion, for at that precise moment the master was expecting Eric Kildare, and Kildare and Mr. Railton were on the very best of terms.

That was why a smile flitted across the master's face as the door opened.

But that smile faded at the sight of Sefton, to be succeeded by a look that Sefton did not like at all.

"I have sent for you, Sefton, because there is something which I think it may be possible you can explain to me," said Mr. Railton. "Sit down, and look at this."

Sefton drew a chair to the wide table. The invitation to sit down seemed to him to augur well. If a wiggling was coming he would have expected Mr. Railton to keep him on his feet.

But that was not according to the Housemaster's code. Sefton, as a prefect, could not be treated as an erring junior would have been, or even as an ordinary member of the higher Forms. As far as it was possible, Mr. Railton behaved to the prefects as though they were his

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colleagues and grown men. It was good for most of them, helping to stiffen their sense of responsibility.

Nothing would ever make a satisfactory prefect of a fellow like Sefton or Knox. Mr. Railton would have been glad to see the last of those two. But while they held their posts he did his best to behave to them as to the others.

"I came as soon as I could, sir," said Sefton. "I must have gone out before your note was brought."

"Oh, you are in time, Sefton! Will you be good enough to look at this and tell me what you make of it?"

The Housemaster put into the prefect's hand a sheet of paper.

Sefton's eyes almost started from his head.

For this was the letter from Banks which had sent him to the Green Man in the dusk of the evening before!

It was not in its original form. That could hardly be, for Sefton had torn it into fragments, and had thrown the fragments into the wastepaper basket.

Somebody had retrieved those scraps; somebody had dealt with them as though they were parts of a jigsaw puzzle. They had been pieced together with great care and pasted on to a sheet of exercise paper—paper such as was in common use throughout the school, from the Sixth down to the Second.

Who?

Sefton's first thought was of Joe Frayne.

He had an easy access to the wastepaper basket.

But it could not be Joe. If he had done that he would surely not have nullified all his scheming by that warning!

Unless, indeed, he had repented, and was trying to make amends.

Did that fit in with what had happened this morning, though?

Sefton wished he had time to think. He was conscious of the eyes of the Housemaster upon him.

They confused him. He fumbled with the paper.

But in another moment he realised that it did not really give him away.

Banks had started his letter with "Dear Sir." It might as well have been addressed to anyone else as to Sefton.

And the envelope could not be produced in evidence against him. The note had come by hand, and there had been nothing on the outside. Taggles, who had handed it to Sefton, and had pocketed half-a-crown with a wink, could not have told who the writer was, though he might guess.

"Well, Sefton?"

Sefton lifted his eyes. His mind was made up.

He would brazen it out.

After all, it only meant lying, and Sefton had no very rooted objection to that. Railton could prove nothing—nothing!

"Well, sir?" he returned.

"Have you seen that before?"

"I? No, sir."

For the life of him Sefton could not continue to meet the master's gaze. His eyes dropped.

"Knox says the same. Yet that it was one or the other of you I am most firmly convinced."

Perhaps that was more than Mr. Railton should have said. But he was fed up with those two. He regarded them as plague spots on the Sixth.

There were others to whom Banks might have written in the terms of that letter—more than one or two others. The Fifth had its contingent of dingy "sportsmen"; the Shell could show Racke and Crooke, though the Shell was not proud of that pair; even the Fourth had a gambler or two.

But the Housemaster put even Cutts and his cronies aside. Something in the tone of that letter, the quality of the threats contained in it, had made him feel certain that the recipient was a prefect.

"I don't see why you should want to shove it on to either me or Knox, sir," replied Sefton, with something of a whine in his tone.

"Then I am not going to enlighten you. Were you at Rylcombe last night, Sefton—at any time after classes were over, I mean?"

"No, sir."

There was the slightest of hesitations before that answer came. Sefton might have been seen on the way. Inquiries might prove him a liar. But he must face it out now.

"On your honour?"

"On my honour, sir!"

"Were you there this morning?"

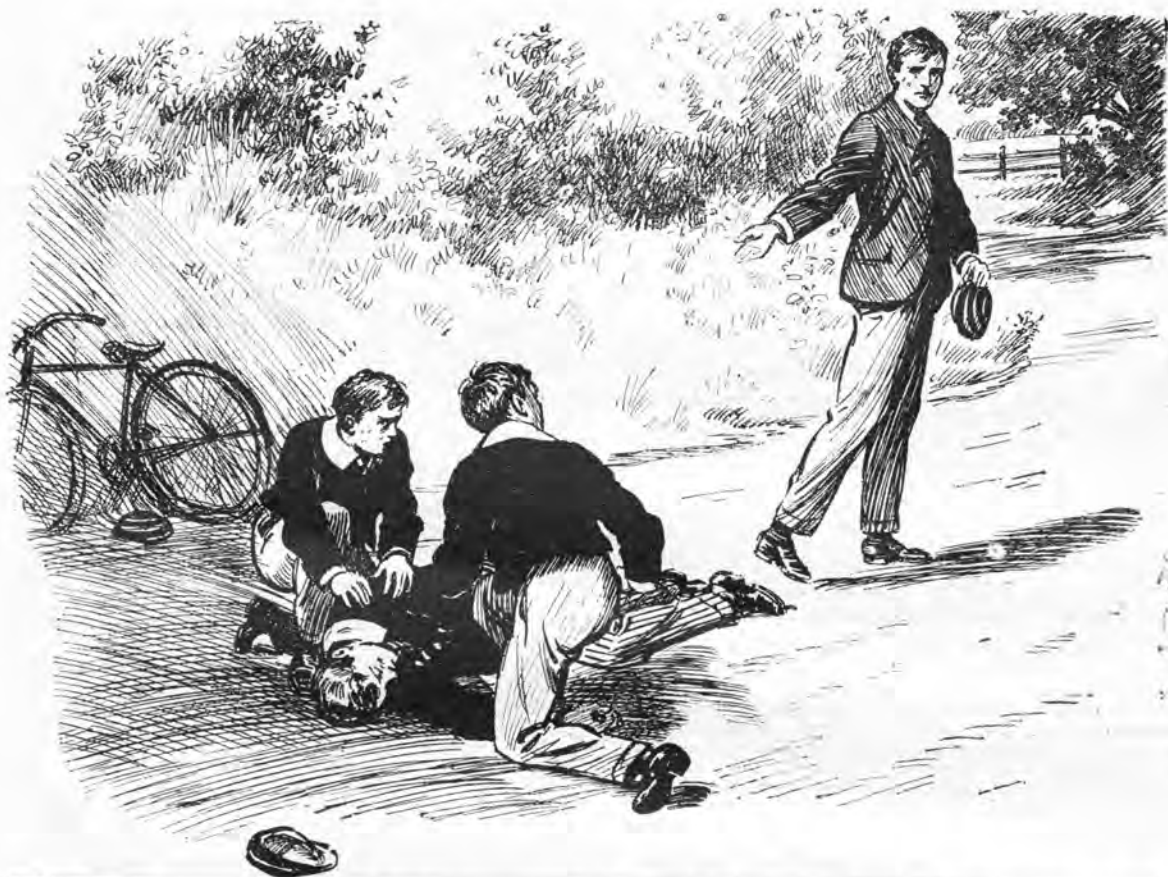
"No, sir—on my honour!"

That was easier. Sefton had not reached the village. But he had been over four-fifths of the way.

"Very well! You can go, Sefton!"

Sefton played a bold stroke then.

"Can I take this thing, sir?" he asked, holding up the paper.



A crashing blow from Sefton took Cardew on the mark. He staggered back, then toppled forward, and lay on his face in the chalky dust. "You two fags had better see to him!" said Sefton. "He asked for it, and he's fairly got it!" He strode away, leaving Frayne and Levison minor kneeling by the fallen junior. (See Chapter 7.)

"What do you want with it?"

"Oh, I don't want it if it is any use to you, sir. But I thought that I might just possibly have a better chance of finding out whose work it is than you could have."

"To me, Sefton, the question of whose work it was is a trifle in comparison with that of who received it. I should not act upon an anonymous letter of accusation. This had to me a different aspect. All the spite and meanness of the anonymous letter writer was doubtless in the boy who thrust this under my door. But he offered that proof which his kind so seldom does. I could not ignore it. I was waiting near the Green Man at the time mentioned. I have seldom undertaken a task less pleasant. Nothing came of it, however. You can take the letter if you please. I have done with it. But I can see no reason why you should bestir yourself in the matter."

"I don't know, sir. You jumped on me and Knox, you know. I think this concerns us both."

"As you like. That's enough!"

Sefton went, as glad to go as Mr. Railton was to get rid of him—hardly more glad, however.

"Faugh!" exclaimed the Housemaster, when the door had closed behind the prefect. "I cannot stand either that fellow or Knox! And really it seems rather absurd to accept their word in a matter like this, for there is no honour in them!"

When Sefton got back to his study Joe Frayne was waiting for him.

"What did Banks say?" snapped Sefton. "Did he give you a note?"

"No. He says as you've got to begin to put things straight within twenty-four hours, or there'll be ructions, an' don't you forget it!"

Sefton was a cruel rotter. Joe had no doubt about that now. But, though the glamour had gone, the gratitude still persisted. A rotter—a cruel rotter—yet once he had been kind and generous to Joe, and the fag was faithful still.

Sefton flung down on the table the paper he had brought from the Housemaster's study.

"Another fellow might ask you whether you had done that, Frayne!" he said. "You had the chance. That letter came out of my waste paper-basket. Someone put it together

like this, and shoved it under Railton's door. He forgot something—my name! Railton's tackled both Knox and me. Of course, neither of us knows anything about it. I don't for a minute believe you did it. If you had you wouldn't have gone out of your way to warn me—which was jolly decent of you."

The words of praise brought no glow to the fag now. All that was over. On his own confession Sefton had lied to Railton. On his own showing Sefton was the brutal bully the Third in general held him. The picture of Cardew's battered face was fresh in Joe's memory.

Yet as he read that letter his indignation against the sneak who had thus dealt with it swept away much that he could not otherwise have put aside.

"I don't know who did it, of course, Sefton," he said. "I might find out, p'raps. But I'm not going to promise to tell you if I do."

"What's the use of it, then?" demanded Sefton roughly. "Jest as you like. I ain't a sneak. But if I did find out—well, I guess I might be able to do something to stop the crawler from playin' games like that any more!"

"You must think it's someone in the Third!" snorted Sefton.

"I ain't sayin'," answered Joe doggedly.

"Not your precious pal, Levison minor, I suppose?"

Joe's wondering eyes, Joe's whole countenance, showed how wide of the mark that suspicion seemed to him.

"Frank?" he said slowly. "You don't know Frank Levison, Sefton! He's the whitest kid that ever came to St. Jim's. He never did a mean thing in his life."

"What did you tell him this morning when you and he rode to Rylcombe together?"

"I didn't tell him a thing, an' we never rode to Rylcombe together at all! He must have come after me."

"Then what did he mean by asking you whether you'd seen Banks?"

"Guessed, I reckon. Franky's pretty cute, and he was with me when I gave you the tip last night. See? He put two an' two together."

"What business was it of his?"

"Nothin'—as far as you went. I reckon he was worryin' about me."

The liar Sefton recognised the accents of truth in Joe. He did not doubt a single word the fag had said.

"Pity!" he said. "He got hurt, and you got hurt, and I had to pound Cardew almost to a jelly—and all because Levison minor couldn't mind his own business!"

"You see, he thought it was his business, 'cause I'm his pal," replied Joe simply.

"Can you trust him to keep his mouth shut?"

"Course I can! There's Cardew, though. But he don't know anything, really. He might have thought you were laming us just for the fun of the thing."

Sefton winced. That speech made him feel uncomfortable. It had never been exactly for the fun of the thing he had been brutal. But there was a vague suspicion in him that at times he had got vile pleasure out of his brutality.

"You can take that thing if you want to, Frayne. I know I can trust you not to use it against me. Do you propose to show it to Levison minor?"

"Dessay I might. Franky's got brains. 'Im an' me together might get to the bottom of it."

"You don't propose to take Cardew into your counsels?"

"Not likely! Shouldn't 'ave the blessed cheek!"

"All right—take it! But keep dark about it!"

CHAPTER 9.

Judgment on Piggott!

JOE had very little doubt who had pasted together those scraps.

Reuben Piggott, who cared little for most of the things that made appeal to his Form-fellows, had his own solitary amusements.

One of them was jigsaw puzzles. He would spend hours over such things. He had even contrived to make money out of them. Having done a puzzle once, he was prepared to bet sixpence that he would do it again in less than a quarter of the time that it took anyone who tackled it freshly. Alternatively, he would undertake to do a new puzzle in less than twice the time it took anyone familiar with it to finish it.

Only once had he ever lost. Then Wally had backed Frank Levison against him, with a puzzle new to Piggott which Frank had done once.

Frank had done it again within ten minutes. Piggott, who had tried to get a glimpse of the thing in process, but had been hindered by Wally & Co., had taken over half an hour.

Since then Piggott had dropped jigsaw puzzles as a money-making proposition. His defeat by Frank had rankled.

He was the sort of fellow in whom things did rankle. That was an additional reason for the belief that was in Joe.

Joe knew of nothing that Piggott had against Sefton. But he might easily have stored up vengeance for a clouting of which Joe was unaware.

It might not have been a Third-Former who had played Sefton this foul trick, of course. But Joe's suspicions could not get past Piggott.

Joe and Frank had the Third Form-room to themselves for half an hour after dinner. Cosby wandered in once, but Joe "shoo'd" Cosby out.

"Yes, I think it was Piggott," said Frank, turning the paper about in his hands. "But I don't see how we're going to prove it, and I'm not very keen on taking trouble for Sefton, anyway."

"It ain't Sefton so much," returned Joe. "If we've got a rotter like this in the Third he ought to smart for it!"

"There isn't any 'if' about it," Frank said quietly. "It's just the sort of thing Piggott would do. But why should he?"

"That's between him an' Sefton," said Joe. "What are you gettin' at, Franky?"

For Frank was holding the paper up to the light.

"It's just ordinary exercise paper," he said. "Might have come from anywhere. Even the Sixth use it. Perhaps there might be fingerprints on it. But we haven't got Piggy's prints, so we can't prove anything by that, and the marks wouldn't show up plainly without a microscope. We could use one in the lab. But I don't see how we should be any forwarder."

As he spoke he continued to hold up the paper to the light and to peer at it.

The chances against its having upon it the least mark of pen or pencil were heavy. Whoever had done the work had access to any amount of the same kind of paper. There was no reason why he should have used anything but a perfectly clean sheet.

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But the long chance came off, as long chances sometimes will—even in the Derby!

"Look here, Joe!" exclaimed Frank.

Joe looked, and saw. The figures were ever so faint. It was easy to guess how anyone working in an indifferent light had failed to perceive them. But the sunlight shining through the thin paper showed them up even with the other paper above them.

"Piggy's curly eights!" breathed Joe.

There was but a line of figures. Piggott must have started to work out a sum on that sheet, using a pencil. Something had stopped him almost at the outset, and he had taken up the sheet when he needed one for a job of another kind, and had never noticed the figures 188,788 upon it.

Four eights were there, and each of them had the little flourish under it which Piggott, and no one else in the Third, affected.

"Settles it!" chortled Joe.

"Well, that's saying a lot," replied Frank. "If Wally or Jimmy made those curly eights, would you believe that Wally or Jimmy had done it?"

"No. And I wouldn't believe it if you made them, or Curly, or Reggie, or that fat-faced Cosby, or anybody else in the Form, except Piggy! But as it's Piggy, I reckon it's proved!"

"So do I. But it's only circumstantial evidence, anyway."

"That's all right. We'll find Piggy after classes, an' deal with him accordin' to the rules of circum-whatdoye-callit evidence. He'll have to fight me, or I'll give him a hiding!"

"Do you think Sefton's worth fighting for, Joe?" asked Frank.

"Not sure. But I'm jolly sure Piggy's a rotter, and has asked for it!"

"Wonder why Piggy did it?" said Frank thoughtfully.

"Oh, I s'pose Sefton cuffed him or something. Piggy always tries to get his own back on anyone."

Frank thought it had probably been something more than a mere clout of the head.

It had, in fact. But it had been nothing like the cruel thrashing Sefton had given Frank himself for an offence hardly more than imaginary. Even Sefton remembered that. He knew that he really had gone a trifle too far. But he had forgotten all about knocking Piggott sideways and then using his foot to him as he staggered back.

"Going to tell the others?" Frank asked.

Joe looked at the evidence which made Piggott's guilt clear. He could not disclose that, and he would have got no sympathy from Wally & Co. if he had. They would have told him to let Sefton do his blagging without any help from the Third Form.

"No," said Joe. "But after dinner we'll hunt up Piggy an' make him fight!"

"I don't know whether you're fit for that to-day, Joe," objected Frank.

His head ached and he could feel his bruises. But now that he had cleansed his face of the blood he did not look as bad as Joe, who was paler than Frank had ever seen him before, except when he had been admittedly ill.

"Me? Oh, I'm all serene, Franky!" said Joe.

"Piggott's above your weight, you know."

Joe's lip curled.

"Piggy's a funk, an' he's no boxer, anyway. He ain't goin' to give me what Sefton gave Cardew—don't you think it. I say, Franky, I'm ever so sorry about Cardew."

"Don't you worry. Cardew won't. I'm not saying he liked being licked. But he never expected anything else."

Then the bell for dinner rang, and Joe put the paper in his pocket. They cleared out. Had they been half a minute sooner they might have caught Piggott at the door, which was ajar. They had sat too far from it for him to hear all that they had said, and he had only been there a few minutes: but he knew they had been talking of him and of that paper he had thrust under the Housemaster's door.

Directly dinner was over he made for the Form-room, and for Joe's desk, which was not locked.

The paper was not there!

A shout at the door made him turn in fright, dropping the lid of the desk with a bang.

The enemy were upon him!

It was not only Joe and Frank who came. Wally had scented something in the wind, and, with a "Yoicks! Tally-ho!" had led the rest after those two.

Joe dashed up to Piggott and smacked his face.

The black sheep staggered back, with his hand to a smarting cheek.

"What's that for?" he snarled. "You'd better be careful, young Frayne!"

"For meddlin' with my desk!" answered Joe, glad to

have a cause of quarrel which needed no explanation. "You'd better put your hands up, young Piggott!"

The invitation was not accepted at once.

Piggott drew back.

"Six to one!" he said. "That's just like you fellows!"

"Rats!" cried Wally. "You know none of us but Joe will touch you. Why, you can have a second, if you like. Manners will act for you."

"Blessed if I will!" snorted Reggie.

"I don't want a second. I'm not going to fight in the Form-room," said Piggott, licking his lips, which had suddenly gone dry.

"You must!" said Jameson. "Why, the chap slapped your dial!"

"Is that any bizney of yours?"

"No. Only if you won't fight we're all going to slap it—both sides! So get ready to turn the other cheek, Peace-at-any-price Piggy!"

"Piggy won't stand for that," said Wally encouragingly. "Why, Joe's only about half his size."

"And there's no need to fight in the Form-room, if Piggy would rather go somewhere else," added Reggie.

"Piggy's a funk!" chanted Curly. "That's what Piggy is—a regular, right-down, slinking funk!"

Piggott put up his fists, lowered them again, cast a wild glance round, and tried to make a bolt for the door.

Wally and Jameson caught him and dragged him back.

"Will you fight, you rotter, or will you take twanko?" demanded Wally. The Third Form had its own way of administering justice.

Piggott breathed hard. He hated fighting, and, for all his advantages over Joe in weight and strength and reach, he had but small hope of winning if he entered the combat.

For Joe was one of those tough youngsters who can take punishment stoically. But Reuben Piggott was soft. He hated being hurt.

"I—I'll take twanko!" he replied cravenly.

"You worm!" said Jameson contemptuously.

Jameson would have fought anyone half as big again as himself rather than make such tame submission. So would any of the others. Curly was the least tough of the six, but he had his pride.

"Lie on the form, then, face down!" ordered Wally.

"I say—you can't—I won't—you—"

"It's that or fight!"

Vowing inwardly that he would make them all suffer for this the black sheep yielded sullen obedience.

"Curly and Reggie, you hold his legs down, one each side," said Wally. "Jimmy, there's an old slipper in my desk, with just the right sort of sole for this job. Six strokes each! 'Lay on, Macduff!' and anyone who doesn't give him a good stinging-up shall henceforth and for evermore be called Macduffer!"

"Here you are, Wally!" said Jameson.

"You first, Frank!" said Wally.

He had his reasons for that. Frank was not keen on this kind of thing. If three or four operated before him he might say that Piggott had had enough, and refuse to touch him. But he could not well back out when given first turn.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Frank put vim enough into his strokes to make Piggott squirm. Curly, who came next, put a little more. But Piggott began to hope that he would come through better than he had expected.

Vain hope! Joe was third executioner, and Joe, honestly indignant with Piggott, laid in for all he was worth. Piggott writhed and groaned.

There was no pity for him yet. According to the creed of the Third, he was getting no more than he deserved. He had been caught at Joe's desk. He had had his face smacked, and yet had refused to fight.

Reggie followed Joe. There was no mercy in Reggie. But Piggott knew that he had worse to come than anything Reggie could do.

Frank turned away now. He would not plead for Piggott, but he did not care to look on any longer.

Jameson was fifth. Perhaps he smote no harder than Joe. But by this time Piggott was very sore indeed. He yelled at the sixth blow and then burst into tears.

The slipper was thrust into Wally's hand.

He threw it down.

"Blessed if I can!" he said. "Why, the rotter's blubbering! I'm jolly well ashamed of you, Piggy! You've done me down! I wish now I'd taken first turn."

No one urged him to change his mind. They let the sneak get up and shuffle away, his face bedaubed with tears.

"Macduffer!" said Jameson to Wally, grinning.

But Wally met Frank's blue eyes, with something in them that made him feel better pleased with himself.

Frank thought he was right. Frank might be too ready to have mercy; but, somehow, Wally was glad of his approval then.

CHAPTER 10.

The Gratitude of Sefton:

"WELL," said Sefton, when Joe went to get his tea for him, "did you find out who did it?"

Joe nodded.

"Some sleuth!" returned the prefect, with more than the hint of a sneer in his voice. "Who was it?"

"I'd rather not tell you that," said Joe.

"Does that mean it was your precious chum, Levison minor?"

"Course it don't! Why, it was Frank who really found out who did it, for he—"

Joe pulled himself up short.

He was in danger of telling too much.

Piggott had never been a friend of his. There was no reason why he should shield Piggott, except for his sense of fair play. Possibly the black sheep of the Third had not got all he deserved. But if Sefton knew the truth, he would be in danger of getting a great deal more.

Anyway, he had been punished once, and Joe was not going to have any hand in getting him punished again.

"What did Levison minor do?" snapped Sefton.

"It don't matter. I ain't goin' to tell you, you know, Sefton. In the Third, we don't reckon to sneak, even about a chap that ain't a pal."

Sefton was furious. He would have insisted on being told then and there, but that another trouble—or another aspect of the same trouble—was occupying his mind.

He would have to see Banks that evening. He had managed to borrow a couple of pounds. Banks would not be satisfied, but the sum would gain for Sefton a brief respite.

It must be to-night. Banks would not wait any longer, he knew.

And it was a wretched night to turn out into.

Since midday the weather seemed to have broken up completely. The wind howled; the rain beat down, and it had turned cold as winter. There was no promise in the sky of better things.

But Sefton took some comfort from the notion that Mr. Railton was not likely to be out in such a storm. It was no night for patrolling the neighbourhood of the Green Man.

"You needn't bother about tea; I don't want any," said Sefton.

Joe turned to go.

"Where's that letter?" asked Sefton.

The fag thrust his hand into his breast-pocket.

An expression of dismay came over his face.

He knew he had put it there. He had kept his handkerchief elsewhere since, lest he might flick the paper out with it. But it had gone!

"I—I think I must have dropped it, Sefton!" he faltered.

"You'd better dashed well go and pick it up again, then!" snarled the prefect. "If you don't bring it to me within an hour, you shall have such a hiding as you've never had in your life before!"

Joe scuttled off. The thing might still be found. Possibly it was under his desk in the Form-room; or maybe someone had picked it up and dropped it into Mr. Selby's waste-paper-basket without looking at it, though Joe realised that it would be hard to find anyone in the Third at once so tidy and so free from inquisitiveness as to do that.

He did not find it easy to see why Sefton should attach so much importance to the letter. There was nothing in it which proved that he was the fellow to whom it had been sent.

Sefton told himself that, but could get no real consolation from it.

His nerves were badly on edge. He paced up and down his study, while the rain beat upon the window-panes, and



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the blast howled and roared round the old buildings of St. Jim's like the voices of triumphant demons.

A nice sort of night to be forced to go out in! And a fine state of affairs to go with the dread that in one's absence some fresh blow might be precipitated by this criminal carelessness of young Frayne!

There was danger! Levison minor knew, and Sefton still believed that Frank only awaited a chance to get his revenge. Frayne had told him, the utter young idiot! Or perhaps Frayne was more knave than fool. He and Levison might have planned something together.

Up and down, up and down, paced Sefton, forced to turn at every few strides, feeling caged, growing with every few minutes more alarmed and more furious.

The time dragged heavily. His clock had stopped. That wretched fag had forgotten to wind it, of course! A dozen times inside five minutes he dragged his watch from his pocket. And all the time he listened for the coming of Joe.

Joe did not come. He did not intend to come. He could not find the letter, and Frank's counsel was to stay away.

"If the thing hasn't turned up by to-morrow morning," said Frank, "there's a chance that he'll have cooled his head a bit by then. It's asking for trouble to go to him without it, Joe."

There was simply no chance that the letter would ever turn up. Piggott had seen to that. Piggott did not want it shown to Wally & Co. He had contrived to pick it out of Joe's pocket at a moment when the eyes of Joe and the rest were fixed upon the grim countenance of Mr. Selby, and he had torn the letter into scraps in his pocket, and dropped the scraps into the inkpot-well of his desk.

Five minutes longer than the hour allowed to Joe had passed. Sefton took his ashplant in his hand, and started to find the disobedient fag.

Joe's luck was out!

He was not feeling too easy in his mind. He wanted Frank. His other chums did not know what was worrying him and must not be told. But Frank had disappeared after tea in Hall.

Someone said he had gone along to Study No. 9 in the Fourth Form passage, which his brother shared with Cardew and Clive. Joe went off to seek him there, and almost ran into Sefton!

There was but one spectator of what happened. He did not show himself. He stood back in a dark corner and gloated.

At the sight of Sefton, Joe turned tail and bolted.

But his chance was small. He had been within a yard of the prefect as they approached one another around a corner, and before he was able to get fairly going the ashplant had risen and fallen twice, with all Sefton's strength and viciousness behind the blows.

They cut across Joe's shoulders cruelly. In the hope of evading Sefton, he swung round to the left instead of the right, only to realise next moment what a mistake he had made.

For now his one chance of escape was to reach the quad. There was no other refuge in that direction.

Piggott chuckled like a young fiend as he saw Sefton swoop, like a greyhound after a coursed hare.

Out into the howling wind and the pouring rain sped Joe, while Sefton struck at him again and again.

Out into the howling wind and the pouring rain rushed Sefton, half-crazy with worry, all the cruelty in him aroused. The fag had not retrieved the letter. He would not have bolted if he had had it.

The wind caught Joe in the face and robbed him of breath for a moment. The rain wetted him to the skin at once.

But he ran on, panting; and behind him Sefton panted, no longer within striking distance.

Too near, though, to be dodged in the gloom! That gloom was such that Joe lost his bearings within twenty seconds. He ran on somewhere, anywhere; and behind him sounded the footsteps and the hard breathing of Sefton.

Joe staggered, and fell against wet wood. A door gave. He crept inside. Only when his shins struck the sharp edge of a stone step did he guess that he had found refuge in the belfry tower of the school chapel.

He ascended a few steps, holding his breath, hoping that Sefton might have lost the trail.

Then he halted, for he heard the prefect below him!

"You young rotter!" came Sefton's voice, heard above all the roaring of the wind. "You've got yourself into a nice hole now! I've the key here, I'm going to lock you in, and I'll let you out when it suits me; before to-morrow morning, most likely—but I don't promise that!"

The key grated as the last words were shouted. Wet through, his shoulders raw and stinging from the cuts of the ashplant, Joe was a prisoner!

Plucky as he was, a sob all but choked him then.

So this was Sefton's gratitude!

Joe's eyes were opened now. He had already ceased to

see Sefton as a generous hero. Now he saw him as what he was—a bullying, bad-tempered blackguard! Not absolutely hopeless; one or two signs Joe had seen in him of decency since the careless kindness by which the youngster had been glamourised at the outset—but as much as that may be said even of hardened criminals.

In a flash it came upon Joe that any debt he owed to the prefect had been wiped out most completely. He had saved Sefton from almost certain expulsion; he had done his errand with Banks, though he had hated doing it; he had got Piggott punished for his sneaking treachery.

And what had Sefton done for him, after all? He could not have reported Joe for being in the Green Man garden; that would have given himself away. It amounted to no more than his saving Joe from rough treatment that could not have been a quarter as painful as the beating Joe had just received.

Joe gave one more gulping sob. Then he began to pull himself together.

Meanwhile, Sefton hurried back into the School House. He was as wet as Joe, and still in a fury of rage.

But he had just enough sense to realise that he could not leave the soaked fag locked up indefinitely in the belfry tower, and he was by no means sure how many hours might pass before he returned from the Green Man.

It was hardly likely Banks would be out, unless he had gone out before the storm began. In that event, he would not hurry back. Sefton would have to wait for him. Wait he must! Unless he saw Banks to-night the worst might happen. A couple of pounds left with Joliffe would be no certain safeguard. He must have a talk with Banks.

Sefton caught sight of Piggott.

"Come here!" he snapped.

Piggott dared not disobey. But he was not as terrified as might be supposed. Piggott knew Joe Frayne and Frank Levison. He might call them young sneaks; but he was well aware that they never did sneak, and confident that Joe had not told Sefton.

The black sheep's longing for revenge upon Sefton had been swallowed up by his determination to get even with Joe and Frank. When he moved forward at Sefton's command he did not guess what a chance was coming to him, though he wondered where Joe was.

"Catch hold of this key!" commanded the prefect. "I've locked that young rotter Frayne up in the belfry tower. I have to go out, and may be late back. He can't be left there all night, but it will do the little scoundrel good to have a couple of hours or so of it. Shove the key in your pocket. Say nothing to anyone. Slink out after prep and unlock the door. That's all you need do; he'll find sooner or later that it is unlocked. Here's half-a-dollar for you. I'm not in funds just now; but if you do as I tell you I won't forget you when I am!"

He did not wait to hear a word from Piggott. He hurried off to change his wet clothes.

Piggott's mean heart was full of unholy joy. Here was something to gloat over during prep. And if he was only careful there was no chance that he could be connected with it in any way. After all, he reflected, he had not locked Joe in the belfry.

Sefton hurried through his changing, put on leggings, wrapped himself up in a raincoat, and buttoned a roomy macintosh over that, and sallied out.

The storm raged worse than ever. As he made his way along Rylcombe Lane he found himself almost taken off his feet whenever he emerged from between the sheltering high banks into an open stretch. And, on account of the winding of the lane, the high banks did not always give shelter; but here and there merely made a funnel through which the wind rushed and the rain was driven with ferocity that seemed to have some malign influence behind it.

Piggott, fondling the key, began to wonder whether he would be acting fairly by himself if he went out into such weather for the benefit of a fellow who only a few hours before had served him a very bad turn.

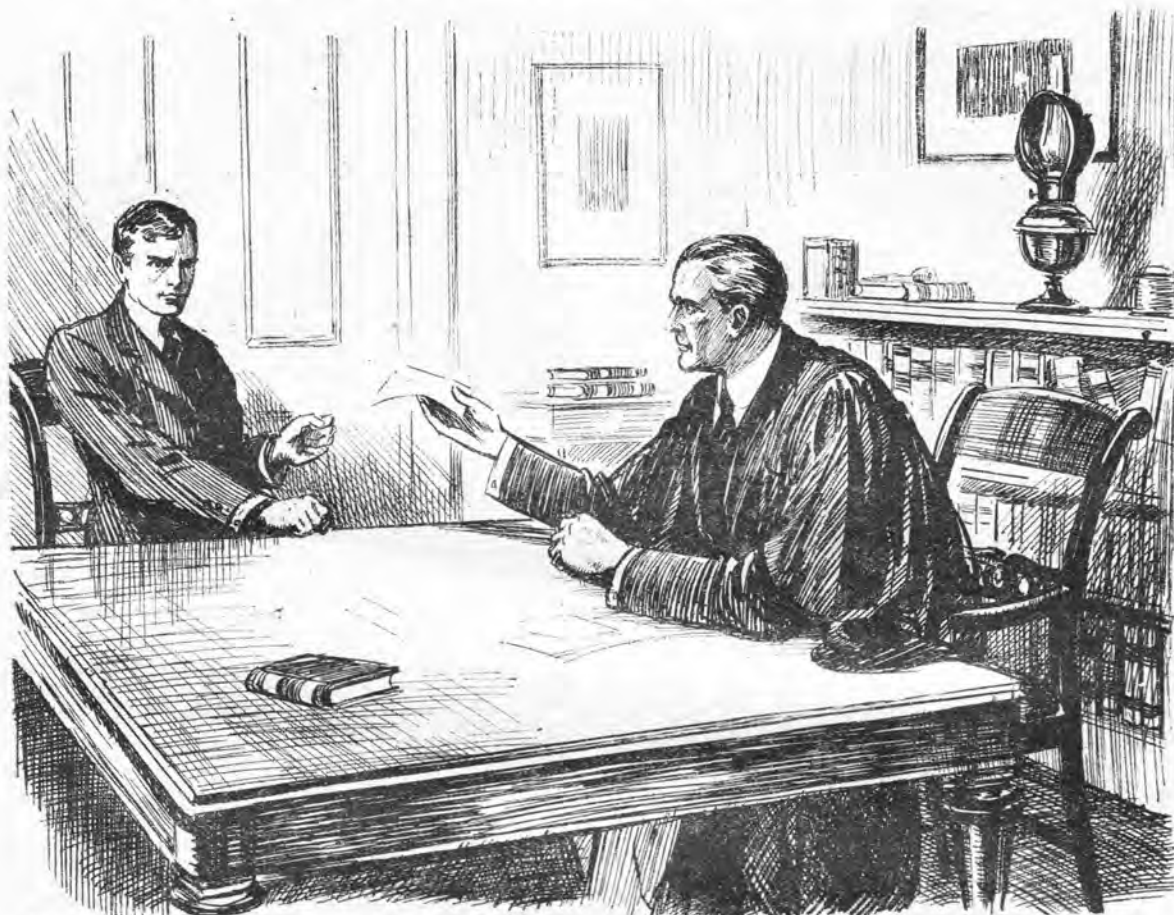
But from the outset he had not been at all minded to release Joe. The one consideration which might have forced him to do that was his fear of Sefton's wrath if he disobeyed.

Mr. Selby noticed Joe's vacant desk at once. But he would not send anyone to look for him. He learned that Joe had been seen only a quarter of an hour or so before prep. He expected him to arrive at any minute, with some excuse for being late. If he did not turn up till prep was over, so much the worse for him!

Joe's chums were not at first worried. They put the delay down to Sefton, and rather hoped that it might bring the unpopular prefect into collision with their beloved Form master.

All of them but Frank, that is. Frank knew that Joe had not meant to go near Sefton, and was troubled about him. But Joe was not a bad hand at taking care of himself, Frank reflected.

The rain beat against the windows. The wind howled and



"Will you be good enough to look at this, Sefton," said Mr. Railton, handing the prefect a sheet of paper, "and tell me what you make of it?" The Sixth-Former's eyes almost started from his head as he recognised the letter from Banks which had sent him to the Green Man the evening before. (See Chapter 8.)

wailed. Mr. Selby scowled and shouted rebukes and showered imposts. And Reuben Piggott caressed that key.

He had made up his mind now what to do about it. As soon as prep was over he would take it up to Sefton's study and lay it on the table there, with the half-crown beside it.

Sefton would be nasty about it, of course. But Sefton had better not be too nasty. If Piggott talked there would be trouble for Sefton.

Moreover, the danger from the prefect's ire seemed to Piggott a smaller one than the danger of trying to carry out his bidding.

This was not the kind of night on which it was easy to steal out unnoticed. And Piggott was not the kind of fellow likely to face such weather without some strong motive.

If he were seen sneaking out suspicion would be aroused at once, and if the key was found on him and he was forced to tell the story—well, Piggott had endured more than one dormitory trial and the sequel of drastic punishment; but he was quite sure he would get it in the neck worse this time than he had ever done before. The prospect was not pleasing to his imagination.

And he could make himself safe—except for Sefton—while still keeping Joe a prisoner. That was the cream of it all to Piggott.

The moment prep was over he darted upstairs to the Sixth Form study passage.

There was no light in Sefton's study. Piggott stole in, laid key and coin on the table, pulled a newspaper over them, and stole out and downstairs again.

CHAPTER 11.

On the Belfry Roof!

"D'ARCY minor!" snapped Mr. Selby.

"Yes, sir?"

"Tell Frayne to come to my study the moment he has the condescension to show himself!"

"Yes, sir."

The Form master went. He had delayed a minute or two

after giving the word that prep was over, and quite half the Form had already left the room for supper in Hall.

"Joe's in for it!" said Wally.

"Wonder where the young fathead's got to?" Reggie said.

"I believe Franky knows!" cried Jameson, who had not cleared out with the rest of the New House fags.

"I don't," said Frank. "But I believe there's something wrong. There's been trouble with Sefton to-day, and—"

"Was Cardew mixed up in it?" asked Wally. "I've seen him, and his dial's a sight! Everybody's asking how he came to get it like that, and all he'll tell them is that he ran up against something knobby."

"Sefton's fists," said Frank. "It's bound to come out, and I didn't promise not to tell. Sefton was pitching into Joe and me, and Cardew came up and fought him!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Wally.

"Silly ass! He hadn't a chance!" said Reggie scornfully. Wally turned on Reggie fiercely.

"Silly ass, do you say? Because he fought knowing he'd no chance? If that's being a silly ass—oh, well, I s'pose you know no better, young Manners! But I say that Cardew was a brick!"

"But what about Joe?" asked Jameson. "I don't want to go across to bed, not knowing what's come of the kid."

"I'll run up to Sefton's study!" Wally volunteered.

Like Piggott, he found the study dark.

Meanwhile, Jameson and Curly and Reggie, looking round, discovered that Frank had slipped away.

He had gone to Study No. 9. To Frank there seemed a possibility that Joe's continued absence meant something a bit too serious for the Third to handle.

Frank found a crowd in No. 9, with Cardew, much battered, but as cool and sardonic as ever, the centre of it.

Something had leaked out, though Frank and Joe had not been responsible. But Cardew would neither confirm nor deny the story that he had been fighting with Sefton. He had not told even Levison major and Clive the story.

The Terrible Three were there—Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners, of the Shell; and the four from Study No. 6 in

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the Fourth—Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Digby, and Herries, and two or three more.

Into their midst, like a small ghost, stole Frank; and at the sight of his pale face and anxious eyes all who saw were seized by an uneasiness that most of them tried to disguise.

"Weally, y'know, deah boys, it does look sewious," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am suah Fwayne is not the kind of youngstah to go on the wandan or anythin' like that."

"He may be locked up in a box-room or somewhere," suggested Tom Merry. "See here, we'd better all start in to hunt for him this moment. I hope he is somewhere indoors, for if he's out in this storm—"

"Listen to it!" said Digby. "My word, I hope he isn't!" Ten minutes sufficed to make the searchers sure that Joe was not in the School House. The Shell and Fourth fellows, who had been in Study No. 9, were joined by more from those Forms, and by Wally & Co., and others of the Third. They all worked together without any of the bickering and backhanded compliments that were usual when the three Forms found themselves employed on the same job.

For by the time their search inside was over there was not one among them all but felt a dread that something serious must really have chanced to little Joe Frayne.

All this time—to him seeming almost an eternity—Joe had been in the belfry tower. It was only a few minutes before the searchers, heedless now of any trouble that might come their way, rushed out into the storm to look for him that he emerged from it—into ghastly peril!

He had passed the first twenty minutes or so after Sefton left him huddled up on the steps, his mind busy with all the dealings between him and the prefect.

Those were bitter thoughts. But the time during which they kept him from dwelling on the gravity of his situation was the least intolerable period of his imprisonment.

For when he came to think of what was happening and might happen to him his courage all but failed.

Around the belfry tower the storm raged. He might shout till he was hoarse. There was no chance that anyone would hear. He felt faint and ill, and the night air chilled him. He was also very wet.

If he were left there all night he would not be found alive in the morning, he was sure!

He rose to his feet, and struggled up the steep steps, without any very definite notion as to what use it could be to get to the top. But he could not stay where he was.

Joe had never been up those steps before, and he had but a hazy notion as to where they led. Not to the place from which the ropes had been worked in the days when the peal was in use, for that was on the ground level. Of late years the use of the bells had been discontinued as a regular practice, and they were rung only on very special occasions.

He came to the top at last, and found himself on a kind of narrow platform, with a rail on its outer edge, which seemed to run round the bell chamber itself.

His eyes had grown so used to the gloom that he could make out dimly the great shapes of the bells. His foot struck a piece of stone or mortar fallen from the wall. He picked it up, and tossed it at the nearest bell.

Through the raging of the storm there came to him a slight, clear tinkle that had a vague comfort in it.

But that comfort was not lasting. The bells could not help this shivering youngster in his need.

Keeping his hand on the rail, Joe shuffled along the platform. He came at length to where the blackness of the roof above him took on a change. It was here a moving blackness, and less dense.

He could not understand for a moment. Then it came to him that he must be looking up through a skylight, and that the movement was the movements of clouds driven before the wind.

What he did then was a thing he could never explain afterwards.

In his normal state he would have realised that there was no help for him in getting on the roof. He could hardly hope to clamber down, and his chance of attracting attention in the gloom and the storm was so small as hardly to be worth considering.

But he was not in a normal state. Fear and fever were upon him.

How he reached the skylight he never quite knew; but it was evident to those who examined the place later that he must have climbed up on the rail of the platform, at deadly risk, for a slip of the foot would have sent him on to one of the bells, to rebound thence, and finish up in a broken heap on the stone-paved floor.

Since that did not happen, it was plain that he had not slipped. To push the skylight open was not difficult. But to climb through it was a feat which Joe, though as agile as most, could hardly have managed at an ordinary time.

He did it then, however, and found himself on the roof, clinging for support to one of the great decorative cornice pieces which, slanting skywards, ornamented its edges.

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The wind howled round him, and the rain beat upon him fiercely. It seemed to him that the very belfry tower rocked in the fury of the storm.

Then, with a loud clap, the skylight fell back into place.

Dazed and feverish though he was, Joe realised then what a mistake he had made. He must get back! At least he was under shelter while in the belfry tower.

But he could not get back. Even in calm weather and a good light the opening of the skylight from outside would not have been easy. Now it was impossible.

Joe clung to the upright cornice piece, a full hundred feet above the quad, and sent a frenzied shout into the storm.

"Help! Help!"

He saw the lighted windows of the school. He felt as might feel a sailor who crashes to his doom on the rocks near his own home port. The friendly lights—yet no hope in them, no help—to die like this in the storm's grip, with none to aid!

"Help! Help!"

Joe's brain reeled. But he kept his grip on the column of masonry, and he was shouting still, though he did not know it.

And now there came to him a ray of hope. Surely a door had opened in the School House? Surely those were figures which emerged and spread about the quad?

They were looking for him!

"Help!"

He must make them hear. But, though he shouted until he could shout no more, till his throat was incapable of further utterance and his very lungs were strained and sore, his voice was carried away by the wind.

They were like specks down there. They moved to and fro. Now and then two or three of them would draw together.

Then it seemed to Joe that he caught the gleam of white faces. He could not possibly have seen that someone in the little group immediately below was pointing upwards, and yet somehow he sensed the fact.

He got to his feet, leaning back from the edge of the roof, with his hands clasping tightly the cornice piece. He tried to shout again, but could not.

But from below there came a shout. He was sure of it.

In that moment of relief from despair he escaped the greatest peril of all. He collapsed, losing his grip on the column of masonry. His senses left him as he pitched on to his face.

But that slanting piece of masonry still saved him from a horrible death a hundred feet below. He had fallen with his head to one side of it, his feet to the other, and his middle pressed hard up against it.

CHAPTER 12.

Rescued!

THERE were four in the little group that had sighted Joe, though their coming together was quite an accident, for nearly everyone had been seeking on his own.

The four were Frank Levison, Wally D'Arcy, Cardew, and Tom Merry.

"It can't be," said Tom Merry, peering upwards.

"Oh, dash it all, what's it matter whether it can be or not!" Cardew snapped. "It is! That's all that matters."

"Then we've got to get him down!" said the junior captain resolutely.

The four of them rushed for the belfry door—to find it locked, of course.

Without a word, Frank left the other three. He was as certain that this was Sefton's work as he had ever been of anything in his life, and he made for the prefect's study—to find him, or the key!

Upstairs he dashed. The study was dark. The fire had gone out. But the key was there! The light from the passage shone in, showing the newspaper Piggott had drawn over it. Frank snatched the paper aside, grabbed the key, and was off again.

On the way down he went past Mr. Selby as though that gentleman had been of no more importance than Taggles or Baggy Trimble.

"Levison!" called the master. "Come back at once, and explain—"

Frank rushed on.

At the moment when he joined Cardew at the belfry door Sefton was entering the gates, weary with his fight against the storm, but relieved to know that he had three days in which to scrape together the rest of the money he owed Banks. He was not thinking of Joe at all.

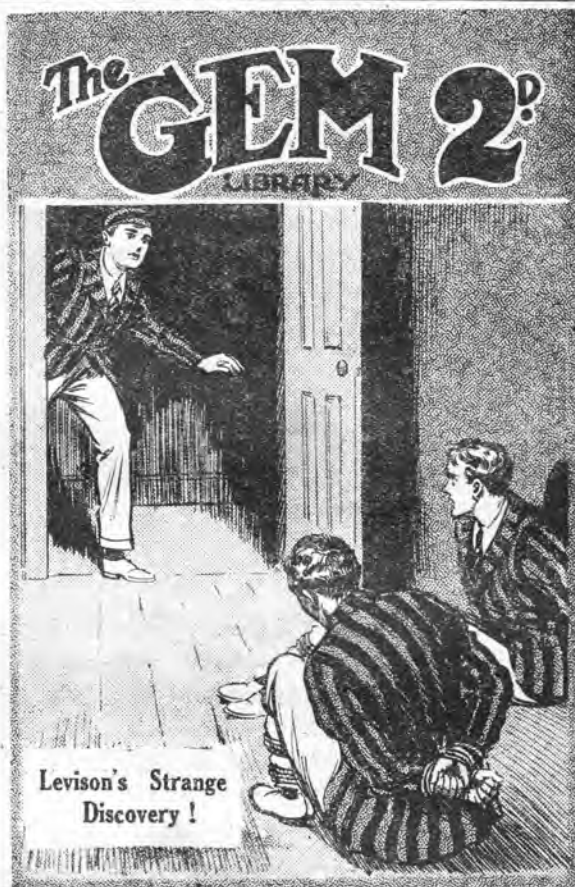
Tom Merry and Wally had gone back to where they could see Joe, or at least fancy they could see him. They were two of a fast growing crowd now. Fellows were pointing upwards, shouting to make themselves heard above the roar of the storm. Manners and Lowther were there, Blake & Co., Clive, and Levison major—plenty who would have dared

Look Out For This over Next Wednesday!

You Cardew enthusiasts, especially, will be pleased to know that next week's topping story of St. Jim's deals with this extraordinary complex character, and proves once again that behind Cardew's mask of irresponsibility and whimsicality there's a first-class brain capable of dealing with the weightiest of problems. And the problem to which Cardew gives his attention in next week's story concerns a very valuable necklace. The title:

"SAVED FROM THE SACK!"

should make you curious. The story itself will make you feel glad that you're a GEM reader. If you're wise you'll make certain of reading this treat by ordering your favourite paper in advance.



Levison's Strange
Discovery!

what Cardew dared then, though it called for no small courage.

Cardew had guessed what Wally and Tom Merry had not—that when Frank had disappeared he had gone on a definite errand. He had even dimly guessed what that errand was, so that there was no surprise in him when Frank put the key into his hand.

Frank's own hands were shaking, so that he feared he could not get it into the lock. But Cardew's were steady.

Cardew's head ached, and his body was stiff and bruised. There was not a square inch of his face that was not painful. But he thought of none of these things; did not even feel them for the moment.

A desperate job wanted doing, and because it was desperate it was a job after his own heart. He might deny it; but Ralph Reckness Cardew most dearly loved the limelight.

One need not count it against him. We are much as we are made. Tom Merry or Jack Blake would have gone about what Cardew went about in a spirit rather different from his. But, though their vanity might be ever so much less than Cardew's, their courage could have been no greater.

He unlocked the door and started the ascent of the stairs with a rush.

Frank would have followed, but found himself gripped by strong hands.

"What's all this mean?" shouted Sefton. "The quad's full of fellows, seems to me. Is anything wrong?"

Frank shouted back:

"It's Joe Frayne! You looked him in there, you brute! He's got out on the roof somehow, and we think he's fainted. And Cardew's gone up to fetch him down!"

"Oh, heavens!"

Sefton staggered, white to the lips. He had never dreamed of anything like this.

But he pulled himself together in a moment. He tore off his loose macintosh, and as he darted up the stairs he threw aside the raincoat also. He must have his legs free.

Ahead of him sounded now and then a gasping breath. Cardew found the climbing of those stairs no easy matter in his battered state.

But not until they reached the bell chamber did Sefton, though he made all haste, catch him up.

Then Cardew swung round. In the gloom the two who had faced each other with fists up earlier in the day faced each other again, this time for a conflict of wills.

"Who's that?" panted Cardew.

"Me—Sefton!"

"What do you want here? Haven't you done enough to that poor kid?"

"Don't be a fool! I've come to rescue him."

"Go back, then! Send someone else to help me! I was here first, an' I'm dashed an' double dashed if I'll take any help from you!"

Sefton came near to striking him. That was Cardew all over—utterly unreasonable, seeing only his own side of anything!

But the prefect restrained himself. Something stirred in him that wrought a change—for the time, anyway. At the best there must be black trouble. It would be hard to face; if he let Cardew do this thing in his place he could never hold up his head again, could not even begin to face it.

"Don't, Cardew!" His voice had a pleading note. "I must go! Don't you see? It's up to me! I'm not going to threaten you; but you mustn't stand in my way—you simply mustn't! And even argument's wasting time."

And Cardew saw the urgency of his need. If Sefton was to save his soul alive he must be the first to the rescue. Cardew would have said that he did not care a tinker's curse about Sefton's soul, and was not at all sure that he had one. But he gave way.

The skylight was just above them as they stood on the platform. Cardew, knowing just about where Joe lay, had worked round from the stairs at once.

Cardew put his hands to the wall and braced his feet against the stout railings.

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"All right!" he said. "You'd better climb on my shoulders."

There came a rush of feet on the stairs. Neither Cardew nor Sefton had chanced to have an electric torch, and even inside the belfry matches were useless. But now the scanty light of a torch in Tom Merry's hand shone through the gloom, and Tom Merry and Frank, who were first and second of those who came, were just in time to see Sefton's legs disappear.

"Quick! He'll want help!" cried Cardew.

There was no hesitation. Tom braced himself, and Cardew clambered up by his shoulders. Then Jack Blake took the Shell fellow's place, and Tom thrust his head out of the skylight.

"No more up here!" he shouted down. "There isn't room!"

Sefton had Joe in his arms. He was kneeling between the skylight and the edge of the roof. Cardew, gripping the skylight with one hand, stretched out his right arm. Around them the wind howled, tearing at them, as it were, and if they set their faces towards it for a moment the swish of the rain in their eyes was blinding.

Cardew had him! Tom in turn gripped Cardew. Somehow they got the fag's inanimate body down through the skylight.

Then Cardew grabbed Sefton. For the prefect had stood up straight, swaying in the wind on the very edge of the roof, and what was in his mind flashed into Cardew's.

"This way, Sefton!" shouted Cardew.

And Sefton suffered himself to be helped into safety.

For a moment he had felt that his life had smashed into fragments around him, that if he himself crashed down to the pavement below and ended it no one could be sure that it was not an accident, and perhaps they might think less badly of him!

But no one, except Frank and Cardew, was quite sure what his early part in all this had been. They only knew

that he had risked his life to save Joe's, and they cheered him.

Utter shame was on Sefton then. He pushed a way through them and hurried down. He knew that Joe Frayne was still alive, for he had felt his heart beating. He could leave Joe to kinder hands than his. What he needed was to get away from them all.

In the long run not more than a dozen or so fellows, among whom was no senior, came to know the full story. No, they did not know quite that, for the part played by Piggott was dark to them.

Joe was taken to the sanatorium. That he had got into the belfry tower and up on to the roof all St. Jim's heard within half an hour. That he had been locked in few ever knew. Joe himself was in no condition for days thereafter to tell anything; and even when he was better the doctor said that it would be inadvisable to take his mind back to that wild night. He had had a terrible shock, and to recall its details might harm him.

Even Mr. Selby could not make a big fuss with Joe lying helpless and delirious. He made what fuss he could, being Mr. Selby. But it came to nothing. No one was punished for that night's work—except Piggott.

And Piggott's punishment was strictly private. Sefton administered it. Piggott threatened to expose Sefton. Sefton replied coolly that he meant to expose himself. That took the wind out of Piggott's sails most completely.

Sefton meant it when he said it. But he changed his mind. After all, why should he confess?

Joe never fagged for him again, of course. For the rest of the term Joe fagged for no one. And no one lost anything by that!

THE END.

(Now look out for next week's ripping yarn: "SAVED FROM THE SACK!" It will please you immensely.)

SMASHING SPEED RECORDS IN SPACE!

ANNIHILATING time and space is the breath of life to some people—motorists and aviators mostly engaging in those life and limb threatening spins and flights which knock previous speed and distance records sideways. Major Segrave, with his wildly extravagant motor record of 207 miles per hour, and the French airman who "busted" the official world-record for air speed by doing 278 miles in an hour, at present stand at the pinnacle of record-breaking fame.

But to see time and space annihilated in a way that makes the speediest human device seem like a disease-stricken snail asleep on a cabbage-leaf, we have merely to look above our heads at certain favourable seasons. Then those incredibly restless and mysterious space-eaters called comets stage before us visions which stagger the keenest human intelligence. That air-speed record of close on five miles a minute then seems pitiful; for the Pons-Winnecke comet, at the time of writing, is lapping up space at the altogether unbelievable speed of 1,000 miles a minute!

A MILLION MILE LONG TAIL!

This same comet is setting up another record, apart altogether from speed, for on June 27th, this year, it will approach the earth more closely than any comet has yet come. It will then be 3,500,000 miles only from us—and three and a half million miles, as astronomers regard distance in space, makes a comet almost a next-door neighbour.

A comet's tail is not the least startling part of it. That of Pons-Winnecke is 1,000,000 miles long. So altogether this visitor out of space can be reckoned as an all-round record-smasher. There are people who consider this and other comets to be potential smashers in another and more sinister direction, for they believe that should the comet roam out of its appointed speed-track and allow its tail to flick the earth, all human and other life would be smashed up.

But the earth has actually sailed slap through a big comet's tail—Halley's comet—without anything dreadful happening. That was seventeen years ago, and still we are waiting for a comet to exercise any influence whatever on our little old globe. We get bits of Halley's comet, in the form of showers of meteors occasionally, but that is all.

COLLISION OF EARTH AND COMET!

Those breathlessly swift visits have been paid without a break, at regular intervals, since the year 240 B.C., frightening superstitious folk out of their wits with equal regularity. People used to do anything not to see comets, for even the so-called learned professors believed the streaming, phosphorescent tails to be composed of flaming swords, decapitated heads, fiery dragons, blood-coloured knives and axes; all of which portended devastating wars or other dire misfortunes!

A collision of the earth and a comet has always been mightily dreaded. The flames of the great tail might set the world alight, or if the comet barged into the earth head-on our poor old planet would certainly (the old-time scientists thought) be shattered to fragments or else knocked violently into the regions of eternal and freezing night!

A fragment of comet—a meteor or thunderbolt—nearly set up a record at the commencement of this year by hitting a man, an occurrence which never yet has been reported. Rather strange, that, for about 12,000 tons of meteors fall on our earth in the course of a twelvemonth. Some of them weigh many pounds apiece, whilst others are less than an ounce. As "shooting stars," these whizzing meteors flick fiery paths through the sky, perhaps a hundred miles up, trailing fire, and occasionally thud into the ground, the impact being forceful enough to bury them completely.

SIXTEEN MILES A SECOND!

That thud can be faintly appreciated when it is said that quite a low speed for an average meteor is sixteen miles a second! Some of them bring with them luck for the finder, for the bottle-green "evening emerald," the precious stone which jewellers call the peridot, is found in meteors. The bits of a meteor which reach us are only tiny fragments of the colossal lump which was hurled off its parent planet. When the meteor hits our atmosphere it bursts, and fragments of it may be picked up thirty miles away.

A monstrous flash, which, according to reports, varied between red, orange, yellow, and blue, lit up the sky some months ago and sent scientists into enthusiastic fits. It was the world's record in meteors, they said. The explosion rocked signal-boxes, and shook houses like dice in a box—so report said. It was all very mysterious—until a practical joker owned up to the trick he had played.

Incidentally, he had also created a record in scientific hoaxes. He made it by sending up bags of photographic flashlight powder attached to gas-filled balloons—with a twenty-minute fuse attached to the "meteor's" tail! The light and the explosion were genuine enough, but the people whose houses were shaken when the big bang occurred must admit to record imaginations!

A KING WITH NO POWER! Crowned king, looked upon as a god by thousands of simple natives, Professor Byrne's life in the heart of the African jungle ought to be fairly comfortable. But there's a snag in it, for the King of the Hokahulas hasn't got as much real power as an ordinary schoolmaster in England!

BEYOND the SILVER GLACIER!



A Grand Story of Peril and Adventure in
Central Africa.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

Raising His Flag!

OVER their luncheon that day, which they took within the four walls of the palace, and which consisted of roasted meat, fruit, and fresh vegetables, washed down with the native mead, Professor Byrne voiced his doubts.

"I am afraid," he declared, "that the spying priest who saw Rosa greet you last night, my son, has been making mischief. I like these skewbald people, yet I have noticed that they are dangerous when their suspicions are aroused. Beeda, who has been servile in the way in which he has honoured me, is madly in love with Rosa. He will hate being tricked. We have injured his dignity. I do not quite know what is best to do."

"But you do not mean that you would ever consent to Rosa marrying him?" Adam flamed.

"Of course not! The idea is absurd! She has concealed upon her, Adam, a poison which would kill within a few seconds. She would die before ever she would agree to marry a native, even if he were a prince. But it means that if Beeda and the priests insist, we shall have to fly from here."

"And the only way to safety lies across the unknown country to the great fall, and behind it along the face of the high cliff to the Silver Glacier. And we have only the faithful Kyhte to act as guide," said Adam.

"Just so, my son—just so. And they will guard the gates. We should have to fight our way out. That would mean using the machine-gun. I should hate it, my dear boy. And remember, these Hokahulas saved our lives. I repeat I do not like the look of it. Whilst I reigned, the solitary white god and king of the Hokahulas, I was a great man and to be feared. Now they have seen many white gods. We have reduced our value, my boy. Rosa, as the only white woman they have ever seen, remains something rare and strange. And Beeda wants to marry her."

"I'm for fighting our way out—any time—even now," said Julian Del Rivo. "I have never known a bold policy fail.

Turn the machine gun on them. Frighten them. Make them show us the way and lead us with treasure. I loathed crossing that accursed field of snow to get here, but I would again endure the torture of it willingly to get back."

"Hoots, mon, how'd yer whist!" growled Sandy McTavish, glaring at him. "When we want your opinion, we'll be askin' for it!"

"Well, dad," said Adam, snapping in half a crisp native root rather like our celery and munching it with relish, "things are not so bad that they might not be worse. Let us sleep on it."

"And remember, sir," growled Harry Franklin, "that there isn't a man here who would not die to protect Rosa!"

Julian Del Rivo cut in with a mocking laugh, and they saw him rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Women," he said, "are the very deuce! Wherever they are is trouble, and still more trouble—"

His eyes glinted evilly, and the party turned their backs upon him.

"And now, sir, if ye dinna mind," said Sandy McTavish, "we'll set aboot getting that big flagstaff doon and rigging up the lines for the hoisting of the Union Jack."

"A great idea, Sandy!" said Adam enthusiastically.

"I wonder if any Englishman travelling in an unknown country," remarked Del Rivo, "has ever been known to travel without the national flag. I suppose once the rag is hoisted you will be claiming all this fine and fertile land as British."

"There is one thing certain, Del Rivo," shot back Franklin hotly, "we shall not call it Dago or Portuguese!"

For a moment the silence was tense, Harry and Del Rivo looking into each other's eyes fixedly. The swarthy Portuguese was the first to turn away, hiding his embarrassment with a shrug.

An hour later the others went out about the business of hoisting the old flag. Orders were issued. Muta, the great black, who seemed to treat the people of Barcoomba as serfdom—and they were in awe of him—superintended the work,

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

ADAM BYRNE, accompanied by his three companions, HARRY FRANKLIN, SANDY McTAVISH, and JIMMY BROWN, set out in search of Adam's father, GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE, who, together with his daughter ROSA, left England four years ago to explore the African jungle, and both of whom are now prisoners in the hands of a strange people at Barcoomba, which lies north of the Silver Glacier and beneath the Mountain of the Hidden-Crest.

Soon after leaving Baruda for the interior, the adventurers, aided by MUTA, a native friend of Adam's, rescue from a horde of hostile natives JULIAN DEL RIVO, a Portuguese, who on claiming to be a friend of Adam's father is allowed to join up with the party.

Resuming their journey across the great icefields the white men discover, tied to a post and dying with exposure, KYHTE, a native of the Hokahula tribe, who bears a written message from Professor Byrne. On regaining consciousness, Kyhte leads the party to the land of the Hokahulas, where they find the professor crowned king of the race who took him captive, whilst Rosa is feigning illness in order to evade an undesirable alliance with the native chief BEEDA. The Hokahula chief is not to be thwarted, however.

"I will wait a little while before I make the white princess my bride," he informs the professor. "But beware lest you tarry too long!"

(Now read on.)

taking control of a gang with native foreman, and interpreting the orders that the very capable Sandy McTavish issued.

He himself shinned up the bare pole with an ease and rapidity that astounded the great crowd that gathered to look on. He bore with him a rope which they paid out whilst he climbed. This he tied securely at a great height from the ground, and then shinned down the pole again. Natives hung on to it. Others dug away the ground into which the flagstaff had been planted. When it began to topple over the rope held by natives steadied it, whilst other natives held the pole as it slanted farther and farther over.

So they prevented it from crashing, and eventually had it prone.

Next Sandy and Jimmy Brown set about fixing the ropes and pulleys. Before the day was out the flagstaff had been replanted.

Then the people were summoned. Thousands who had been waiting all day flocked again to the square where the troops kept order and watched whilst Sandy McTavish set the glorious piece of bunting which Adam had brought with him from England in its place and hauled it up till it hung ten feet from the ground.

"Father," cried Adam eagerly, "you are king! You are my father. The honour is yours. You must unfurl the flag."

"Thank you, my boy!" half-choked the professor, a mist forming before his eyes, as he glanced back at the hut, just showing near the trees where Rosa lay hidden. "I shall be proud to raise the Union Jack."

Sandy gave the line into the professor's hands, and he began to haul. Up and up the flag went, higher and higher, until it was run right home—and then as the breeze caught it it opened out and began to flutter, its glorious red, white, and blue was seen by the Hokahulas for the first time. The great crowd burst into one great frantic shout.

Mechanically the professor raised his hand to remove the bejewelled crown of skin he wore, but Adam stayed him with a laugh.

"No, no!" he cried, as he pulled off his own. "Hats off to the flag, dad—I agree with you—but not the king his crown."

They stayed awhile to look, then returned to the palace. The professor issuing orders that he was not to be disturbed.

They ate. They talked. Adam and Harry produced the wireless apparatus on which they had picked up those elusive signals, and which someone had broken during the night. He told the story—to which his father listened intently. He talked about the magical improvement in that modern miracle—wireless, showed how it had grown.

"And to what do you attribute the signals you heard?" asked the professor.

"I do not know. They were in Morse code, I believe, and must have been sent out from some very powerful and far-distant station. I can think of no other explanation."

Adam had completely repaired his portable wireless, replacing all the damaged gadgets with new ones, fitting new wires, new transformers, and the like, had fixed new dallenitter lamps or valves in place of the shattered ones, and fixed new batteries in place of the old.

And now, turning on the lights of the four valves, and opening out the frame aerial into position, Adam more fully explained the working of it.

Julian Del Rivo, seated apart with his arms folded, grinned derisively at the man Symes.

"Childish and rubbishy nonsense this!" he jeered. "Trying to pick up messages from the air—in such a place as Barcoomba."

And then Adam, who had slipped on the headphones, uttered a low cry.

"The signals—the signals!" he cried. "Dad, you understand Morse. See if you can read them!"

He gave the headphones to his father and grabbed another pair.

The professor sat awhile, spellbound, his mouth gaping.

"Why, yes, I can hear what seem to be signals certainly," he cried. "And most probably they are in Morse. H'm! H'm! I can make no sense of it. I seem to catch a letter here and there. 'N—O—B—E—L.' But I can't get anything consecutive, Adam."

"Nor I, dad."

They tried awhile longer, and then the professor drawled out: "M-i-r-a-w-a-l-a." Do you agree, my boy?"

"That is certainly what I seem to read, dad," Adam replied.

There was a splutter of atmospherics, letters that came and faded. That was all. Finally they put the headphones down and Adam switched off the current.

Adam was frankly puzzled.

"There is more than a trick in it, dad," he said. "For you spelt out the letters even as I heard them myself. That is confirmation, at all events—but I'm hanged if I can make any sense of it!"

Then they were startled by hearing Muta, who had been carrying on a low and intimate conversation with Kytte, in the Hokahula tongue, as they sat together in the outer room, entering into an altercation with somebody who had intruded upon the privacy of the palace, in spite of the king's orders.

The man who answered Muta spoke harshly, and in a tone of authority.

"I believe," said the professor, rising, "that is Choitae, the high priest. He crowned me, but I have never believed that he likes me."

As he spoke the rush curtain was parted and a tall and commanding-looking priest, whose head-dress was adorned with horns of polished gold, strode into the inner chamber.

There he salaamed majestically.

Del Rivo Sees Red.

"**W**HOW!" cried Muta, who came behind him, making a significant gesture and speaking in language he had learned from the Cockney engineer, Jimmy Brown. "He is dangerous! White flyer, shall I knock his head off?"

"Peace!" returned the professor sternly. "Why is it that you have come to me, O Choitae, the High Priest?"

"The chief Beeda grows impatient," returned the priest, with a grim and meaning smile. "It has been reported by one who saw that the princess with the skin like snow, the daughter of our king, the white god, is fit and well. If she has been ill the magic of the white god has cured her. I have come to ask your permission for Beeda to marry her to-morrow."

The professor, eyeing him fixedly, did not quail, although he was quick to read the threat behind the smile. The spying priest of the night before had carried the news to his master.

The professor began to parley. But the high priest was not to be put off. A thousand and one reasons he put forward as to why it would be well for the marriage to take place on the morrow. Barcoomba was crowded with people drawn from all parts of the land, because they had heard of the coming of the white men who had crossed the Silver Glacier and braved the terrors of the great fall, to reach the country of the Hokahulas. The time was fitting. Beeda was ready.

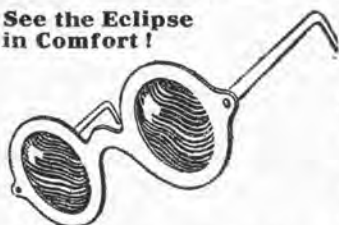
The professor argued, his voice rising by degrees to a pitch of anger that caused the horned priest to smile.

At last his patience broke down completely.

"The answer is no, O Choitae, the high priest!" he roared, as, seizing Harry Franklin by the wrist, he pulled him forward. "Rosa, my daughter, the white princess, cannot marry Chief Beeda, much as she respects him, because she is betrothed to this white god of her own race!"

"Then I am free to tell the chief that she refuses to marry him," said the horned Hokahula, with a sneer; "that you, whom we have made our king, also refuse your consent?"

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There were times when Professor Byrne found goading hard to bear. This was one of them.

"Go tell him what you like!" he retorted. But when the rush curtains fell together again, as the high priest departed, he turned to Adam with a rueful smile.

"I'm afraid that's put the lid on it," he said dolefully.

The group of white men exchanged rueful glances.

"Somebody has betrayed us," the professor went on. "The priest who spied upon the meeting between Rosa and ourselves must have betrayed us. But there is another traitor in the camp besides—somebody who must have told everything from the time I besought Rosa first to feign illness. I would have staked my life upon the loyalty of the Hokahula women who served her."

"They have made you king, dad. Surely there is nothing really to fear. These men will obey your commands," said Adam.

The professor, smiling ruefully, shook his head.

"A king without real power—a mere figurehead imposed upon a great and strange people, has no power to rule and command when you come down to bed-rock bottom, my boy. I have never showed my might through the medium of the sword. I am no conqueror or slayer. I jockeyed myself into the position of king because of the greater ease it would give me, and the greater protection I could give Rosa whilst we were prisoners in this strange land. But the priests are jealous. Beeda has become suspicious."

"The return of my messenger and your guide, Kyhte, to Barcoonah cannot be to the liking of the people whose law deals death to any who wander beyond the boundaries of their land—for fear, doubtless, lest they should bring the stranger with an all-conquering army into the Hokahula land and make slaves of the people."

"Well, sir," said Harry, "we have the machine-gun and our arms wherewith to save Rosa. In spite of their great numbers and their well-trained warriors we have the whip-hand, sir."

"I trust so," returned the professor.

"At all events, Rosa is not married to Beeda yet, and I have no doubt we'll be able to devise a way out of the difficulty."

The words were scarcely uttered than a great outcry and an echoing succession of piercing screams came to them from behind the palace.

"Something is amiss at the hospital," declared the professor, showing amazing nimbleness as he leaped towards the curtained doorway, his regal robes flapping as he went, his feet looking grotesquely large in their crude boots of skin. "Those are Rosa's devoted women crying."

Adam, snatching up a rifle, broke into a run, followed by Harry.

From the adjoining room rushed Sandy McTavish and Jimmy Brown.

Muta, followed by the giant Kyhte, dashed from the outer chamber round the front of the palace at top speed.

Outside all was in darkness, save where a faint glimmer showed through the waving rush curtains of the isolation hospital which were fanned by a gentle breeze.

Yet, quick as they all were, Julian Del Rivo was quicker. As they sped across the garden they could hear swift, retreating footsteps, cat-like in their stealthiness, vanishing in the direction of the open.

The Hokahula women came rushing towards them.

Then they heard the voice of Del Rivo.

"The hut has been raided!" he yelled. "They have got your daughter, professor!"

A Hokahula maiden threw herself prostrate at Byrne's feet.

"Oh, white king of the Hokahulas," she wailed, "the white princess has been stolen by the priests!"

The professor sped on.

"A king, but without power!" he moaned.

Adam, Harry, Jimmy Brown, and Sandy McTavish, moving at great speed, followed in the direction in which they supposed the raiders had carried Rosa.

The professor came upon Del Rivo standing rigid, a revolver clasped in his hand. The man's face was set, his eyes glinted wickedly.

"The first man I see I shoot!" he snarled; and then the professor saw a figure moving rapidly towards them.

It was the man Symes, he believed, and, blinking his eyes to make sure, the professor found that it was so.

Then to his horror he saw Del Rivo point the weapon at the oncoming man.

"For Heaven's sake—" he protested, raising an arm to stay the hand of the Portuguese. But even as he spoke a streak of fire cut the night as the revolver roared.

Throwing up his arms, the man Symes pitched forward on to his face and lay there still.

"There's one Hokahula dog the less!" snarled Del Rivo.

"He was no Hokahula!" cried the professor, standing back in horror. "Have you no eyes, Del Rivo? You have shot the man Symes!"

A King In Custody!

THE man Symes lay where he had fallen; Del Rivo, the smoking revolver in his hand, staring down at him aghast, apparently completely overcome by the mistake he had made.

Professor Byrne, king of the Hokahulas, with his striped robes flapping about him and his shoes of skin, blinked as he looked first at the prostrate figure, then at the Portuguese.

"After all," he declared mildly, "though they have stolen my daughter away, the Hokahulas are a people of peace. Though the priests may be jealous of the power that has been given to me they are genuinely set upon marrying her to Beeda, their chief. They would not harm her, or me, or any one of us, unless we gave them cause. This is no time or place for shooting, Del Rivo. You have killed an old and faithful friend."

Adam eyed Del Rivo with an increasing loathing and disgust. It seemed to him, as he studied the face of the Portuguese, that behind the set mask of it there lurked a smile of satisfaction.

Adam would have been prepared to swear in any court of justice in the world that he believed this to have been a case of deliberate murder.

And then, to the amazement of everybody, the man Symes stirred, raised himself up upon his hands, and blinked at Del Rivo out of eyes that were dilated with fear.

"Did you mean to kill me, Del Rivo?" he challenged. "Did you?"

Del Rivo, thrusting the revolver back into its holster, helped him to his feet.

"Why, my friend," he cried laughingly, "then it means that you are not badly hurt, eh? My blunder has not resulted in serious injury. I am glad—glad! Oh, my friend—my friend!"

The party of white men gathered round the man Symes, stared at him incredulously. He was all of a tremble, but apparently little hurt.

Tearing open the loose and tattered garment he wore he revealed to the astonished eyes of the anxious friends a shirt of steel, the links of which were so small and so beautifully interwoven that it could be worn with little discomfort.

As Adam bent to look closer he saw distinctly the mark which the bullet had made.

With teeth that chattered and eyes that rolled accompaniment, the little man explained.

"Once, years ago, in Lourenco Marquez," he said, "I made an enemy of a man who was a killer. I went about armed, kept a revolver beneath my pillow, and as I was in daily fear of being assassinated, I sought for some protection for my body. And a man who kept a general stores, who dealt in all kinds of curios and antiques, sold me this shirt. I had befriended him, and that was his return. Two days after I wore it for the first time, as I was walking through the heart of the town, my enemy, a man named Carter, sprang upon me from behind, and in full view of a crowd of people drove a knife-blade at my back. The steel shirt turned it aside with ease—and as some of the bystanders sprang upon my assailant to arrest him, he drew a revolver and shot at them right and left as he ran. They riddled him before he reached the end of the street. I have worn the shirt ever since in all my travels." The man Symes turned his rolling, frightened eyes upon the Portuguese. "It has saved me more than once. But I feared the natives more than white men until Julian came, and— Keep him away from me. I don't trust him. I—"

He came to a sudden stop, and with a shudder drew back.

Then whilst they watched in puzzled wonderment, Del Rivo, leaping forward, folded the man Symes in his powerful arms.

"My friend—my dear friend," he cried, as he kissed on both cheeks the man he might have killed, "I would put a bullet through my own brain rather than wittingly harm you. But, thank the powers that watch over us, you are safe! It was anger at those scoundrels carrying that beautiful white flower away that made me shoot."

Symes pulled his chin inwards as, looking down, he tried to examine the mark the bullet had made.

Then he shot a frightened glance at Del Rivo and edged away.

Now the white king of the Hokahulas moved across the open space or garden towards the front of his palace, Adam, Harry, and the others following at his heels, Jimmy Brown and Sandy McTavish keeping a watchful eye upon the stalking Portuguese.

But when the professor reached the open, he saw stalwart torch bearers and Hokahula warriors armed with spears and shields, bearing their bows and arrows on their backs, their bodies half-draped with skins, surrounding the big, rambling building.

A giant of a man, brown and white, with feathered head-dress, evidently the officer in command, stepped forward to meet the Englishmen.

"The high priest Choitae has stolen the white princess, my daughter, O Mirana, chief of the Hokahula warriors," said the professor haughtily, and in the native tongue. "I am going to Chief Beeda to demand that she be instantly released. Therefore stand aside and let me pass."

The soldier, a strikingly handsome man, bowed, spreading wide his hands in salutation.

"The orders of the high priest Choitae and of the chief Beeda, Chief of the Hokahulas, decree that the white king and his friends shall be kept prisoner within the palace until the marriage of the white princess to our chief to-morrow," he answered respectfully.

"I am king of the Hokahula people!" returned the professor. "You cannot imprison your king, Mirana the Warrior!"

The Hokahula swung himself haughtily erect.

"Before you came, O white king—before the white flyers of the air passed the Waterfall and were led into the land of the Hokahulas by Kyhte, the guide, whose life is forfeit, the chief Beeda was the great power in the land. Under him reigned the high priest Choitae. Because they believed you to be a great white god they made you king of the people and built you a great palace in Barcoomba. But since it has been shown that there is not one white god only, but many thereof—who, so it is said, can fly through the air like the birds, though you, O king, have not yet shown us that you can fly—doubt has been cast upon the omnipotence of the great white god. It is held by Choitae, the high priest, that the beautiful white princess is not less human than any of the Hokahula maidens. Therefore the chief Beeda would marry her. So says Choitae, the high priest."

The professor, trembling with anger, motioned to the warrior to stand aside.

"I am king!" he cried. "And as long as I remain king I will be obeyed! Listen, Mirana! You who carry out faithfully the orders that have been given you, did we care to

do so we could sweep you and your warriors away with the fire that spits from the little mouths of the magic guns. That we have no wish to do. But I will see Beeda. My daughter, the white princess, must be given back to me!"

He swung round.

"Adam, my son," he called, "Harry—all of you. Muta, too—follow me!"

But even as the party moved forward, so did a solid wall of armed giants bar the way.

Then came a low-toned boom of drums, and the ranks of the warriors opening made room for Choitae, who faced the professor.

"We have the princess in safe keeping," he announced. "To-morrow, in the great square, the wedding will take place. The chief Beeda will make her his bride. It is written in the history of the Hokahulas that a princely wedding that is blessed by the silver mist shall be everlastingly blessed. Behold!"

He swung round, pointing with his long and powerful arm, upon which armlets of gold and of white metal glistened and from which dangled beautiful ropes made of feathers and of beads, towards the distant trees; and as they looked the friends could see a dense white mist stealing stealthily from out the forest and passing onwards into the clearing.

The professor eyed it frowningly. Then he awakened to action again.

"Listen to me, O Choitae, the high priest!" he cried, his deep, rich voice booming powerfully as it always did when he was roused. "In spite of what you have done and what you say, the chief Beeda shall not marry my daughter, the white princess, without my sanction! I care not for your white mist! It will bless no wedding ceremonial to-morrow. Rather than that my daughter shall marry the chief Beeda I will mow down your warriors, your priests, and your people with the tubes that deal death! Beware how you trifle with your king, the white god! I demand that my daughter shall be given back into my hands unharmed—that your ceremony be postponed!"

(Another ripping instalment next week, chums.)

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