

SPARKLING STORIES OF ROOKWOOD SCHOOL EVERY WEEK!

The GEM

2^D



THE MIDNIGHT CRICKETERS!

This week's
novel school yarn.

ST. JIM'S MASTER ARRESTED! MR. RATCLIFF CHARGED WITH—

THE MIDNIGHT



CHAPTER 1. King Cricket!

"PLAY!"
Click!

"Bowled, Fatty!"
"Oh, played, sir!"

There was a ripple of handclapping as Fatty Wynn, the demon bowler of the New House at St. Jim's, whipped one
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**A Splendid New Long
Complete Yarn of TOM
MERRY & Co. at St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

of the stumps which Jack Blake was defending clean out of the ground.

Lessons were over for the day, and the practice-nets on Little Side were crowded with white-clad juniors.

"Nothing like cricket!" sighed Tom Merry, as his eyes took in the busy scene.

"Best game in the world," said Levison enthusiastically. "Footer's all right, of course—"

"Oh, rather!"

"What-ho!"

"In its due season," said Levison sagely. "But when the jolly old spring comes round, gimme cricket!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove! Figgay's shapin' wathah well ovah theah!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, directing his celebrated monocle to the long-legged leader of the New House juniors, who was standing up to all comers at one of the wickets. "I wathah fancy we might try him out in the comin' Gweyfwiahs match, Tom Mewwy!"

"I rather fancy Figgy's a cert, anyway," chuckled Tom Merry. "What about taking a turn yourself, Gus? Your name's not down yet, you know!"

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—HOUSEBREAKING! SCHOOLBOY SAVES THE SITUATION!

CRICKETERS!

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hallo, hallo! Here's Grundy!" continued the junior captain cheerily, as George Alfred Grundy of the Shell tramped up in flannels. "Bowling or batting, old bean?"

"Both!" replied Grundy promptly. "And, by the way, I suppose it's all fixed that I'm in the team for the Greyfriars match?"

"Something wrong with your supposer, then!" grinned Tom Merry. "You'll go in if you're good enough, of course—"

"Well, ain't I good enough, then?"

"Hem! Judging by last season, old chap—"

"Anything wrong with me last season?" asked Grundy, beginning to glare. "Fact is, Tom Merry, I've never been given a chance. If you'll play me against Greyfriars—"

"Well, if you'll show me how you're likely to shape this year—"

"I'm going to, idiot! Not that you ought to need showing. Anyone with an eye for a cricketer ought to be able to see what I'm like!" snorted Grundy. "Look at the way I hold my bat!"

And to give Tom Merry the required impression, he swung his bat round in the air with a flourish.

Unfortunately, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still standing by, watching Figgins. The swell of the Fourth happened to be just in the way of the bat, with the result that Grundy just caught his ear in a fleeting but painful flick.

"Yawwooooh!" yelled Arthur Augustus fiendishly.

"Sorry!" grunted Grundy. "As I was saying, Tom Merry—"

"Gwooooh! My yah! You've injahed my yah!" wailed Arthur Augustus. "Look heah, Gwunday—"

"Anyone can see that I'm a born cricketer—"

"You clumsy wottah—"

"And if you don't give me a place in the team, Merry, I'll—"

"Ow! It feels as if it's been torn wight off—"

"Can it, you asses!" howled

Tom Merry, above the double-barrelled indignation chorus. "Forget your ear, Gussy, and do a bit of bowling; and you, Grundy, take a turn at the wicket over there. No squabbling, you know—Railton's watching."

"I intend no disrespect to Wailton, deah boy, but—"

"Then carry on!" said Tom. "And wire in, everybody. May not have much longer down here before it rains!"

"All serene, Tommy!"

"Vewy well, deah boy, in the circs. I will dwoep the mattah!"

And Grundy and D'Arcy went to the nets, the latter still rubbing his ear rather tenderly; and the rest of the players "wired in" as requested, while the low and threatening clouds that had been gathering spread slowly across the sky.

Mr. Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's, made his appearance shortly afterwards.

Some of the juniors who noticed him couldn't help thinking it rather appropriate that he should arrive with the approach of rain. Most of the juniors found Mr. Ratcliff a depressing influence, especially where sport was concerned.

Mr. Ratcliff stood beside Mr. Railton, the good-natured Housemaster of the School House, who had been watching the play for some time.

"A great pity, Mr. Railton, that the enthusiasm displayed here is not carried into the class-rooms!" he remarked, with a hint of a sneer in his voice.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"One can hardly expect that much from the juniors, Mr. Ratcliff. I confess that in my younger days I was more keen on games than on lessons— Oh, well caught, Merry!" he wound up as Tom Merry brought off a difficult catch.

Mr. Ratcliff's lip curled.

"I am sure you do not now regard that circumstance as

a matter for congratulation, Mr. Railton. So far as I am concerned I am glad to be able to say that I never became infected with this mad craze for sport."

"My dear sir—" protested Mr. Railton.

"To an unbiased mind that description is a mild one, sir!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "It is a mad craze, and I defy you to deny it!"

"But I do deny it," said Mr. Railton warmly. "To describe the average boy's healthy interest in cricket as a mad craze is to make a travesty of the truth. Cricket does not interfere with school work—"

"My experience, sir, is the reverse! In fact, here is an example of the truth of my statement," said Mr. Ratcliff harshly, pointing to Figgins, who was still standing up successfully to the bowling of half a dozen keen juniors. "I ordered Figgins to write me fifty lines by six o'clock. I am perfectly sure that he has not done them!"

"But, my dear Mr. Ratcliff—"

"We will see!" snapped the Housemaster of the New House; and he turned to the nets and called out: "Figgins!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" responded Figgins, lowering his bat and looking round in surprise.

"I ordered you to deliver me fifty lines by six o'clock, Figgins!" said the sour-tempered Housemaster, his eyes glittering as he became conscious of the disapproving murmurs of the School House juniors in the vicinity. "Have you done them?"

"Yes, sir," replied Figgins; and Mr. Railton smiled grimly, while Mr. Ratcliff looked a little taken aback for the moment.

"You have finished them? Then why have you not handed them over to me?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, in his harshest voice.

"Because it isn't six yet, sir, and I didn't think it necessary till I'd finished cricket!" was Figgins' answer.

Mr. Ratcliff scowled. There was nothing disrespectful in Figgins' answers, but he felt that he had been made to look rather silly.

"Your prognostication, Mr. Ratcliff, was not quite correct," observed Mr. Railton dryly.

The New House master bit his lip.

"Not altogether correct, perhaps, sir!" he snarled. "Nevertheless, the fact that this junior calmly proposed postponing the delivery of the imposition till after his game of cricket gains me the point. Figgins!"

"Yes, sir," returned Figgins again, looking round with a frown.

"You will stop playing this instant and return to the House for the purpose of delivering the lines to my study before the due time."

"Good old Ratty!" murmured Tom Merry in an undertone; and Monty Lowther, who was standing near him, joined in with:

"Ain't he a jewel, chaps?"

"At once!" ordered Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

Figgins reluctantly quitted his wicket.

But as it happened, Mr. Ratcliff didn't score, after all. For even as the long-legged New House leader reached the pavilion, the first spot of rain fell, and that spot was quickly followed by so many others that practice was abandoned without another ball being bowled.

There was a general rush for shelter, and Mr. Ratcliff, with an expression on his face that would have done credit to the Demon King in a pantomime, made off at top speed. Even the consolation of depriving Figgins of the privilege enjoyed by the rest seemed denied him; it was as though the stars in their courses for once were against Horace Ratcliff, M.A.

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If you can't play cricket during the day, play cricket during the night.

... So Figgins breaks bounds to master the art of leg-breaks.

Practice ended in confusion. The players returned to their respective Houses.

Temporarily, at any rate, King Cricket ceased to reign on Little Side.

CHAPTER 2.

Well Caught, Ratty!

RAIN!

It was coming down in sheets.

From the windows of the New House the School House could be seen but dimly through a misty ocean of rain. Rain was rattling against the window-panes, and swirling noisily along the roof gullies and down the drain-pipes.

"Blow it!" said Fatty Wynn, staring gloomily out of the window of the study he shared with Figgins and Kerr.

"Bother it!" said Kerr.

"Blow and bother and bust it!" grinned Figgins. "First practice we've had this year, too. And I was just beginning to enjoy myself."

"You'd have had to chuck it, anyway, with Ratty after you," said Kerr, with a smile. "He didn't seem too pleased at the rain spoiling his chance of singling you out."

"Poor old Ratty! S'pose he can't help it," remarked Figgins, with a shake of his head. "Pity we can't practise indoors, you men."

"About time they fixed up indoor nets with matting to play on," granted Wynn. "They've got 'em at Wayland, I see. A retired pro's set up as an all-weather cricket coach in a hall in the High Street."

"Good wheeze, too, with the weather we get," nodded Kerr. "Can't we do something like it here?"

"My hat! Worth trying!" said Figgins, his eyes gleaming. "Of course, it wouldn't be like playing on turf."

"How the thump do you think we can do it here, then?" demanded Fatty Wynn, in wonderment. "I suppose you're not suggesting the entrance hall?"

"Not exactly," grinned Figgins. "There's just the chance Ratty would step in. No reason why we shouldn't try a kind of restricted cricket in the passage outside the study, though."

"Great pip!"

"Well, why not? We can rig up some sort of wicket at the blind end of the passage, and have one or two chaps fielding in the doorways."

"Oh crickey!"

"And a bowler or two at the landing, and perhaps somebody half-way down the stairs in case of accidents."

"M-m-my hat!"

"We can borrow a few rugs to put down on the floor to deaden the noise," said Figgins enthusiastically. "I don't see why it shouldn't work. Anyway, it'll fill in the time—till we're ready for prep. What do you men think?"

"H'm!"

"I'm wondering what Ratty'll think if he happens to butt in," remarked Kerr, with a wry grin. "No sense in asking for trouble, is there?"

Figgins frowned.

"Dunno why he should butt in. We're a long way from his room, and if we're careful he won't hear anything. Anyway, there'll be a scout on the stairs, and we can clear away the mess and vanish before he gets here, if he does happen to be on the prowl."

"H'm! Well, it's not a bad way of passing half an hour, certainly," admitted Kerr cautiously. "Mustn't make too much noise, of course."

"Naturally. What do you think, Fatty?"

"I'm on," grinned the fat member of the trio. "Might be better to play with a tennis ball."

"Tennis ball—rats! With rugs on the floor they won't hear a sound downstairs," said Figgins, rather optimistically. "Let's get going!"

"I'll go and gather the clans," said Kerr.

And he quitted the study to spread the news, while Figgins and Fatty Wynn started hunting round for the necessary equipment.

The idea was received enthusiastically in all the studies down the passage. Within a couple of minutes of Kerr's departure, Redfern and Lawrence and Owen and Pratt and Jimson and French had invaded Figgins' study, offering their services, and others were turning out as they heard about it.

"Get busy, you chaps!" said Figgins, turning up a red face from a lumber cupboard which he was turning out in the hope of finding something which would hold three stumps. "Spread out plenty of rugs and mats! The more the merrier, you know!"

"All serene, Figgy!"

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The New House juniors set to work with a will, ransacking their studies for suitable covering for the floor.

Figgins appeared eventually holding up an egg-rack.

"Just the thing to take the stumps!" he said. "Spread the stuff about!"

"What-ho!"

Many hands made light work, and very soon the linoleum which covered the floor of the passage was almost obliterated by a varied and extensive collection of rugs and mats.

"Just about right," remarked Kerr, returning from his tour of the studies and surveying his colleagues' work with approval. "Who bats first?"

"Figgy'll do, as he didn't finish his innings at the nets," grinned Redfern. "I'll take a hand with the bowling, if you like."

"Go ahead! Fatty, too, and perhaps Lawrence and Pratt. After all, we're not restricted so far as bowlers go," said Figgins, as he went to his wicket. "Wade in, chaps!"

"Play!"

Redfern bowled, and play began.

The juniors were soon enjoying themselves immensely. Naturally, there was no comparison between practice in the Fourth passage in the New House and practice down at the nets at Little Side. But cricket in the passage turned out to be not altogether impossible, and it had the charm of novelty.

Figgins, out of respect to the peculiar conditions of the play, made no attempt to hit hard, contenting himself with mild taps, just sufficient to send the ball back to the bowlers.

The bowlers lined up at their end, and entered into the spirit of the thing with great enthusiasm.

Thud! Thump! Thud!

"Play!"

Click!

"Well tapped, Figgy!" called out Redfern, in a hoarse stage whisper. "Boundary next time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, ye cripples!" chuckled Kerr, who was wicket-keeper. "Mind the windows!"

Click!

"Hold it, Frenchy! Oh, butter-fingers!"

"Get him out, somebody!" begged Owen.

As the bowlers warmed to their task they began to bowl a little faster. That perhaps was only to be expected.

As a natural corollary, Figgins responded by hitting out a little harder. Cricket balls began to fly up and down the passage at a somewhat alarming speed.

"Careful, Figgy!" warned Kerr, as one ball disappeared over the landing, and went rattling down the stairs to the spot where Jimson was keeping guard. "Don't want the beak up!"

"All serene!"

And Figgins eased up—for a minute or two—after which he was tempted, and hit out again. Then harder—then harder still.

Twice a ball went over the landing. When Jimson came up the second time he was looking a little scared.

"I say, you chaps, they'll hear you downstairs, if you're not careful!" he remarked. "Slow it up a bit."

"Just one more yorker, then, to see if I can get him out!" grinned Fatty Wynn, and he sent down one of his celebrated "specials."

Figgins, forgetting again for a moment where he was, stepped out to it.

Neither he nor anyone else in the passage noticed, in the excitement of the moment, the sound of hurried footsteps racing up the stairs.

Crack!

The ball went whizzing back to the landing.

And at the identical moment when it flew past the top of the stairs, a figure in cap and gown bounded up the last stair into view.

What would have happened if that figure had been a fraction of a second sooner hardly bore thinking about afterwards.

What actually happened, anyway, was sufficiently dreadful to send a kind of thrill of horror through the spectators.

The ball, instead of hitting the newcomer on the head, as it might easily have done, simply lifted his academic cap off and sent it whizzing across the passage.

After that it collided with the wall and bounced off harmlessly to the floor.

By the grace of Providence no damage had been done. But the newcomer, who proved to be Mr. Ratcliff, had certainly sustained a mental shock of sufficient severity to make him yell.

"Whooooop!" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

CHAPTER 3.
Drastic Punishment!

"W HOOOOOP!" roared Mr. Ratcliff again. Then he recovered himself a little, pulled out a pocket handkerchief and mopped his brow. "Oh dear!" groaned Fatty Wynn.

He was the only one of them who managed to say anything. The rest were speechless with horror.

"Ow!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, mopping his brow and trembling violently as he did so. "Ow! Oh! Ah! Ow!"

"Oh lor!" moaned the only articulate indoor cricketer.

"Oh! Ah! Oh! Dear me!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

For a few moments he felt too overcome by shock even to be angry.

Those few moments, however, rapidly passed, and as Mr. Ratcliff regained his composure anger surged up fiercely within him, showing itself in two bright spots on his cheeks, which became visibly brighter and brighter as time went on.

"Silence, sir, when I am speaking!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. He glared balefully down the passage at the uncomfortable crowd. "This, then, is the pass to which we are reduced by the insane craze for sport which holds sway over the school!"

"Sir——"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Ratcliff furiously. "To proceed with what I was saying, I am aware that I incur a measure of unpopularity through being opposed to absurd and childish pastimes such as cricket. But this outrageous affair justifies my attitude up to the hilt. I am filled with loathing and disgust. Your insensate passion for sport at any price has driven you to the length of endangering the lives of others, including myself. Disgraceful and abominable, I say!"

"Oh crikey!"

"I didn't mean——" began Figgins.

"You didn't mean to kill me outright!" snarled Mr.



Baggy was seized, rushed across the study, and shot unceremoniously into the passage!

"Monstrous!" rasped Mr. Ratcliff, at last. "Abominable! Utterly outrageous and disgraceful! How dare you!"

"Oh dear!"

"How dare you!" stormed the furious Housemaster of the New House. "I repeat, how dare you! Answer me!"

"Oh crikey!" moaned Fatty Wynn. "You see, sir——"

"I shall accept no paltry and futile excuses, Wynn!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "I see quite clearly what has happened. I assure you, it is all very clear indeed. You have been playing cricket!"

"Well, sir——"

"It was my fault, sir——" began Figgins.

"Naturally!" said Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. "In an outrageous episode like this, I naturally assume that you are behind it, Figgins. I shall punish you accordingly, of course. But that does not excuse the rest of you!"

"We're all in it, sir——" began Kerr, when Mr. Ratcliff cut him short.

"If you think you will escape your richly merited punishment by confessing to a complicity that is already obvious to me, Kerr, you are greatly mistaken. You will not!"

Kerr frowned.

"I don't want to, sir. I was only saying——"

Ratcliff. "That I can understand, Figgins. Even you, perhaps, would not go so far as that!"

"I didn't mean to hurt anybody, and I wouldn't have put you in danger, anyway, if you hadn't rushed up so quickly to catch us!" said Figgins, stung into retort by the beak's unjust fulminations. "These chaps are able to look after themselves all right, and if you hadn't been so anxious to get us——"

"Silence!" thundered the Housemaster. "Every word you utter adds to the enormity of your offence! How dare you suggest that I was anxious to catch you!"

"Well, you were!" said Figgins doggedly. "We all know that!"

"Figg!" whispered Kerr beseechingly.

"Well, it's true, anyway!" growled Figgins, a little abashed at the sudden realisation of what he was saying to his own Housemaster. "Of course, sir, I'm sorry——"

"Oh, you are sorry, then, are you?" said Mr. Ratcliff sarcastically.

"I didn't dream, of course, that anyone would suddenly jump up the stairs like you did," said Figgins. "Naturally, I'm sorry!"

"Your sorrow comes a little late, Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "I'm afraid that it will avail you little or nothing now. I shall not take you to the headmaster."

"Oh!" Figgins didn't know whether he ought to feel glad or sorry at that announcement. It was more than possible, as a matter of fact, that Dr. Holmes, the worthy old Head of St. Jim's, would take a more lenient view of the offence than Ratty would.

The juniors waited expectantly.

"Every boy present," went on Mr. Ratcliff, rolling the words on his lips with an enjoyment he could scarcely conceal, "will write me a thousand lines, and will be detained in class next half-holiday!"

"Oh!"

"Oh crikey!"

"My hat!"

"And you, Figgins," said the sour-tempered Housemaster venomously, "will, in addition, present yourself to me after breakfast to-morrow for a caning; and, furthermore, will refrain from playing cricket in any shape or form for a period of one month from to-day!"

"Phew!"

It was an audible whistle from the crowd. Ratty's words fairly electrified them.

The leader of the New House juniors blinked at Mr. Ratcliff almost dazedly.

"Re-refrain—" he stuttered.

"From playing cricket in any shape or form for one month!" finished Mr. Ratcliff grimly. "In that way, perhaps, I shall reduce this absurdly overrated pastime to its proper proportions in your estimation. You understand?"

"But—but you can't mean it!" blurted out Figgins, his

face quite pale under the stress of his emotion. "I'll mean—"

"I have already considered what it will mean, Figgins!"

"But it'll mean that I shall have to miss the Greyfriars match—the first big game of the season!" gasped Figgins. "You can't mean it, sir! You don't realise the importance—"

"I realise the preposterously important place that cricket takes in your life, Figgins, and I am determined to alter it!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "No more cricket for a month. You understand?"

And the Housemaster of the New House turned on his heel and made for the stairs again.

Figgins stared after him, almost stunned for a moment. Then he dropped his bat and rushed after the retreating Housemaster.

"Half a minute, sir!" he gasped breathlessly. "Surely you can make it something else? Report me to the Head for a flogging, if you like!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned round with an exclamation of anger. "You have heard what I said, Figgins. That should be enough!"

"But it's not fair!" said Figgins desperately. "The fellows will be relying on me to turn out!"

"I am not in the least concerned with that!"

"Then I'll take it to the Head!"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered.

"You may do so if you wish. In view of the fact that your reckless game placed my life in danger, I warn you that the Head is more likely to add to your punishment rather than reduce it."

Figgins almost groaned aloud. He realised that, lenient as the Head undoubtedly was on occasions, he was not likely to look with a favourable eye on an appeal for clemency this time.

"But—but can't you do something, then, sir—allow me to play on the day of the Greyfriars match?"

"I do not intend to vary your punishment in any way whatsoever!" said Mr. Ratcliff, in tones of finality. "That, Figgins, is my last word on the subject. I forbid you to say another word!"

And Mr. Ratcliff went down the stairs, a grim smile on his wrinkled face.

Figgins gave it up.

It was a staggering sentence for him. But Ratty was evidently determined to see it through.

The passage fairly buzzed after the Housemaster had departed. Very soon the entire House was buzzing, and in a short time after that the news was all round the school.

Figgins of the Fourth, one of the great heroes of junior cricket, forbidden to play! It was a situation without precedent at St. Jim's. Little had Figgins imagined when he started indoor practice that it would lead to this.

But it had, and apparently there was no way out. And in the tents of the New House clan there was a weeping and a wailing and a gnashing of teeth.

CHAPTER 4.

Keeping in Trim!

FOR a time Figgins was disconsolate.

It wouldn't have been so bad if the rain had continued. But rain doesn't keep on for ever in Sussex, and in the few days following the sensational incidents in the Fourth passage in the New House a long settled period of fine warm weather set in.

The playing pitches of St. Jim's became crowded with white figures. Everybody was anxious to get into trim for the new season. It was cricket at midday, cricket in the afternoon, and cricket in the early evening, when half-holidays came round.

Figgins wandered round Big Side, round Little Side, and round the Fag Sports Ground, looking like a lost soul.

Mr. Ratcliff had intended his punishment to be severe. But it was doubtful if he realised the full extent of its severity.

The long-legged leader of the New House juniors hardly knew how to contain himself. To moon about, looking on at the play in which he was not allowed to join in, was a refinement of torture to him. Compared with it the tortures of Tantalus seemed insignificant trifles.

Something had to be done. Figgins made up his mind on that.

"The question is—what?" he said gloomily to Kerr and Wynn, discussing the matter with them after dinner one half-holiday.

"Difficult to say, old chap," said Fatty Wynn, rubbing his podgy chin reflectively. "Only one thing that I can see—grin and bear it!"

"Fathead!"

"Well, what else?"

"That's what I'm asking you, chump!" snorted Figgins.

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"Surely you've got something to suggest, Kerr—you usually have?"

Kerr smiled rather wryly.

"'Fraid I feel at a loss, this time. If it's a question of keeping fit—"

"It isn't; I can do that in the gym if I want to. What I want is cricket practice!"

"Just what you can't get, old bean!"

"What about phantom cricket?" suggested Wynn brightly.

"Phantom cricket?"

"Better than nothing, anyway," grinned the fat junior. "You can come down to practice with the rest of us, and just pretend!"

"Why, you fat idiot—"

"Jolly good wheeze, if you ask me!" said Fatty Wynn. "We can bowl to you, and you can imagine you've got a bat in your hand, and shape up to each ball accordingly."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr.

Figgins didn't laugh. He glared.

"And you call that a jolly good wheeze!" he said disgustedly. "I should say it's about the daftest idea that ever came out of that packet of sawdust you call a brainbox. Can it, Fatty!"

"Well, if that's N.G., I don't know what to suggest," grinned the cheerful junior from Wales. Then he emitted a sudden whistle. "Phew!"

"Thought of another one as good?" asked Figgins sarcastically. "If so, bury it!"

"By gum! I believe I've got it!" said Fatty Wynn, his eyes shining excitedly. "Wayland!"

"What about Wayland?"

"Bailes' Sports Club."

"Bailes' whatter?"

"Bailes' Sports Club!" repeated Fatty Wynn, grabbing his leader by the arm. "The place I was telling you about the other day—where they have indoor cricket practice, you know!"

Figgins gave a sudden start.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"The very place for you, Figgy!" said Wynn eagerly. "Why I didn't think of it before goodness only knows! Eureka! We're saved!"

"Half a minute!" said Kerr cautiously. "I've heard about the place, but we don't know anything about it yet. What is it?"

"Just what it says it is, fathead," grinned Fatty. "It's a sports club—"

"Then in that case Figgy'll have to become a member before he can get his practice?"

"Not a bit of it. There's an advertisement for it in last week's 'Wayland Gazette'; it says quite clearly there that members of the public can use the nets and receive coaching from ex-pros for half-a-crown an hour. Good enough?"

"My hat!" breathed Figgins. "If you've got it right, Fatty—"

"Of course I've got it right!"

"Why, it's the very thing—just what I want!" exclaimed Figgins enthusiastically. Then his brow clouded again. "Of course, it won't affect my not being able to play against Greyfriars—"

"Well, it can't do that, admittedly," grinned Kerr. "But it will jolly well keep you in trim for the match after that."

"And give you something to do while the rest of us are putting in practice here," added Fatty Wynn. "You can get a pass out at midday every day and buzz over there on your bike—"

"Nothing to stop it," said Kerr. "The prefects won't dream you're going out at cricket practice."

"Well, hardly," Figgins smiled as he thought it over. "Be a lark if they've got some really hot bowlers there and I blossom forth as the unbeatable batsman at the end of my month!"

"Why not?" chuckled Fatty Wynn. "The place is run by an ex-professional, and they've got professional coaches in attendance. Go ahead, Figgy! You'll be better off than if you practised with us!"

"I'll do it!" said Figgins.

And that settled matters.

When the rest of the juniors went down to Little Side that afternoon Figgins abandoned his recent role as the ghost of the pitches and strolled off to the bicycle shed.

He was whistling cheerfully as he wheeled his machine down to the gates. The prospect of cricket of any kind again was quite sufficient to restore Figgins' good humour. Mr. Ratcliff met him at the gates and smiled sourly.

"Cycling, then, Figgins?" he asked.

"Just off for a spin, sir," answered the New House junior briefly.

"You find time hanging a little heavily on your hands

nowadays, doubtless," remarked the Housemaster, with a nod in the direction of the cricketers Figgins was leaving. "I would advise you, Figgins, to take up some useful and instructive hobby in this period of enforced leisure. You will find the study of ornithology eminently suitable, I should say."

"Yes, sir; I shall have to think about it," said Figgins, who, as a matter of fact, wasn't quite sure what ornithology meant. "By the way, sir," he added quickly, as Mr. Ratcliff began walking away, "there's no chance of your allowing me to turn out for the Greyfriars match, I suppose?"

Mr. Ratcliff laughed harshly. He had been waiting for something of the kind.

"Your supposition is quite correct, Figgins," he said. "There is no chance whatever of that happening."

And he went his way, leaving Figgins biting his lips with vexation at having been tempted to speak on the matter at all.

But Figgins soon had reason to cheer up and forget all about Mr. Ratcliff and his vexatious ways.

Within half an hour he was at Wayland, and wielding a bat at the indoor cricket practice nets attached to Bailes' Sports Club.

The accommodation turned out to be better than he had hoped for.

Robert Bailes, the proprietor of the place, was an ex-county player, and, though getting on in years, a really first-class bowler. With an eye, perhaps, to further business from Figgins' colleagues at St. Jim's, he devoted special attention to the newcomer.

Figgins had to face better bowling than he had ever known before, and he enjoyed and profited by every minute of his experience.

He came away from the place at last, ruddy and cheerful, with the promise that he would spend many more hours there in the weeks that were to come.

The only fly in the ointment was the fact that he was still debarred from playing in the Greyfriars match. But so optimistic did Figgins feel after his two hours at the wicket that he was full of hope that some miracle would happen to put that right.

Anxious now to get back and tell his chums Kerr and Fatty Wynn all about it, he rode towards St. Jim's at top speed.

He had passed through sleepy Rylcombe, and was just about to put on a final spurt for the remainder of the journey, when something caused him to slow up and dismount instead.

Some yards up the road, near the Green Man—the dingy inn that had sometimes in the past been the resort of one or two self-styled "gay dogs" from St. Jim's—a familiar figure was hiding behind some trees, intently watching the place.

Figgins recognised the watcher at once. It was Mr. Ratcliff.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins' Good Turn!

"GOOD old Ratty!"

Figgins murmured the words to himself, as he wheeled his bike into the hedge.

Horace Ratcliff, M.A., could always be relied on to provide relief of this kind at any hour of the day.

Figgins concealed himself in the hedge, and regarded him with a rather contemptuous smile. Just like Ratty to do things in this sneaky fashion! By his attitude it was to be inferred that he suspected the Green Man of housing some dabbler in fast life from St. Jim's. Any other master, in the same circumstances, would have marched up to the inn and demanded admittance to put his suspicions to the test. Ratty preferred to hide himself and wait until he caught the offender red-handed coming out of the place.

Figgins glanced across at the inn. It didn't look exactly the most inviting place in which to spend a fine spring afternoon. But there were probably fellows at St. Jim's—one or two, anyway—who preferred a game of cards or billiards within its dingy precincts to a jolly game of cricket on the school playing pitches.

"Dashed if I can understand it!" remarked Figgins, uttering his thoughts aloud.

He looked from the Green Man back to Mr. Ratcliff, and wondered what he had better do.

The probabilities were that one of the seniors—Knox of the Sixth, or perhaps Cutts of the Fifth—had taken the opportunity presented by a quiet afternoon to drop in for an hour or so in the doubtless congenial society of Joe Lodgey and his cronies.

By the look of things at present, that same senior was going to receive a rude shock when he came out again.

Figgins hadn't a great deal of sympathy with the point of view of the average merry blade. But he hadn't a great deal of sympathy with Mr. Ratcliff's point of view, either. In any case, his natural instinct for fair play made him feel that the occasion called for action of some kind on his part.

It was up to him to warn the unsuspecting fellow inside the Green Man of his danger.

The only way of doing that was to gain access to the premises himself, and so far as Figgins saw, that meant creeping along under the low wall that ran round the back of the inn and worming his way through the shrubbery to the back of the house.

Since there was always a chance that Mr. Ratcliff might change his mind and approach the inn himself, it was a risky proceeding.

Figgins decided to take the risk and do it.

He dived through the hedge, made for the shelter of the wall, and crept along till he reached the open gate that led into the garden.

Before entering, he glanced cautiously over to the clump of trees where Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was still keeping guard from that place of vantage, and as his eyes were fixed on the inn itself, Figgins considered the moment opportune to go ahead.

He threaded his way through the low shrubs, and succeeded in reaching the shelter of a protruding wall of the house without attracting Mr. Ratcliff's attention.

A little breathless, the St. Jim's junior knocked at the door.

After an interval, a key grated in the lock, and a scrubby-looking gentleman, whom Figgins identified as Mr. Joe Lodgey, looked out.

"Afternoon!" he remarked, somewhat surprised to see Figgins.

Figgins nodded curtly.

"Is there a St. Jim's fellow here?"

Mr. Lodgey winked.

"Well, I s'pose you ain't a prefect, by the look of you, so there's no 'arm in sayin' Mr. Cutts is jest finishin' a nice little game of billiards. Fancy a game yourself, sir?"

"Thanks; but I don't play," answered Figgins, not too graciously. "I'll have a word with Cutts, though."

"Certainly! Come this way, sir."

"I'd rather stay here, thank you!"

"Jest as you like, sir," grinned Mr. Lodgey, and he disappeared in search of Cutts.

The blade of the Fifth was out in a couple of seconds. He was holding a billiard-cue in one hand, and he looked a little flushed.

"Figgins!" he exclaimed, elevating his eyebrows in surprise. "What the merry dickens—"

"Enjoying yourself, Cuttsy?" grinned the New House junior. "I've just dropped in to warn you that Ratty's waiting outside."

"The deuce he is!" said Cutts, starting. "Where exactly is he, then?"

"Lying low in that clump of trees in the lane. If you want to dodge him, you'll have to crawl out the back way under cover of the shrubs."

"Thanks for the tip, young Figgins!" said Cutts, with a nod. "Did you drop in, then, simply for the purpose of warnin' me?"

"Well, it's a sure thing I didn't come out on the ran-dan. I leave that sort of thing to silly asses like you!" said Figgins bluntly. "You'll make a dash for it now?"

"Like a bird!" answered Cutts, handing over his cue to the attendant Mr. Lodgey, and pulling his straw hat over his eyes. "See you another time, Lodgey! Pretty decent of you to do this, Figgins. Thanks awfully!"

"Don't mensh! Mind how you go. Ratty's bound to keep his best eye forrard."

Cutts went down on all fours and scrambled off towards the gate. It was rather an undignified proceeding for a Fifth-Former to adopt, but it was the only safe way of getting out of the inn without being seen.

He reached the gate safely, and disappeared from view. Figgins lost no time in following him.

He, like the senior, reached the gate without mishap.

It was when he was almost back to the hedge that something went wrong.

Figgins, crawling cautiously under cover of the low wall that bounded the garden of the inn, was under the happy impression that Mr. Ratcliff was still keeping guard on the other side of the building.

But a change came o'er the spirit of his dream all of a sudden. He realised that someone was standing between him and the hedge.

He looked up.

It was Mr. Ratcliff.

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"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Figgins involuntarily; then, with a scarlet face, he scrambled to his feet and managed to stutter out: "G-good afternoon, sir!"

"Good-afternoon, Figgins—for the second time to-day!" returned the Housemaster of the New House, smiling a frozen smile on the dismayed St. Jim's junior. "I was not aware previously that it was your habit to emulate the beasts of the field by walking on all fours!"

"Well, sir—" groaned Figgins.

"Possibly you are about to tell me that you are carrying out my suggestion to study ornithology?" asked Mr. Ratcliff. "If so, Figgins, you may as well save your breath."

"As a matter of fact, sir—"

"As a matter of fact, Figgins, you have just come out of that evil den," said Mr. Ratcliff, indicating the Green Man, "after spending the best part of the afternoon in some nefarious gambling game. That, I take it, is the truth?"

"Not at all, sir!" flashed back Figgins. "I've never been in the rotten place in my life, and have no wish to enter it!"

"You dare to deny that you have been there for at least half an hour?" asked Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "Have a care, Figgins!"

"Well, I haven't, anyway!" growled Figgins. "I know it looks fishy—"

"It certainly looks remarkably 'fishy,' as you slangily term it. In fact, it looks so fishy that I intend to see the landlord of this disreputable hostelry and force him to tell me the precise facts!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Come!"

"But, sir—"

"Not a word, Figgins! You will accompany me to the inn, and we will see what your late host has to say in the matter."

And Ratty, not without a little difficulty, climbed over the low wall, and stamped off to the main entrance of the Green Man.

Figgins followed.

CHAPTER 6.

Pellon on Ossa I

"AFTERNOON!" was Mr. Joe Lodgey's greeting, when he opened the door in response to Mr. Ratcliff's knocking.

Figgins was relieved to see that he betrayed no sign of recognition.

Mr. Ratcliff ignored the salutation and went straight to his business.

"I believe you are the landlord of this—this establishment?"

"I'm the landlord of this 'ere hotel," corrected Mr. Lodgey. "Name of Joe Lodgey, sir. I'm afraid you're too early for a drink; Act of Parliament, you know, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned quite pink.

"How dare you! The idea that I should come here for refreshment!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Let me tell you, my man, that I am a master from St. James' School."

"Makes no difference to me, sir," declared Mr. Lodgey.

"Acts of Parliament 'ave to be observed, whether you're a schoolmaster or a farm'and. 'Fraid I can't serve you!"

"You are deliberately insolent!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I warn you that it will not pay you to trifle with me, my man. I have reason to believe that this boy has visited your premises this afternoon; I demand that you tell me all you know regarding that visit."

Mr. Lodgey stared at Mr. Ratcliff, apparently dumbfounded by the demand. Then he turned his gaze to Figgins and eyed that junior carefully from head to foot.

"Strike me pink!" he said, after he had concluded his examination.

"The truth, my man!" said Mr. Ratcliff impatiently. "I am waiting."

"You want the truth?" asked Mr. Lodgey. "The truth, the 'ole truth, and nothin' but the truth?"

"Yes, yes; please don't waste my time."

"Well then, you'll 'ave it, sir," said Mr. Lodgey. "An' when Joe Lodgey promises you the truth, you can rely on it. The truth is, sir, that I've never seen this 'ere young fellow before in my life!"

Figgins almost jumped! Fortunately he managed to repress himself in time.

Mr. Ratcliff glared at the innkeeper almost wolfishly.

"I do not believe it; you are shielding him!" he snapped. "Once again, my man, I warn you—"

"Look 'ere, mister, if you don't check that tongue of yours I shall start warnin' you!" said Mr. Lodgey grimly. "There's only one man ever called me a liar so far; they took 'im to Wayland Cottage Hospital!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Ratcliff, taking a hurried step backwards. "I—I did not actually imply that you were lying, my man. I merely suggested—"

"Well, you take my tip, mister, an' stop suggestin', or you an' me'll quarrel!" growled the landlord of the Green Man. "I tell you I never seen 'im before in my natural. Wot's more, I make it a strict rule never to allow school-boys in this 'ere hotel. See?"

"I really cannot believe—"

"Well, if you can't believe me, put up your dooks, an' we'll settle who's right in the old-fashioned way!" roared Mr. Lodgey.

With that he tore off his coat and rolled up his sleeves and put himself into a fighting position. Mr. Ratcliff uttered a shrill squeak of alarm.

"If you dare to touch me, you ruffian—"

"That's done it!" said Mr. Lodgey. "First I'm a liar, then I'm a ruffian; that's enough for me—put 'em up!"

"Look here—" said Figgins in alarm.

"You stand back, young 'un! Ready, you?" asked Mr. Lodgey, advancing on the trembling Housemaster.

"I utterly refuse—Yoooooop!" concluded Mr. Ratcliff, as the enraged landlord seized his nose with his thumb and forefinger and gave it a sudden savage tweak.

"Put 'em up!"

"I—Yooooop! Help! Police!" howled Mr. Ratcliff.

He didn't wait for more. Wrenching himself away from Mr. Lodgey's grasp, he turned tail and fled. Figgins, after a moment of hesitation, decided that the best thing to do was to follow him.

Mr. Joe Lodgey contented himself with shaking his fist after them from the doorway. When they had vanished among the trees he chuckled to himself and went indoors again.

In the lane Mr. Ratcliff turned on Figgins with an almost fiendish look in his face.

"Scandalous! Outrageous!" he snarled. "To think that I should be subjected to such vile indignities on your account!"

"But it wasn't my fault—"

"The fault, wretched boy, was entirely yours!" hooted the infuriated Housemaster.

"I do not believe a word uttered by that low ruffian. I believe, as I have always suspected, that you are a frequenter of the vile den he keeps, and I shall punish you accordingly!"

"Then, if you believe that, take me to the Head and see what he says!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "He'll believe me, if you won't!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "By adding impertinence to your other offences, Figgins, you are merely making matters worse for yourself. I do not propose to take you to the Head."

"I'm not afraid to see him, sir."

"Possibly not. You may hope to obtain from the Head a misplaced leniency which you would not get from me!" said Mr. Ratcliff savagely. "Be that as it may, I intend to give you another chance before I bring your disgraceful offences to his attention. Follow me."

Figgins retrieved his bike and wheeled it back to St. Jim's in silence. He felt he could hardly trust himself to argue further with a master so embittered and unreasonable as Ratcliff.

With Mr. Ratcliff in front and Figgins dolefully pushing

his machine in the rear, they marched through the gates of the school. A good many curious glances were cast at them, and as they proceeded towards the New House quite a crowd tacked on behind, anxious to know what was "on."

Tom Merry and a crowd of cricketers on their way back to tea from Little Side met the procession near the bike-shed. They stopped and stared.

"Anything wrong, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry in a stage-whisper.

Figgins shrugged expressively. At the same moment Mr. Ratcliff turned round. There was a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

"Silence, all!" he called out. "Doubtless some of you are wondering why I am leading Figgins back in this fashion. I think it perhaps wise, though it is an unusual step to take, to explain the reason."

"What the thump—" murmured Tom Merry.

"The fact is, boys," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I have just caught Figgins in the very act of leaving a disreputable inn, which is very properly placed strictly out of bounds—I refer to the hostelry known as the Green Man!"

"What!"



Just as Mr. Ratcliff thought he was clear of the window, a hand hooked into his collar and he was hauled back!

"Impossible!"

"Naturally, the idea fills you with revulsion. I trust that all of you experience that feeling," said Mr. Ratcliff, with one eye on Figgins to note the effect of his words. "You may wonder why I have adopted the course of informing you of this matter—"

"Bai Jove! It is wathah unexpected, Mr. Watchiff—"

"Precisely," nodded the Housemaster of the New House. "I will explain my motive in adopting this unusual and unexpected course, then. I have done it in Figgins' own interest—"

"Rot!" said Figgins, in tones that could be heard by all.

"So that he may be shamed into a more decent mode of living by the contempt he will justly receive from his school-fellows as a result of my revelation," said Mr. Ratcliff, ignoring the interruption. "That is the reason, my boys."

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It is done, you see, entirely with a view to Figgins' own good. Now, Figgins!"

"Sir!" said Figgins, regarding the astute Housemaster with a look that spoke volumes.

"I will leave you now to the well-merited scorn of your colleagues. I shall not cane you."

"Oh!" said Figgins, quite surprised at that information.

"I shall simply order you to remain within gates for the same period as I have forbidden you to play cricket," said Mr. Ratcliff. "In other words, Figgins, you are 'gated' for a period of three weeks and two days from to-day."

"What!"

"A lenient punishment, in all the circumstances, Figgins! That is all!"

And Mr. Ratcliff departed, that peculiar gleam still in his eyes and a peculiar smile on his face.

He left Figgins gripping the handlebars of his bike almost transfixed. Pelion was piled on Ossa now with a vengeance! The ban on cricket was bad enough; but Figgins had found at Wayland one way of making it tolerable. Now even that was cut off from him!

A crowd of juniors swarmed round him, plying him with questions.

Figgins hardly heard them.

No cricket at St. Jim's, no cricket at Wayland, and no chance even of getting beyond the gates for a walk or a bike-ride!

To Figgins it seemed like the last straw.

CHAPTER 7.

In the Lion's Den!

"F IGGIN'S—"

"Buzz off, Baggy!"

"Figgins—" said Bagley Trimble of the Fourth.

"Scat!"

"Figgins the blade!" yelled the Falstaff of the School House, triumphantly finishing what he had been trying to say. "Figgins the gay dog, you know! Ever heard anything like it? He, he, he!"

"You fat idiot—" said Tom Merry, detaching himself from the group that had been discussing cricket round the table in the Junior Common-room.

"Well, it's true, ain't it?" demanded Trimble indignantly. "Mellish told me—"

"Blow Mellish!"

"Mellish told me all about the scene Ratty created in the quad, and you can't get away from it!" roared Trimble. "Fancy Figgy, though, of all men! Figgy at the Green Man! He, he, he— Yaroooh! Wharrer you doing, you ass?"

"Banging your fat noddle against the table at the moment!" said Tom Merry grimly. "That's nothing to what I'll do if you say much more about Figgins!"

"Bai Jove! An' I'll help you, deah boy!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Figgins is one of the best, an' I shall wefuse to allow fat vottahs like Twimble to besmirch his name!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ow! You silly idiots!" snorted Trimble, rubbing his head and backing warily away from Tom Merry. "Who said I was besmirching his blessed name, anyway? I wasn't!"

"You were saying—"

"I was saying he'd been down to the Green Man on the ran-dan this afternoon," grinned Trimble. "So he has; I wasn't saying I disagreed with him!"

"Can it, Baggy!"

"Dry up, you fat chump!"

"I don't blame any man for having a bit of fun now and again!" declared the Falstaff, with a podgy smirk.

"Nothing namby-pamby about me; on the q.t., you chaps, I'm a bit of a goer when the going's good!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I admire Figgins for having the pluck to go into the place in broad daylight!" went on Trimble seriously. "Figgy's one of the best—quite agree with you there, Gussy!"

"You feahful idiot—"

"What's more," said the fatuous Falstaff of the Fourth, "Figgy's always been a pal of mine, really. We could hardly be otherwise, seeing things as we do, in the same light, and all that sort of thing. Figgy likes a plunge now and again, and I'm the same myself—"

"So you're both in the swim together?" suggested Monty Lowther solemnly.

And Trimble winked and nodded.

"Exactly!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dashed if I see anything to laugh at!" exclaimed Trimble peevishly. "Anyway, you can take it that I'm siding with my old pal Figgins in this bizney of going to the Green Man!"

"But there's no bizney of going to the Green Man, fat-head!" hooted Jack Blake. "It's all a yarn of Ratty's! Figgy said so."

Trimble grinned.

"He would. That's just to throw dust in your eyes—see? He'll have a different version for me. We'll talk together as one man of the world to another—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I shall soon know all about it," said Trimble confidently. "Probably I'll find he had a rare old time down there this afternoon. He'll tell me where he wouldn't tell you softies!"

"Why, you silly ass—"

"I dare say the champagne flowed like water," said Trimble, with a knowing wink. "There'd be billiards, of course, and cards—for heavy stakes, naturally—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And plenty of information flying round about gee-gees, for a cert!" said Trimble. "Thinking it over, I think I'll trot over to the New House and have a chat with him about it!"

"My hat! If you're going to talk that kind of rot, I'd advise you to stay over here!" remarked Herries. "Figgy takes a large size in boots, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble sniffed.

"Suppose you chaps are jealous because you haven't got the nerve to go out on the ran-dan like me and my old pal Figgins! Well, I can't help that, I suppose. I'm going across to see him, anyway!"

"Put on a suit of armour before you go, then, Baggy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" said the Falstaff of the Fourth; with which elegant valediction he rolled out of the Common-room.

He quitted the School House and crossed over to the New House building, intent now on seeing his old pal Figgins.

In point of fact, Trimble himself had never previously regarded Figgins as anything like a pal. But he was liable to flights of imagination on occasions, and having heard that Figgins had changed his point of view in one way he found it quite easy to imagine him changing it in another, and regarding Trimble with a much more friendly eye.

Trimble had always fancied himself as a gay dog. Now that Figgins had apparently decided to tread the primrose path, the Falstaff felt that the New House leader would be more likely to see eye to eye with him than he had in the past.

He entered the New House and rolled up the stairs to the junior quarters.

Reaching Figgins' study he tapped on the door and rolled in without waiting for an invitation.

Figgins was at home, talking with Kerr and Wynn. Apparently they were discussing weighty matters, for none of them seemed to have heard the knock or noticed Trimble's entry.

"I can't stand it, I tell you," Figgins was saying. "Being barred from cricket is bad enough; being gated as well makes it impossible. I've simply got to do something!"

"All very well, old man," said Kerr slowly. "The worst of it is I can't see what you can do."

"Ratty's all sorts of a rotter," put in Fatty Wynn. "But whatever he is, you can't ignore him, Figgy!"

Figgins stared moodily across the table.

"That remains to be seen," he said; then he suddenly recognised Trimble. "What the thump!"

"Hallo, hallo! What's this School House worm doing in a respectable part of the School?" asked Kerr. "Chuck over that stump, Fatty!"

"Pleasure!" grinned Fatty Wynn, reaching for the article in question. "Which way would you like to go out when we've finished with you, Trimble—down the stairs or out through the window?"

"Neither, you ass! It's pax!" yelled Trimble, in alarm, as Kerr made a threatening move. "I've come over to see my old pal Figgins!"

"What?"

"Your old pal whatter?" roared Kerr. "Oh, my hat! This is a new one on us, Figgy! Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins glared at the newcomers. After the incident in the quad he was in no mood to see the funny side of anything, and he certainly didn't feel overwhelmed with pleasure at the prospect of being considered an old pal of Trimble's.

"What's the game, you fat freak?" he demanded. "It is some weird jape—"

"Jape be blowed!" snorted Trimble. "I've come over as a pal, Figgy, old chap, for a little chat—about gee-gees, and so on, you know."

"Gee-gees?" hooted Figgins.

"Gee-gees!" nodded the Falstaff, with a fat wink. "And cards, of course, and billiards—"

"What in the name of goodness—"

"Now that old Ratty's rumbled you and the fellows all know I suppose you'll be barred in most circles," rattled on Trimble agreeably. "So I've trotted over to keep you company in your loneliness."

"M-m-my hat!"

"I'm not soft, like most of 'em here," explained Trimble, with a smirk. "I'm like yourself, Figgy—a bit of a goer, you know! Don't mind if I sit down, do you?"

"You—"

"Got any smokes?" went on Trimble cheerfully. "A cigarette'll do; but I prefer a good cigar if you happen to have one by you, old chap!"

"Why, you utter ass—"

"Now let's hear all about what happened this afternoon?" said Trimble, proceeding to make himself comfortable in the study armchair. "Don't be afraid of shocking me, old fellow. Take a lot to do that. I suppose you had plenty of fizz down at the Green Man— Here, what's up?"

"Collar the fat freak!" sang out Figgins.

Trimble uttered a yelp.

"What for, you ass? Don't you understand that I've come over for a chat? Between pals with the same tastes! Yoooop!"

The Falstaff's remarks tailed off into a howl.

During the succeeding five seconds he had no time for further explanations of the object of his visit.

Figgins & Co. yanked him out of the armchair, lifted him bodily in the air and rushed him across the study. After a brief pause to open the door they swung him round once, twice, and thrice. Then they let him go.

Trimble finished up with a crash and a bump several yards down the passage, howling fiendishly.

"Come back again whenever you feel like a friendly chat!" roared Figgins. "You'll always get the same hearty welcome."

"Whooop! Ow! Yooop!"

"Kick him down the stairs!" suggested Kerr.

Trimble didn't wait for that. He was on his feet and flying down the passage—before the New House juniors could get near him. And Figgins went back to his study feeling a little mollified.

Quite a crowd awaited Trimble's return on the School House steps, and there was a yell as he came limping into view.

"How's your old pal, Trimble?"

"Did you have a good talk about the gee-gees?"

"Ow! Figgins is a howling rotter!" groaned the Falstaff of the Fourth. "I wouldn't speak to the cad, if you jolly well paid me to now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

And Trimble limped into the House, still groaning. Apparently the ancient friendship between himself and Figgins had come to a sudden end.

CHAPTER 8. After Lights Out!

BOOM!

The first stroke of ten boomed out from the old clock at St. Jim's. George Figgins sat up in his bed in the Fourth dormitory in the New House.

"You fellows awake?" he called out softly.

Only the deep breathing of the juniors answered him.

Figgins waited for a few seconds, then slipped cautiously out of bed. He dressed hurriedly in the darkness, then paused before moving away.

"Anyone awake?" he whispered.

Still no answer.

Satisfied, the leader of the New House juniors tiptoed across the dormitory, noiselessly opened the door and went out.

There was a window at the end of the passage which

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overlooked the playing fields. Figgins stopped there, carefully opened it, then climbed out on to the sill.

Having closed the window again he let himself, hand under hand, down a rope which he had previously left there. He reached the ground level in safety.

Breathless he stood in the shadow of the building for half a minute, then, satisfied that he had not been observed, he walked quickly across the open space to the nearest trees, and kept in the shadows from that point down to the School wall.

There he made a dive underneath a rhododendron-bush, and dragged out a bicycle. It was the work of a few moments to stand the machine against the wall, climb on to the top, then haul it up, and lower it to the ground on the other side.

Within a minute of reaching the wall Figgins was pedalling away down the lane leading to Rylcombe.

Figgins had not begun this perilous nocturnal enterprise without first devoting a good deal of thought to it.

He was, in the usual way, quite a law-abiding citizen, not given to going out on the tiles. In the usual way there was no reason for his doing so.

The punishment which Mr. Ratcliff had given him, however, had placed him in a very unusual position. After a good deal of thought Figgins had decided that he was justified in taking unusual measures to meet it.

He had informed nobody of his decision. Kerr and Wynn, he knew, would have roundly condemned the move as being fraught with too much danger, so he kept his intentions even from them.

It was a little hard that he should have to deceive his own particular chums, and the leader of the New House juniors had felt by no means happy about it—hence the vague references about taking certain steps, which he had been making when Trimble had butted in earlier in the evening.

But he felt it was the wisest course. Kerr and Wynn would undoubtedly have taken forcible steps to prevent his breaking bounds that night, and that would have spoilt everything.

"Everything," of course, meant cricket practice at Robert Bailes' sporting establishment at Wayland.

Figgins had rung Bailes up during the evening, and ascertained that the nets remained open as long as any patrons remained. That fitted in with his requirements. He was debarred from cricket during the day at St. Jim's, and debarred also from openly visiting Wayland. But the only thing to stop him practising at night was the interference of a stray master or prefect, which was a sufficiently remote contingency to be "chanced."

Figgins felt a sense of grim exultation as he whirled along through the cool night air. Ratty had treated him unjustly. There was no doubt in his mind about that. But he had found a way of getting over Ratty, and he felt pleased about it.

He was soon at Wayland.

Bailes' establishment was quite busy, despite the lateness of the hour. There was a miniature golf course, and other similar attractions in the building, besides the cricket nets, and with all these to keep visitors interested, the place rarely closed before midnight.

Even the crickets nets still had their quota, the patrons being chiefly young fellows whose work kept them too late to permit of ordinary cricket practice during the week.

Bailes welcomed the St. Jim's junior with open arms, and was discreet enough not to inquire how he was able to be in Wayland at such an hour.

Figgins took a hand at bowling for a time, then, having warmed himself up to the game, went in to bat against a mixed collection of local players, and, occasionally, the proprietor himself.

After half an hour at the wicket he went on to bowl again.

The minutes sped by all too quickly. Figgins was enjoying himself.

It was getting near the midnight hour when at last he reluctantly gave it up and prepared to go. By that time the club was almost deserted.

"Coming again, sir?" asked Mr. Bailes, as he pocketed the fee which Figgins handed him. "We shall have some pretty hot bowlers here to-morrow afternoon."

Figgins shook his head.

"'Fraid I can't get here in the afternoon, and I expect I shall feel too tired to come in the evening. If it'll be all right the night after that, at the same time—"

"Right as rain, sir!"

"All serene, then! You can expect me then."

And the St. Jim's junior, with a farewell wave to the remainder of the cricketering circle, strode out.

He felt a little more guilty on the return journey than he had in coming. The hour was very late indeed now,

and if anything did go wrong at St. Jim's—if somebody found that he was missing—there would be trouble with a vengeance.

Ratcliff was just the suspicious kind of man to keep an eye on Figgins after lights out, to make sure that he was not taking advantage of the cover of night to leave the restricted area in which he had been ordered to remain during the day.

It was with a more rapidly beating heart that the New House junior scaled the school wall, dumped his bike again under the same rhododendron-bush, and returned to the New House.

The House was in darkness, and Figgins felt a little more confident as he climbed back through the window near the Fourth dormitory.

He closed the window softly behind him, and started tiptoeing down the passage towards the dorm.

Then came a sound that brought him up with a start, his heart thumping.

It was a footfall, coming from the opposite direction. Someone had just come up the stairs and was advancing towards him.

Figgins hugged the wall, hoping against hope that he would not be seen. But it was a vain hope. The footsteps of the newcomer quickened, and the familiar voice of Mr. Ratcliff rang out:

"Stop!"

CHAPTER 9.

A Rift in the Lute!

FOR a moment Figgins was almost paralysed.

Then he regained control of himself and thought quickly.

Mr. Ratcliff had not been able to recognise him in the dark; that much was certain. But if something wasn't done in a hurry the Housemaster would certainly do his best to find out who the nocturnal wanderer was.

Figgins darted back towards the window, pulling his cap well over his eyes as he did so.

Mr. Ratcliff ran after him, his glasses glinting in the faint reflection of starlight from the window.

"Stop!" he ordered. "You are cornered, whoever you are, and it is useless attempting to escape. Stop, I say!"

He reached out to grab his intended captive. Figgins dodged under his arm and eluded him.

Then a daring scheme entered the New House junior's head. There was an ornamental jardiniere standing on the window-ledge. At one time it had housed a palm, which had long since withered and died, leaving the jardiniere to remain on the ledge, fulfilling no purpose whatsoever.

Figgins saw a way in which it could serve a decidedly useful purpose to him now.

He grabbed the jardiniere as he flashed by the window.

Mr. Ratcliff, his blood roused by the unexpected opposition, fairly flung himself at the elusive night-bird; his hands descended heavily on Figgins' shoulders.

Figgins whirled round desperately. His hands, still holding the big bowl, flew up.

A moment later Mr. Ratcliff got the shock of his life. Something big and black and heavy came down on his head and over his ears, almost tearing the latter off in the process. Instinctively he let Figgins go and tried to wrench the thing off.

To his utter dismay, he could not shift it! Figgins had been fortunate in slipping it over just when Mr. Ratcliff's head happened to be in the ideal position for taking it. Mr.

Ratcliff found that, try as he might, he could not budge it an inch.

"Help! Rescue! Help!" shrieked the Housemaster of the New House.

At least, that was what it sounded like to himself, inside the jardiniere. His words, however, were rather bottled up by that awkward article, with the result that in the passage it merely sounded like a subdued mumble.

"Mmmmmmmmm!"

"My hat!" gasped Figgins.

His ruse had been more successful than he had dared to hope. Not only had he prevented Ratty from recognising him, he had also wedged him so well in the big bowl that he might easily have time to undress and get into bed before the Housemaster escaped!

Without another glance at the imprisoned Housemaster, Figgins raced over to the dormitory, entered, and started peeling off his clothes.

Somebody sat up in bed as he entered, and Redfern's voice called out in the darkness:

"Who's that? And what's on outside?"

"S-sh!" hissed Figgins, breaking all records for the quick-change act.

Several others began to stir. That was unfortunate, but it couldn't be helped, and it didn't matter half so much as being found out by Ratcliff.

"Great Scott! It's Figgy!" exclaimed Kerr from the other side of the dormitory. "What's on, Figgy?"

"No time for words now! Some other time perhaps!" snapped the leader of the New House juniors.

He got into his pyjamas at last, and slipped into bed.

Simultaneously the door of the dormitory was burst open.

The newcomer groped along the wall for the electric light switch. He found it and turned it on, and the dorm was flooded with light. Then came a yell from the New House Fourth.

"What the thump—"

"Ow! What is it?"

"Great pip!" yelled Redfern. "It's Ratcliff—Ratcliff, with that old vase stuck over his napper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar from the entire dormitory. In the peculiar circumstances Mr. Ratcliff could not see, and as likely as not could not hear them either, so they felt safe in letting themselves go.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat! Whoever did this deserves a vote of thanks!" chortled Lawrence. "Was it you, Figgy?"

"Mmmmmmmmm!" came a furious mumble from within the jardiniere. Mr. Ratcliff was evidently trying to call attention to himself.

"Well, we'll have to get him out somehow or other!" grinned Kerr. "Who'll volunteer to help?"

The Scottish junior and a number of others tumbled out and surrounded Mr. Ratcliff. They guided him to a chair and sat him down in it, then started heaving away at his inconvenient headgear. At first it looked as if they had started on a long job, for the jardiniere showed no signs of coming away.

Fortunately Ratcliff helped by coming away himself. He wasn't used to being tugged at by half a dozen hefty juniors, and he soon felt the strain of it. The result, eventually, was that he suddenly jerked completely off the chair and collapsed in a heap on the floor.

And that did it! There was a bump and a loud crash, and the jardiniere smashed into smithereens, leaving Mr. Ratcliff to sit up among the wreckage.

Would You Believe It?

6000 the marble statues adorn exterior and interior of Milan Cathedral.



The 'Rocket' was not the first steam locomotive! The first was tested at Merthyr Tydvil on February 21, 1804.



It was built to the designs of Richard Trevithick, a Cornish mining engineer.

A Burmese' footballer kicked a football barefooted to a distance of 166 feet 6 ins.



"Whooop!" roared Mr. Ratcliff, holding his hand to his head and staring dizzily round the dormitory.

"Hurt, sir?" inquired Owen sympathetically.

"Of course I am hurt!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "Never in all my life have I been so outrageously ill-used!"

"Why did you do it, sir?" asked French innocently.

"Was it for a wager?"

An explosion of wrath escaped the Housemaster.

"Dunderhead!" he roared. "Do you imagine, then, that this dreadful happening is my own doing? If so, dismiss the idea from your head at once! It is not!"

"Oh!"

"In point of fact," snarled Mr. Ratcliff, "I have been the victim of a savage and brutal attack by a boy whom I was in the act of apprehending for breaking bounds. I suspect that the boy in question comes from this dormitory. If so, I order him to own up at once!"

Mr. Ratcliff was optimistic if he expected that order to be obeyed. It wasn't, anyway.

The Housemaster of the New House glared wolfishly round the dormitory until his eyes lighted on Figgins, who was still in bed.

"Figgins!"

"Yes, sir!" said Figgins sleepily.

"I suspect that you are the culprit. Get out of bed at once, so that I may see whether you are in your night attire or not."

"Certainly, sir!" said Figgins, with a well-feigned look of surprise on his face.

He turned out of bed, and Mr. Ratcliff looked surprised and considerably disappointed to find him wearing his pyjamas instead of the trousers he had quite expected to see.

"Huh!" was Mr. Ratcliff's comment.

"May I get back into bed now?" asked Figgins. "I feel awfully tired, sir!"

"Very well!" snarled Mr. Ratcliff. "The rest of you will return to your beds also. I will make no more inquiries to-night, but I warn the guilty party that he has not heard the last of this episode!"

And Mr. Ratcliff stamped off, turning out the light before he went and slamming the door after him with a slam that echoed through the House.

Naturally, there was a row over it in the morning.

Mr. Ratcliff assembled the entire House and threatened all sorts of unpleasant things for everybody if his unknown assailant did not own up.

Figgins did not own up. The fortune of war had favoured him, and it was up to Ratty to find him out if he could; that was how Figgins looked at it.

So all Mr. Ratcliff's threatenings were in vain, and the day went on without the identity of the culprit being established.

But if it wasn't officially established, a good many juniors had a fair idea that Figgins was concerned in the affair, and curious looks were bestowed on the leader of the New House juniors during the course of the morning.

Figgins did not choose to explain matters. He even left Kerr and Wynn out in the cold still, knowing that his adventure overnight would meet with their disapproval.

There was a slightly strained atmosphere in Figgins' study as a consequence when Tom Merry came over at midday.

Tom had come to discuss a matter of some importance—

namely, Figgins' place in the team chosen to play Greyfriars on the approaching Saturday.

In view of the ban on Figgins playing cricket, it seemed useless to the junior captain to include Figgins' name on the list. He had come to explain that, in consequence, a substitute would be found.

Figgins, for once, did not find himself in agreement with Tom Merry. It was not like him to be unreasonable; but he had, as a matter of fact, become rather "touchy" over the whole thing.

"If you don't mind, Tom Merry, I'd rather you put me down," he said, when Tom had concluded.

"But, my dear fellow—"

"Oh, I know what you're going to say. On the face of it, it looks as if I shan't be able to play. All the same, something may turn up, and I'd like you to keep me on the list till the very last moment."

Tom Merry shrugged.

"Dashed if I see what can turn up, Figgy. Anyway, even if you can play at the eleventh hour, I don't know that I ought to play you in preference to fellows who are spending every spare minute at practice. You can't keep at the top of your form without practice, Figgy, and you know it."

Figgins frowned. For a moment he felt inclined to tell of his arrangements to practise at night in Wayland. But he checked himself.

"I shall be all right, take my word for it," he said. "I've never let you down yet."

"Agreed. But—"

"There's no sense in it this time, old scout," said Fatty Wynn. "You can't play in any case, so what's the use of going down on the list?"

"All the same, I should like Merry to include me," said Figgins doggedly.

"But—"

"Be reasonable, Figgy, old bean," urged Kerr. "After all, as Tommy says, you can't hope to be in form without practice."

"Further than that, since we've got so far," said Tom Merry, "there's a yarn going the rounds that you're breaking bounds at night. I'm not saying it's true; but if it is, I can tell you at once that a chap who's up half the night is not likely to be much good in a keen game of cricket."

"I tell you if I turn out against Greyfriars I shall be in tiptop form!" growled Figgins, without attempting to deny the suggestion that he had been breaking bounds at night. "I ask you, Merry, to put my name down. If I can turn out I'll be O.K."

Tom Merry pulled a wry face.

"All serene, Figgy. I must say you're taking a funny line; but you've been a good scout in the past, and I'll put your name down, though it seems daft to me."

"And to me," said Fatty Wynn.

So Figgins' name went down on the list, after all. But for the time being the circumstance gave him little consolation.

It seemed impossible that Ratcliff's ban should be lifted in time for the Greyfriars match; and, meanwhile, Figgins' strangely unreasonable attitude had caused a decided coolness to develop between him and Tom Merry & Co., and even his own chums.

There was a rift in the lute, and unless Figgins trod warily it looked like widening.

Facts from Far and Near.



John Bunyan, the tinker of Bedford, invented 444 places & people in his book, "The Pilgrim's Progress," which has been translated into 70 languages.

12 chicks from 11 eggs were recently hatched on a farm at Ludford in Lincolnshire.



A Rain of 'Pearls' at Secunderabad, India.



Quarts of the pearls were gathered by the delighted natives, but imagine their disappointment when the pearls turned out to be snails' eggs.

A MAGIC SQUARE

6	1	8
7	5	3
2	9	4

The numbers are so placed that all the columns add the same, horizontally, vertically and diagonally.

CHAPTER 10.

Ratty on the Track!

ON alternate nights during the remainder of that week Figgins went down to Bailes' nets and practised.

He was taking a grave chance now, and he knew it; but the knowledge did not stop him. Figgins' back was up, and at whatever cost he was grimly determined to keep up practice.

Mr. Ratcliff was prowling round the House on the night after his misadventure outside the Fourth dormitory, but everything was in order. On the night after that he gave it a miss, and Figgins got to Wayland and back without a challenge.

But Mr. Ratcliff had not given up the chase yet. He was convinced that someone in his House was breaking bounds at night, and he was intent on finding out who that "someone" was.

He patrolled the building again on the night when Figgins was not due at Wayland, without success. But he also ventured forth once more on the night after that.

Then at last his efforts were rewarded.

On this particular night he went cautiously from dormitory to dormitory, tiptoeing round the silent rooms and peering at each bed to make sure that it was occupied.

Eventually he arrived at the Fourth dorm, and in due course at Figgins' bed.

And there Mr. Ratcliff stopped.

The bed was empty.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled to himself in the darkness, and it was not a pleasant smile. He did not like Figgins. There was little in the sturdy, athletic, good-natured Figgins for a gentleman of Mr. Ratcliff's calibre to take a liking to. Since that little episode outside the Green Man, Mr. Ratcliff had made up his mind that Figgins was a frequenter of that dingy hostelry. Figgins' absence in the dead of night confirmed his suspicions.

The Housemaster went across to the door and switched on the light, and there was a stirring on the part of the New House Fourth.

"Hallo, hallo!" murmured Kerr sleepily. "What on earth—"

"Who the thump—"

"Whazzamatter?"

Mr. Ratcliff held up his hand for silence.

"I am sorry to have to disturb you at this hour of the night, boys, but I have an inquiry to make of you. On looking into the dormitory a moment ago I found that Figgins is missing."

"Oh crikey!"

"Where is he?"

"That, my boys, is the question I have to ask you," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Does any boy in the room know where Figgins has gone?"

There was silence on the part of the Fourth. Some of the fellows looked to Kerr and Wynn; but Figgins' chums, who were looking deeply troubled, only shook their heads.

"Kerr, do you know anything of Figgins' movements? Or you, Wynn?"

"No, sir."

"He came to bed with the rest of us," said Kerr. "Perhaps he felt ill, or something, and went on the roof for fresh air."

Mr. Ratcliff smiled again.

"An ingenious suggestion, Kerr; but I am tempted to think that you make it with the object of shielding Figgins. In that object you will not succeed."

Kerr shrugged. He hadn't really had much hope of getting over the hard-boiled Ratcliff so easily.

"My own belief," said Mr. Ratcliff, "is that Figgins has left the school premises for the purpose of visiting that infamous resort where I caught him a few days back. I intend to find out for myself whether I am correct or not. You may go to sleep again, boys."

With that Mr. Ratcliff turned out the light and quitted the room, leaving the New House Fourth not sleeping but buzzing with excitement.

Fairly exulting at the thought of the coup he looked like bringing off, the Housemaster went downstairs, slipped on his hat and a light overcoat, and left the House.

Had he been a better student of human nature and of his own pupils, he would not have been so sure that Figgins had left St. Jim's to visit the Green Man. But Mr. Ratcliff was too self-centred and unsympathetic to understand the juniors in his charge, and he felt convinced that it was the Green Man that had drawn Figgins out that night.

He made up his mind that there should be no lack of proof this time, as on the previous occasion. He would catch the erring junior red-handed, if he had to break into the place like a burglar to do it.

And that, curiously enough, was what Mr. Ratcliff finished up by doing.

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When he arrived at the Green Man the blinds of the inn were all drawn, and though Mr. Ratcliff peered in every window where a light was showing, he could not get a glimpse of what was going on inside.

From one of the rooms he heard the sound of money chinking, and a burst of laughter. He guessed that a game of cards was in progress, and wondered whether Figgins was one of the players. But he could not see into the room.

Desperately anxious to know whether his quarry was within, the St. Jim's master eventually went to the back of the building. There, to his delight, he found one of the windows open.

It should have occurred to Mr. Ratcliff that it was rather peculiar for a window on the ground floor of what was evidently a little-used part of the house to be open at such



an hour. But Mr. Ratcliff, in his anxiety to catch Figgins, did not consider that aspect of it.

He climbed cautiously through the window and crept stealthily down the passage towards the room where the card-playing was in progress.

The sound of a soft footfall on the stairs stopped his progress. He stood in the passage palpitating as he suddenly realised what had not occurred to him before—that he was a trespasser, and therefore a lawbreaker.

Mr. Ratcliff had no time to consider his position in greater detail.

There was another footstep on the stairs, then a big shape suddenly loomed up before the master from St. Jim's.

Involuntarily, Mr. Ratcliff uttered a gasp. Then the shape advanced on him, and he suddenly felt a pair of broad, sinewy hands close round his throat.

Mr. Ratcliff was no fighter. But so great was his terror

that he fought now like a maniac. His fist crashed on to the face of his unknown adversary, and the man relaxed his hold for a moment. Mr. Ratcliff took advantage of the respite to emit a yell.

CHAPTER 11. Ratty's Getaway!

"HELP!"

George Figgins started. He had finished another midnight practice, and was cycling through Rylcombe on his way back to St. Jim's, when the cry fell on his ears. Figgins slowed down and dismounted.

He looked in the direction of the sound, and found himself facing the Green Man, almost from the exact spot where he had dismounted on the occasion when he had found Mr. Ratcliff shadowing Cutts.

Strangely enough, the voice he had just heard reminded him somewhat of Ratcliff's. But that, of course, was impossible. The idea of the Housemaster being in the Green

car. "Get out of the road, you, or I'll smash you! -We're in a hurry!"

"So am I; but I've got time to wait and clear this up!" retorted the St. Jim's junior. "You may be all right, but you look a jolly fishy pair to me—"

"Knock the cub aside!" snarled the driver. The other man made a rush and hit out with a blow that would have felled an ox.

Figgins jumped aside just in time, and hit back. Nick, in the driver's seat, gave a yell of rage.

"What's up with you, Bret? You'll have the marks here in a minute! Knock him down and I'll drive over him!"

It dawned on Figgins that he had run into a couple of pretty desperate rogues. But he didn't give up the fight.

From the Green Man came the sound of confused shouting and scuffling. Nick and Bret heard it, and acted quickly. The first jumped out of the driver's seat and leaped on Figgins from behind, and his companion slogged out and almost stunned the St. Jim's junior with a blow to the jaw.

Figgins collapsed in the road. But he was not beaten yet. Even as the car started forward he staggered to his feet again and jumped on to the running-board, aiming a blow at the driver as he did so.

The car lurched across the road and came into collision with Figgins' bike. From the two crooks came a chorus of hair-raising oaths.

"Get the cub into the car and settle him as we go along!" said Nick, as he reversed.

"Bring his pushbike, too, then; if we leave it there we'll have all the marks in the county after us!"

Nick nodded and jumped out again to retrieve Figgins' bike, while Bret closed with his schoolboy adversary and dragged him into the car.

A couple of seconds later the car leaped forward, and they were roaring up the road towards Wayland.

Meanwhile, in the Green Man, Mr. Ratcliff from St. Jim's was getting more excitement than he had dreamed of experiencing when he set out from the school that night.

In the hands of the unknown individual who had come down the stairs he had fought like a wildcat. He had managed to call out twice; but each time those sinewy hands had closed over his throat again and silenced him.

Mr. Ratcliff struggled furiously in the darkness. Then, suddenly, he felt himself released and flung aside. He crashed to the floor in a heap, and his assailant fairly flew down the passage to the window by which the St. Jim's master had entered—and which, incidentally, he himself had forced before that.

Gasping, Mr. Ratcliff scrambled up again and looked dizzily round him. Why he should have been attacked so violently was altogether beyond him. Even if his adversary had suspected him of being a burglar, there was no occasion for the use of such force. That the boot was on the other foot—that his aggressor was a burglar who took Mr. Ratcliff for the householder—rather naturally did not occur to him.

Mr. Ratcliff, dizzily wondering why the man had left him so suddenly, bolted for the open window.

As he did so the door of the room where the card game had been in progress opened, and a sharp beam of light fell across the passage. There was a noisy clamour of voices.

"What is it, Joe—burglar?"

"I'll give 'im burglar if it is!" roared the familiar voice of Mr. Joe Lodgey. "Gimme that gun that's 'anging on that there wall, somebody!"

"Ere you are, Joe!"

Mr. Ratcliff uttered a silent prayer and jumped out on the sill. But there was a rush of feet behind him before he could touch the earth, and rough hands grabbed him by the shoulders, the scruff of the neck, and even the ears.

"Got 'im!"

"Ere you are, Joe! Shall I ring for the police?"

"Wait till I've 'orsewhipped 'im first!" roared Joe Lodgey, to Mr. Ratcliff's terror. "The coppers can 'ave what's left of 'im afterwards!"

In sheer terror Mr. Ratcliff gave a violent wrench away from his captors.

For once luck was with him. The light coat which he had put on when he left St. Jim's came off, and Ratcliff slipped out of it and made a dash.

From Mr. Lodgey and his friends came a roar of dismay.

That roar was sufficient to inspire Mr. Ratcliff to superhuman efforts to get back to St. Jim's before his pursuers. He had never previously been noted for athletics, but now he put up a performance that would not have disgraced a champion on the cinder track.

Mr. Lodgey and his friends didn't stand an earthly. They gave up the chase before they were out of sight of the Green Man, and returned to the inn for the purpose of

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A brick smashed the window Figgins fairly dived off the top of 'he car on to the raider's back!

Man at this, or any other hour if it came to that, was enough to bring a smile to Figgins' face.

"Help!" There it was again! Figgins pushed his bike round the bend in the lane with the intention of finding out what was wrong.

He almost bumped into a big car which was standing at the side of the lane, its engine running, without a light to give warning that it was there.

Figgins began to scent something wrong. He went to the front of the car.

Simultaneously a dark figure seated in the driver's seat leaned out, and another figure came rushing across the green from the inn.

Figgins dropped his bike into the road. There wasn't much doubt about there being something wrong now.

There was a shout from the running figure.

"Get her going, Nick! I've had a fight to get out!"

"Half a minute!" said Figgins, planting himself in front of the big car.

The man in the driver's seat uttered a threatening yell.

"Out of the way, kid, before I run you down!"

"I'm stopping here for a while, thanks!" said Figgins coolly. "What's your game, anyway?"

"Who's this?" demanded the other man, approaching the

consoling their host, who, as it turned out, had lost nearly a week's takings and his entire collection of jewellery, which, though somewhat flashy in appearance, was worth a considerable sum in cash.

Mr. Ratcliff, minus his hat and coat, arrived back at the New House at St. Jim's in due course, and was very thankful to have come through the ordeal with a whole skin.

So tired and worn-out was he that he temporarily forgot all about Figgins, and did not even go up to the dormitory to see whether that junior had returned.

Had he done so, his visit would have been a fruitless one. Figgins had not returned, and when the morning came and rising-bell was ringing out over the old school, the leader of the New House juniors was still missing.

CHAPTER 12.

With Gyves on His Wrists!

"GONE!"

"Eh?"

"Figgins has gone, I tell you!" yelled Trimble, threading his way through to the front of the crowd, which had gathered before the notice-board in the Hall to read the names of the selected Junior Eleven taking part in the match next morning. "Vanished, you know—mizzled—bunked—vamoosed!"

"Rot!"

"But it's true!" hooted the Falstaff of the Fourth, his podgy face red with excitement. "He went out on the tiles last night—"

"What, again?"

"Change the record, Baggy; we've heard that one before!"

"Well, he did, anyway!" snorted Trimble. "He went out, I tell you, and Ratty went out after him,"

"My hat!"

"Probably he saw Ratty and got funky," grinned Trimble. "Whatever it is, Ratty came back without him, and Figgins is still missing. Good job, too!"

"What!"

"Jolly good job!" chuckled the Falstaff of the Fourth. "The rotter slung me out when I went over to talk to him as a pal, and I've got no sympathy with him now. If he gets expelled, jolly good—ow-wow-ow! Whooop!"

Trimble's expression of opinion ended up in a wild howl,

as Tom Merry and Jack Blake and one or two others upended him and rolled him on the floor.

"Can it be true?" asked Tom Merry, having thus helped in disposing of Trimble.

"Sounds pretty wild; but after what we've been hearing the last day or so, it won't be altogether startling," said Blake. "Here's Kerr and Wynn. Ask them!"

Figgins' two chums came over in response to the School House juniors' hail. Their expressions were serious.

"Any truth in this yarn about Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

"'Fraid there is," answered Kerr gloomily. "Ratty woke us all up last night to ask where he'd gone, and he certainly wasn't in bed then. So far, he hasn't turned up."

"Bai Jove! I can hardly believe that Figgy—"

"I can't believe that there's anything wrong with Figgy from beginning to end!" interrupted Kerr passionately. "He's done no wrong. Goodness knows why he broke bounds at all; but there's nothing rotten behind it, I feel sure."

"Nem. con., old bean!" said Tom Merry. "But why on earth hasn't he come back?"

"There can only be one reason—he met with foul play somewhere last night."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well, that's the only possible solution," said Kerr.

"Even if he knew he'd got to face the music over the affair, Figgy wouldn't shirk the issue. That wouldn't keep him away."

"Well, I should say not, from what I know of Figgy. But—"

"But what kind of foul play do you suspect, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus. "If he'd been wun ovah, or something, we'd have been informed by the police."

Kerr nodded.

"Suppose we should. But I'm jolly sure something fishy has happened to him. Ratty's gone to the Head about it; I suppose that's all that can be done for the present."

That was all that could be done as far as the juniors were concerned, anyway, for the bell went for morning lessons soon after.

After lessons, a big crowd gathered in the vicinity of the Head's study to glean news. It was quickly learned that Figgins was still missing.

Mr. Ratcliff came along from the Fifth Form room, and went into the Head's room for a consultation, glaring at the crowd as he did so.

"Ratty doesn't look any too pleased about it, anyway!" remarked Blake. "Wonder what happened to him last night. Looks as if he'd been in a rough-house. Hallo, here's old Crump!"

There was a buzz of interest as P.-c. Crump, the village constable from Rylcombe, piloted his portly presence through the main door of the House. The juniors surrounded him and plied him with eager questions.

"Any news, Crump?"

"Heard anything of old Figgins yet?"

"Horder, there, everybody!" puffed the village policeman. "Which I ain't come 'ere about no missing school-boy; it's something more important than that. Anyone know a feller called Ratcliff?"

"The Housemaster of the New House!" said Tom Merry. "Yes, he's in the Head's study over there. What about him?"

P.-c. Crump blinked solemnly at the junior captain of St. Jim's.

"Which 'e's a master, is 'e? Well, that don't make no difference to me. I've come 'ere to arrest 'im!"

"What!"

It was a yell from the crowd; in fact, it was more like a shriek than a yell. The fellows crowded round P.-c. Crump in incredulous amazement.

"Arrest Ratty?" yelled Tom Merry, almost transfixed.

"But—but what—"

"I 'old a warrant for the arrest of 'Orace Ratcliff, for burglary at the Green Man, Rylcombe, last night," said Mr. Crump pompously. "You say 'e's over there?"

"Yes, but you can't—"

"Surely, deah boy, there must be—"

"I'll do my dooty, whoever Mr. Ratcliff may be!" said the worthy constable, and having jammed his helmet a little more tightly on his head, he strode across to the Head's room, and rapped on the door, while the buzz from the crowd swelled to a roar of excitement.

"Ratty, you know!"

"Ratty—to be arrested for burglary!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

P.-c. Crump, in response to the Head's invitation, "Come in!" entered the study, leaving the door wide open after him. The excited crowd surged towards it, almost frantically with excitement.

"'Orace Ratcliff!" they heard P.-c. Crump say solemnly, "I 'old a warrant for your arrest—"

The Thrills of This Year's ROYAL TOURNAMENT



Vividly described by pen and picture in this week's issue of MODERN BOY—the boy's paper with the finest fiction. There are also other interesting features in this number including splendid stories by

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"What!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff, his eyes almost bolting out of his head.

"For feloniously enterin' the premises of Joseph Lodgley, licensed victualler, of Rylcombe, and stealing sundry articles, a list of which I 'ave in my possession. I arsk you, 'Orace Ratcliff,'" said Mr. Crump, "to come quietly."

"I—I—you—you—" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"I also warn you that anything you say may be taken down an' used in evidence agin you. Now, sir, if you're ready—"

Apparently Mr. Ratcliff was not ready. He jumped back from the village constable as if he had suddenly been electrified.

"Dolt! Imbecile! Fool!" he shrieked. "If you dare to lay a hand on me—"

"Ho! Like that, is it?" asked P.-c. Crump grimly, and he produced a pair of metal articles that jingled in his hand. "In that case, Ratcliff—"

"Handcuffs!" murmured Jack Blake faintly, from the doorway. "Hold me up, somebody!"

"Oh, scissors!"

"Ratty with the bracelets on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Those who were out of range of the Head's eyes, yelled. Nobody believed, of course, that Mr. Ratcliff had really been guilty of burglary. But the Housemaster of the New House had never been popular, and his unpopularity found expression, now that this extraordinary trouble had descended on him.

The Head started to his feet as P.-c. Crump made a move in Mr. Ratcliff's direction.

"Mr. Crump!" he said sharply. "I ask you to explain yourself. Mr. Ratcliff is a trusted master here, and the suggestion that he has committed a burglary is preposterous. What is the meaning of your intrusion?"

The village constable, somewhat awed by Dr. Holmes' majestic presence, paused.

"Very sorry, sir, if I'm intrudin'," he said. "But dooty is dooty, and master or no master, I 'old a warrant for this man's arrest. Wot's more, I intend to hexecute it!"

"Good old Crump!" murmured Cutts, from the back of the crowd.

Mr. Ratcliff, from the far corner of the Head's study, let out a shrill yell of protest.

"The man's a fool! This egregious mistake is probably the result of his imbecility—"

"Which you ain't allowed to use langwidge about officers of the Force, Ratcliff!" said P.-c. Crump sharply. "You come along with me, an' none of your 'anky-panky! 'Ear me?"

It was very evident that Mr. Ratcliff's injudicious remarks had aroused the ire of the worthy officer. He made a ponderous rush at his intended prisoner.

Mr. Ratcliff dodged.

"Mr. Ratcliff—officer—" gasped the Head.

"Which this 'ere man's resistin' arrest!" panted P.-c. Crump. "I must arsk you, Dr. 'Olmes, in accordance with my powers as an officer of the p'lice, to 'elp me overpower 'im!"

Dr. Holmes almost fell down at the shock of the request. But he knew that the constable was quite within his legal rights to call on private individuals to assist him as required, and somehow he managed to grab Mr. Ratcliff as he passed.

"Mr. Ratcliff—sir!" he gasped. "For the sake of peace and quietness, I must ask you to surrender to the officer—nay, I order it!"

"I refuse!" croaked Mr. Ratcliff. "There is a ghastly mistake, and I absolutely— Oh! Ah! Oh!"

There was a snap and a click, and the Housemaster suddenly found that he was securely handcuffed to the left arm of P.-c. Crump. Horace Ratcliff, M.A., was, without a shadow of doubt, under arrest!

His face almost green, Mr. Ratcliff was led through the House down to the Head's car, which had been hastily brought round to save the crowning humiliation of his being marched, handcuffed, down to the village.

The car drove away, and St. Jim's was left howling with a mixture of amazement and amusement. Mr. Ratcliff under arrest for burglary! It seemed that the only fit and proper thing to happen now was for the skies to fall!

CHAPTER 13.

Well Done, Figgins!

MEANWHILE, George Figgins was lying, bound hand and foot, in a little room forming part of a separate flat over an empty shop in the poorer part of Wayland.

The flat was evidently the residence of Messrs. Nick and Bret during their stay in Wayland. The furniture was

primitive, consisting as it did of a couple of camp-beds, a table, and some boxes. The other contents were intriguing to look at, but rather beyond Figgins' ken. They consisted, as a matter of fact, of various implements and apparatus used in opening safes.

"Curse the kid!" were the first words Figgins heard spoken when he awoke from a troubled sleep in the morning.

Looking up, the St. Jim's junior saw his hosts regarding him with far from favourable eyes.

Nick and Bret were not very agreeable gentlemen to look upon. The first-named was a thick-set, low-browed young man with yellow, shifty eyes; his companion was tall and rather drooping, with a hook nose and protruding teeth that gave him a peculiarly malevolent appearance.

Figgins nodded to them quite calmly.

"Good-morning!" he remarked.

"Not so much lip!" growled Nick. "Unless you're mighty careful, there won't be many more good mornings for you—nor bad ones, either, if it comes to that!"

"Why couldn't you have minded your own business last night, you young fool?" inquired Bret, with a scowl.

Figgins smiled.

"When a couple of dirty, low-down crooks are trying to get away from the place they've burgled, it's anybody's business! I thought I'd make it mine, anyway!"

"Like that, eh?" snarled the crook. "You run to lip, by the look of it, my fine bird! You'll find it'll pay to keep a little quieter with us, though. Take that, to go on with!"

He aimed a vicious kick at the captive, and Figgins uttered a sharp cry of pain.

"Better put something round his mouth again before he fetches up the marks!" suggested Nick. "Curse the young fool for his interference! There's only one thing for it now, Bret. We clear out."

"Mighty sure we can't stay on in the district entertaining this packet of trouble!" growled the other, as he bound a cotton scarf round Figgins' mouth. "Nothing else to be done that I see. We'll quit to-day, if you like."

"And leave this school kid here?"

"Why not? The cops are scouring the town for him by this time. They'll find him sooner or later. What worries me is that we're going without having a cut for those sparklers in the shop-window in the High Street."

Nick chuckled.

"No need to worry, my buck; we can grab the only thing worth taking as we pass. There's a diamond ring in that window worth every penny of a thousand pounds. I'll be satisfied to get that."

Bret seemed to hesitate.

"I'm not too keen on the snatching game. It's risky."

"Bah! It's a sleepy old place!" said Nick contemptuously. "We'll be half-way to the Big Smoke before they realise they've had a brick through their window. We've got a good car, haven't we?"

"Well, I won't crib, then; have it your way."

Figgins, listening, chafed at his enforced inactivity. How he would have liked to turn the tables on these two scoundrels in time to prevent their carrying out the smash-and-grab raid they were planning!

It seemed very unlikely that he would be able to accomplish anything at that moment. Bound and gagged as he was, it looked as though nothing short of a miracle could do it.

But Figgins was an optimist, and, in spite of the blackness of the outlook, he looked for an opening, however small it might be.

Nick went out to fetch the car from the place where it had been garaged for the night. It was while his companion was in another room that Figgins had a brainwave.

Among the apparatus and other stuff littered about the floor was a bottle which Figgins suspected, from the somewhat unpleasant odour it gave off, to contain acid.

In this conjecture he was right. The bottle was filled with a powerful acid used by Nick and Bret in the course of their illegal activities for boring through steel doors.

As the remaining crook seemed busily engaged in packing in the adjoining room, Figgins made up his mind to try to upset the bottle, with the idea that some of the liquid might trickle along to his hands and burn through the cord that tied his wrists.

He rolled over as far as he could, so that his bound hands were just beside it; then, with a sudden, sharp movement, tried to upset the bottle.

At first he was unsuccessful, but after one or two tries, he was overjoyed to feel it tip sideways. Pressing his hands to the floor, he waited, hardly daring to hope that success would crown his efforts.

For a time, nothing happened, then Figgins felt a tingling sensation against his flesh, and knew for certain that the acid was flowing along the floor.

He tugged at his bonds with all his might. There was a sudden weakening in them. Then they parted, and his hands came away, quite free.

Immediately afterwards there was the sound of a motor engine in the street below, and soon after that Nick came up the stairs and entered the room.

Figgins kept his hands behind him as though they were still bound, and to his great relief the crook hardly glanced at him.

"You ready, Bret?" he asked. "We've no time to waste. I hear the narks are out for this school kid already."

"O.K.!" I've got most of the stuff packed. What about the tools?"

"Take what we can, and leave the rest to the next tenant!" chuckled Nick. "Get a move on, anyway!"

He opened a big leather bag, and started piling the "tools" into it.

Figgins' heart was in his mouth lest they should discover what he had done; but, fortunately, they were in a hurry and did not notice the overturned acid bottle.

At last they were off.

Before they reached the bottom of the stairs Figgins was sitting up tearing away frantically at the cord round his ankles.

Quick action was wanted now, that was obvious. The two crooks had a powerful car, and it was their intention to make one smash-and-grab raid on the jeweller's shop in Wayland High Street, then clear out of the town.

There was no time to warn the police. The only thing to do was to chip in himself.

Figgins stood upright at last, free to act. Aching and cramped as he was, he did not delay for a moment, but rushed to the window to see what was happening below.

Nick and Bret had loaded up the car with their luggage and were just about to move off. It was a saloon type of car, and looking down on it, Figgins realised that there was just the chance that he could jump on and remain on until he attracted help.

The engine was beginning to hum. It was now or never! With desperate haste Figgins flung up the window and climbed out.

Another second and he had taken the jump. He landed, sprawling over the top, just as the car moved off.

Followed a quick run through several streets. Messrs. Nick and Bret, unaware that they had a fellow-traveller, were making straight for the High Street.

But if the crooks were unaware of the circumstances, the townsfolk of Wayland were not! Crowds stared at the unusual sight of someone hanging grimly on to the top of a swiftly moving car, and very soon a procession of push-bikes, motor-bikes, and other cars was following.

They entered the High Street at last, and Figgins saw the jeweller's shop looming up before him.

The car slowed up. One of the doors opened, and Bret leaped out, a brick in his hand.

Crash!

With a splintering crash the brick went through the plate-glass window. Simultaneously the crooks' unknown guest fairly dived off the top of the car on to the raider's back.

"Got you!" roared Figgins, as he felt Bret stagger and collapse under him. And his fist smashed into the face of the astonished crook, knocking him almost senseless. Then Figgins jumped up again and pointed to the raider's companion, who was just about to start up. "Stop him!" he yelled.

Another car and a motor-bike flashed by and drew across the road to cut off the crooks' escape, and from the rear several more motorists who had been following stopped to make a barrier.

"Trapped!" snarled Nick from the driver's seat. "The school kid's beaten us, after all!"

And it was so. Within a couple of minutes Nick and Bret were being taken to the police station in the custody of several burly policemen. Figgins had turned the tables with a vengeance!

CHAPTER 14.

All Serene!

"O H dear!"

Thus Mr. Ratcliff.

The hapless Housemaster had spent the best part of half an hour in Wayland Police Station, threatening and cajoling and pleading with Inspector Skeat.

It was all to no effect. The inspector, though startled to think that a St. Jim's master should be concerned in a burglary, felt that the circumstances were sufficiently suspicious to warrant his detaining Mr. Ratcliff.

"Take the prisoner to the cells!" he snapped, having informed Mr. Ratcliff of his decision, and a groan of utter misery burst from the St. Jim's Housemaster.

But proverbially the darkest hour is before the dawn, and even as that groan left Mr. Ratcliff's lips there was a sudden babel from the street, the tramp of many footsteps sounded up the stone steps leading into the station; and a small army of policemen came into view, with two scowling young men in their midst.

Finally Mr. Ratcliff's astonished eyes lighted on George Figgins.

Figgins, naturally, was astonished to find his Housemaster in such a place, and more astonished still when he found him to be under arrest.

"What on earth, sir—" he gasped.

"So it is you, Figgins!" moaned Mr. Ratcliff. "My dreadful position is all the result of your nocturnal excursion. I am arrested for the preposterous crime of burglary at that loathsome hostelry at Rylcombe last night!"

"The Green Man?" gasped Figgins, suddenly realising what must have happened. "Then in that case, sir, it's all right!"

"On the contrary, Figgins, it is the reverse of all right. Solely owing to your iniquitous—"

"But it is all right, sir!" yelled Figgins. "It's all right for a very good reason; I've got the two fellows who broke into the Green Man last night here at the present moment!"

"What!"

"Quite true, sir," grinned the sergeant, who had followed Figgins in. "This young gent deserves a medal for wot he's done."

"And you mean to say that these two men are the real thieves?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"No doubt about it, sir! We've got all the stuff they took from the Green Man in a car outside, so there's not much question we've got the right ones."

"What's more, I can give all the evidence that's wanted," said Figgins.

And he proceeded to recount to the inspector and an interested audience the whole story.

Mr. Ratcliff listened, open-mouthed. When Figgins had finished the St. Jim's master almost embraced him.

"Figgins! My brave boy!" he murmured. "Thanks to you I am saved! You have acted wonderfully—magnificently! No words of praise can be adequate to describe your noble deeds!"

"Oh crikey!" said Figgins to himself. Aloud, he said: "I want to explain why I broke bounds as I did, sir."

He explained: Mr. Ratcliff listened to his explanation, with a beaming smile.

"The whole thing is overlooked, my boy," he said. "What

Next Week's Fine Programme!

"TERROR FROM THE EAST!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

A Thrilling Long Complete Yarn of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's!

"The

ROOKWOOD 'SCREEN' STAR!"

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Another Ripping New Complete Yarn of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood!

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And Other Splendid GEM Features!

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(Continued at foot of next page.)

Meet the GEM'S Walking Encyclopedia!



Now that summer's here the Oracle's brain is in full flower! He can answer just any question you like to ask! Try him and see!—Ed.

I BOUGHT a nice straw hat over the week-end, chums, seeing the weather was so summery, and when I turned up in it the old Ed. burst into loud guffaws. "If you wear that in the office," said he, "I'll stop your money." "I don't give two straws what you stop," I retorted, "you're not going to stop me keeping my brains cool."

The old Ed. agreed that the office-boy was hot-headed enough, and I ought to keep the napper cool if poss. "There's a reader in Reading," he continued, picking up a letter, "wants to know how many rooms there are in Buckingham Palace? Can you run along and count 'em, d'you think, before lunch?"

"No need to do that, Ed.," said I. "I can tell you right now how many rooms there are in the Palace—209. Ten of these rooms are the King's private apartments, and nine are the Queen's. Besides these, there are 46 bed-rooms and 5 kitchens, and 30 rooms forming the State apartments."

"Can you tell Joe Kings what a cummerbund is?"

"I can, Ed. A cummerbund is a waist-belt, worn in India round the middle to protect the body against changes of temperature. It's usually made of muslin or brightly coloured cloth."

"There's another letter here, Whiskers, with a query about the Lord Mayor's coach. Tom Haslop wants to know whether the Lord Mayor always used a coach in the Lord Mayor's Show?"

affair with gold knobs on it, so to speak, which cost over £10,000. This very expensive conveyance was used until 1896, when a copy of it was used in its place."

"What were press-gangs?" fired the Ed.

"Bodies of officers and men who, in the old days, arrested deserters from the Navy, and forced able-bodied men to join. Conditions at sea were so bad at one time that that was the only way they could get recruits. The men who were pressed by the press-gangs into Naval service were sent to the guard ships."

"What were the guard ships, old 'un?"

"Usually the flagship of the admiral. A guard boat in the Navy nowadays is a boat which goes the round of the fleet at anchor to see that proper watch is kept at night."

"Jack Wiggins asks if it's true that locusts grow on trees. I always thought locusts were a sort of insect," added the Ed., looking up with a puzzled expression on his handsome features. (It's all right, chums, he's not handsome really, but I might get a bit extra for putting that in.) Anyway, I soon explained all about locusts to the Ed.

"It's like this, sir," I told him. "Jack isn't referring to the locusts that fly in swarms over the fields out East and devour the crops. Jack Wiggins is talking

about the locusts you can buy in the sweet-stuff shops to eat. They are the pods of the locust-tree, otherwise known as the carob tree. These trees grow in Spain and along the Mediterranean, and in Sicily they make a sweet syrup from them."

"Can you tell a Brondesbury reader why soldiers call tea 'char'?"

"The word 'char,'" said I, "is the Portuguese for tea. If you were in Lisbon or any other Portuguese town, and you asked for char, you would get a cup of tea. The word got used by our soldiers in India—they probably picked it up through the Portuguese colonists."

"Who were the Cyclopes?" was the Editor's next brain-teaser.

"The Cyclopes," said I, "were a race of giants who were supposed, according to the old Greeks, to live in caves, and were said to have only one eye."

"What's a redan?"

"A redan is a type of fortification, built in the shape of a V, with the open end behind the defending troops, and the two sloping sides at a salient to the enemy."

"What's a puffin?"

"A sea-bird, Ed., found on the coasts of England during the spring and summer. Their plumage is glossy black on the top part, and white underneath, and they present a rather comical appearance on account of their large flat bills. They used to be salted and sold as food years ago, but to tell the truth I've never bought a pound of puffin, and I don't know what it tastes like. These puffins are known by various names in different parts of the country. Some folks call them the bottlenose, and others coulterneb, pope, seaparrot, and tannymorie. Other local names for them are marrott and willock, while in—"

"That's enough of that," broke in the Ed. "You needn't stand there puffin' and airing your knowledge, Whiskers. Get along and wake that office-boy up, I want my tea."

I promptly skeddaddled and told Adolphus to put the kettle on, and see that the water didn't burn.

"THE MIDNIGHT CRICKETERS!"

(Continued from previous page.)

is more, you may consider the remainder of your punishment entirely cancelled."

"Hurrah!" yelled Figgins.

And that, so to speak, was that!

So Figgins turned out for the Junior Eleven against Greyfriars, after all.

He played the game of his life.

Greyfriars, as usual, were in tip-top form, and when their batsmen got busy they took a lot of dislodging. Even Fatty Wynn, for once, was unable to make much impression on their wickets.

Then Figgins took a hand in the bowling. He dismissed Bob Cherry and Vernon-Smith in his first over, and tempted Redwing to flick a tricky ball right into the hands of Tom Merry in the slips at the end of the second.

It was the turn of the tide for St. Jim's. Figgins' bowling turned a brilliant Greyfriars opening into quite a moderate innings.

But it was when he came to bat himself that Figgins really shone. He went in third, and played like a man

inspired, hitting boundary after boundary with effortless ease.

Appropriately, he scored the winning run with a mighty hit that sent the ball far over the heads of the spectators, and there was a cheer such as had rarely been heard on Little Side.

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, Figgins!"

"St. Jim's wins!"

There was a rush of juniors to shake him by the hand when he returned to the pavilion. Figgins was radiant.

"Well, I kept my promise not to let you down, Tom Merry!" he remarked.

"True, O king!" smiled Tom Merry. "And you've been through some ups and downs to get into the game! Jolly glad everything turned out so well in the end!"

"Who's Cock House now?" roared the delighted Kerr and Wynn together in triumphant chorus.

"Never mind that," said Jack Blake. "I suggest we give three cheers for George Figgins—the one and only midnight cricketer!"

And the cheers were given with a will.

— THE END.

(Figgins has saved his bacon after all, chums! Next week's GEM will contain a magnificent thrilling adventure yarn, entitled: "TERROR FROM THE EAST!")

ANOTHER GRAND NEW COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN!

LOVELL'S LITTLE LAPSE!

By
OWEN CONQUEST.



CHAPTER 1. Hard Luck on Lovell!

"**H**A, ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome glanced round in surprise.

Tea was going on in the end study in the Classical Fourth at Rookwood. Three members of the Fistical Four were seated at the table. Arthur Edward Lovell was seated in the window with a cup and saucer balanced on his knee. Lovell was looking out into the quad where, apparently, something was going on that moved him to sudden merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the jolly old joke?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha—old Manders

—ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

"Somebody's got his tile with

a golf ball! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Three juniors jumped to the window. Mr. Manders, the Modern master, was not popular at Rookwood, especially on the Classical side. Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned as they looked down.

On the path that ran under the windows stood the lean, angular form of Mr. Manders, with an extraordinary expression on the lean, angular face. At Mr. Manders' feet lay his hat. Near his hat lay a golf ball. Someone, evidently, had buzzed that golf ball from one of the windows with accurate aim, and Mr. Manders, quite surprised by the sudden loss of his hat, stood transfixed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

Jimmy glanced along the study windows. Nobody was to be seen at any of them. The man who had buzzed that golf ball at Manders had retired from view promptly, before the Modern master's eyes could fall on him. The missile might have flown from any of a score of windows; though

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Jimmy Silver had a strong suspicion that it was from Mornington's window that it had flown. Morny was the only man in the Classical Fourth who was likely to have nerve enough, and cheek enough, to knock off a master's hat in the quad. Manders' voice floated up to the Fistical Four in a gasping squeak.

"Goodness gracious! Upon my word! What—what—what young rascal—what impudent young rascal—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" boomed Lovell.

"Shurrup, you ass!" whispered Jimmy. "Manders might think it was you—"

"Rot! Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Manders looked up at the window. His baleful eye fixed on the Fistical Four. Then he clutched his hat with one hand, the golf ball with the other, and whisked away. The expression on his face as he whisked away was almost ferocious. He vanished into the House.

"Trouble for somebody!" said Raby, as he went back to the tea-table. "Manders has gone to Dicky Dalton to complain."

"Flogging, if they find the man!" said Newcome.

"That ass Morny, ten to one!" growled Jimmy Silver. "It's too thick! Manders is a tick, but it's rotten bad form—"

"Jolly funny, I think," said Lovell. "You should have seen Manders' face when his tile went overboard! Ha, ha, ha!"

The Classical chums resumed tea. A few minutes later the door of the end study opened, and the plump face of Tubby Muffin looked in. Tubby was looking excited.

"You men know what's up?" he asked. "Dalton's coming up, and he's got Manders with him. Manders looks frightfully wild."

"He would!" chuckled Lovell.

There were footsteps in the passage. The squeaky voice of Mr. Roger Manders was heard.

"It was from the end study—I am positive on that point! Those young rascals—those impudent young rascals—"

"Oh crumbs! You're for it, you fellows!" murmured Tubby, and he vanished as Mr. Manders and the master of the Fourth arrived at the doorway.

Jimmy Silver & Co. rose to their feet. They were looking grave enough now. Mr. Manders' face was almost pale with rage; and Mr. Dalton looked troubled and angry. The chums of the Classical Fourth were glad that their consciences were clear, though a clear conscience was not always useful where Mr. Manders was concerned.

"Which of you boys threw a golf ball at Mr. Manders from the window?" rapped out Mr. Dalton sternly.

"None of us, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

"What—what?" hooted Mr. Manders. "Do you dare to deny it? Mr. Dalton, I am positive that the missile came from this window! These

four boys were looking down, and laughing—laughing, sir, at the success of their—their dastardly assault! I demand a—"

"One moment, sir! Silver, Mr. Manders is assured that the golf ball was thrown from this study."

"Mr. Manders is mistaken, sir!" said Jimmy.

Richard Dalton looked searchingly at four faces, one after another. His expression was dubious.

"Mr. Dalton! I repeat that the ball was thrown from this window! It was thrown by Lovell, and his companions were in the plot!"

"If you actually saw Lovell throw the ball, Mr. Manders—"

"Certainly I did!" hooted Mr. Manders.

"I didn't!" roared Lovell indignantly.

"You did!" hooted Mr. Manders. "You were at the

ROOKWOOD JAPER'S BLUNDER!

The face of Lovell's victim is as black as the ace of spades . . . and so is Lovell's face when he discovers that he's japed the wrong man!

window, and you threw the ball! I distinctly saw your movement!"

"I was holding my teacup—these fellows know—" gasped Lovell.

"Lovell never—" began Newcome.

"Lovell didn't—" gasped Raby.

"He never did—" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Dalton held up his hand.

"Silence! I am bound to accept Mr. Manders' statement."

"They were all at the window!" spluttered Mr. Manders. "They laughed—laughed, sir—actually laughed—"

"So would anybody have laughed," said Lovell. "It was funny—"

"What? What? Mr. Dalton—"

Mr. Dalton had brought a cane to the study under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand.

"You were guilty of disrespect in laughing at such an incident," said the Fourth Form master. "And Mr. Manders is positive—"

"Absolutely positive, sir!" hooted Mr. Manders. "Absolutely! I saw the boy's movement—"

"You didn't!" roared Lovell.

"Silence, Lovell!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"But I never—"

"Silence! You will bend over that chair!"

"But I tell you I never did—" gasped Lovell.

"Bend over that chair!"

Lovell fairly glared at the Modern master. To do Mr. Manders justice, he had not the slightest doubt that the missile had come from the end study. He had had trouble with those cheerful young gentlemen before, and he knew exactly how much they liked him. Mr. Manders certainly had not seen Lovell throw the golf ball, as Lovell had not thrown it; but in his angry and excited state, it was easy for him to fancy that he had seen what he was positive had occurred. Certainly, Mr. Manders would not have dreamed of telling an untruth had he realised it. But he was too enraged at the moment to realise that he was overstepping the facts.

"You hear me, Lovell?" snapped Mr. Dalton.

"But I tell you, sir—" gasped the hapless Lovell.

"You have heard what Mr. Manders says—"

"It's not true, sir!"

"W-what?" spluttered Mr. Manders. "What—"

"Lovell! How dare you! Bend over that chair immediately, or I will take you to the headmaster!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

Arthur Edward Lovell, with feelings too deep for words, bent over the chair. The cane rose and fell, and six anguished yelps from Lovell accompanied six hefty swipes.

Mr. Manders looked on with grim satisfaction.

"Silver, Raby, and Newcome, you will take three hundred lines each," said Mr. Dalton, as he tucked his cane under his arm and left the study with Mr. Manders.

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome looked at one another with grim faces. Arthur Edward Lovell, wriggling spasmodically, ejaculated in tones of anguish:

"Ow, ow, ow! Ow, ow, wow!"

CHAPTER 2.

Morny Asks For It!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON, lounging along the Fourth Form landing, smiled as Mr. Dalton and the Modern master passed on their way downstairs. Mr. Dalton was frowning, Mr. Manders scowling. Morny seemed to derive some entertainment from their looks, though he did not smile till their backs were turned. With the smile on his handsome face, his hands in his pockets, the dandy of the Fourth lounged along to the doorway of Study No. 4, where his chum, Kit Errol, met him with a worried look.

"All serene, old scout!" said Morny lightly. "The Manders bird never even looked at me!"

"You were a reckless ass, Morny—"

"As you remarked before," assented Mornington, with a nod. "Put on a new record, old bean."

"It was rottenly disrespectful—"

"And we all respect Manders so much—what?" grinned Mornington.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Errol sharply. "You know you ought not to have knocked a master's hat off!"

"I'd rather have knocked his head off," assented Mornington. "But there would have been more fuss still about that. Anyhow, they don't seem to guess the giddy culprit."

"I fancy they've guessed—and guessed wrong, judging by the yells from the end study," said Errol.

Mornington started.

"You don't mean— Oh, my hat!" Mornington cut along the passage to the end study.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!" greeted his ears, as he looked in. Arthur Edward Lovell was twisting painfully. His three comrades were silent and grim. They were sorry for Lovell, and sorry for themselves. Three hundred lines each was not a light imposition. Morny stared at them.

"Manders been here?" he exclaimed.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Six for Lovell, and an impot each for us!" growled Raby. "All because some silly lunatic buzzed a golf ball at Manders' hat."

"But it wasn't this study!" exclaimed Mornington.

"Didn't you tell Dicky Dalton it wasn't, you duffers?"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Manders told him it was," grunted Jimmy. "He said he saw Lovell chuck the ball from the window. Of course, he thought he did."

"He was telling lies!" hooted Lovell. "Just telling whoppers! Ow, ow! I don't believe Dalton half-swallowed it, either; only he had to take a master's word! It was just crammers! Ow, ow!"

"Oh gad!" said Mornington blankly. "Manders said he saw Lovell chuck the ball! Why, it was I chucked it, from my window!"

"You silly ass!"

"The man's a liar!" howled Lovell. "He was telling lies—"

"He thought so, of course," grunted Jimmy. "He saw Lovell laughing at the window and fancied the rest."

"I—I never knew!" said Mornington. "I'd have come



Mr. Manders' grasp was on Morny. His left hand fastened like a vice on Morny's collar, while his right wielded a cane!

along and owned up like a shot if I'd known the old ass was putting it on Lovell."

"I'll make him sit up for this, somehow!" groaned Lovell. "Dicky Dalton couldn't help it, blow him; but Manders—"

Mornington's eyes gleamed. "Look here, you men, I'm going to Manders to own up! It will make him look no end of a fool, and a liar as well. He will have to admit to Dalton that he was telling whoppers about Lovell. You fellows will get off your impots—"

"Ow! I can't get off my six!" groaned Lovell. "It's worth six to make Manders look such a giddy ass!" said Morny, grinning. "Why, it will fairly make him squirm. He's told Dalton that he saw Lovell chuck that golf ball, and he's goin' to have to explain that he never saw anythin' of the sort. Fancy his face!"

There was a chuckle in the end study. Even Lovell grinned. There was no doubt that Manders would "squirm" if he was driven to taking back his hasty accusation and eating his own words.

"You'll get six, though!" said Jimmy. "It's worth more than that to get old Manders in a cleft stick!" said Mornington, as he walked away whistling.

Mornington hurried down the stairs. "Seen Manders?" he called out to Townsend of the Fourth.

"Just gone!" answered Towny. "He looked in a fearful bait. What's happened to the old bean?"

Without answering that question, Valentine Mornington hurried out of the House. The lean figure of Roger Manders was visible in the distance, going into his own House, on the Modern side. Mornington sauntered cheerfully in the same direction. Tommy Dodd & Co. were lounging in the doorway of their House when he arrived there, and they made a movement towards the Classical junior.

"No larks!" said Mornington. "I've called to see Manders."

"Better give him a miss," grinned Tommy Dodd. "He's just gone to his study looking as black as thunder."

"I'm goin' to make him look blacker," answered Morny, and he strolled into Manders' House.

He tapped at the door of Mr. Manders' study.

"Come in!" A sharp voice snapped from within the study. Morny opened the door and stepped in. Mr. Manders stared at him, frowning. He was not expecting a call from a Classical man, neither was he gratified thereby.

"What is it, Mornington?" he snapped. "If you please, sir," said Morny demurely, "I felt bound to come and tell you, sir, that it was I threw the golf ball!"

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Manders. "What?"

"I'm ready to go to my Form master, sir!" said Mornington meekly. The glimmer in his eyes did not escape Mr. Manders.

Mr. Manders' mind was made up. Mr. Manders had the happy faculty of believing what he chose to believe. He did not choose to believe Mornington. The result would have been too awkward for him.

His eyes glinted at the Classical junior. "You are aware, Mornington, that I have already told your Form master that it was Lovell who threw the ball."

"Yes, sir. That was a—hem—mistake. It was I, sir."

"It was not you, Mornington," said Mr. Manders, in a snarling voice. "I have no doubt that this pretended confession is part of the plot—a 'rag,' as I suppose you would call it. I do not believe you, Mornington, and I shall not take you to your Form master, as you desire."

"Errol was present, sir, and he will say—"

"I have no doubt that Errol would say anything. You cannot deceive me so easily, Mornington. I shall not take you to your Form master; the matter is closed."

"But, sir—"

"But," said Mr. Manders, "you have come here in furtherance of a plot—a rag—and since you have chosen to enter my House, Mornington, I shall punish you as if you were a member of my House. I do not desire to trouble Mr. Dalton further, and shall therefore take the matter into my own hands." Mr. Manders picked up a cane.

"Bend over that chair, Mornington."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Morny. This was an entirely unexpected outcome.

Mr. Manders swished the cane. "Bend over!" he snapped.

Morny backed to the door. "You've no right to cane me, sir! I'm ready to go to my own Form master, or the Head!"

"No doubt," said Mr. Manders bitterly. "No doubt! But you will not be allowed to do so, Mornington! Will you bend over that chair?"

"No," said Mornington, between his teeth, "I won't! You've no right— Oh, my hat! Leggo! Yooooooop!"

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Mr. Manders' grasp was on him. His left hand fastened like a vice on Morny's collar. His right wielded the cane.

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

"Oh crumbs! Leggo!" yelled Mornington. "Oh gad! Look here— Ow! Wow! Wow!"

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

"There!" gasped Mr. Manders. "Now go!" He threw open the study door, and bundled the Classical junior into the passage. "Now go!"

The door slammed on Valentine Mornington.

CHAPTER 3.

Leaving it to Lovell!

"LEAVE—" "Oh, rats!" "Leave it—"

"Rot!" "Leave it to me!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, getting it out at last.

It was prep in the Classical Fourth, and should have been prep in the end study. But in that celebrated apartment, Jimmy Silver & Co. were not thinking much of prep; least of all was Lovell.

Three members of the Co. were feeling sore. One member was feeling sore in a double sense. Linger twinges reminded Arthur Edward Lovell of the six he had received from Mr. Dalton.

Had Morny's bright idea for showing up Manders as a fool, and worse, been a success, the Fistical Four would have felt solaced. The impots would have been washed out, and the humiliation of that unspeakable "tick," Manders, would have consoled Lovell for his licking. But Morny's bright idea had been a wash-out. All he had gained by his visit to Manders' House was a licking.

Lovell picked an empty can from the study cupboard. It was a large can, holding about a gallon. Into this Lovell poured most of the available supply of ink. He added water till the can was three-parts full. Then he took the fire-shovel, and raked soot out of the chimney. This part of the mysterious process caused considerable sneezing in the study. Lovell had rather a heavy hand, and he spilt as much soot as he collected. A good amount, however, was added to the contents of the can, and Lovell proceeded to mix it with the poker.

"What on earth—" asked Jimmy Silver. "Get on with your prep, old man."

Three fellows got resignedly on with their prep, while Lovell got on with the mixing. What he was going to do with that horrible mixture was, as yet, a mystery to his study-mates. Apparently it formed a part of the plan of campaign against Manders.

Lovell rooted about the study, and added a bottle of gum and a tin of liquid blacking to his mixture. It was growing more and more horrible; but Lovell grinned over it in a satisfied way.

Finally, he fixed the lid on the can very carefully. Then he smiled at the astonished faces of his comrades.

"Manders will like that!" he remarked.

"Mum-mum-Manders!" said Raby faintly.

"When he gets it on his napper, I mean."

"Oh crikey!"

The bare idea of even Manders getting that horrible mixture on his napper made the juniors shudder. Lovell chuckled.

"But—but—but— How—" stuttered Jimmy.

Lovell looked at his watch.

"Time!" he remarked. "Before another quarter of an hour, Manders will be getting this down his neck. I'm only sorry that I shan't be able to tell him who did it."

"But Manders is over in his own House," said Jimmy dazedly.

"I know that. I happen to know, too, that there's a Masters' Meeting at a quarter past nine. Manders never misses a Masters' Meeting—he knows all the other beaks would be glad if he did. He will come over."

"But—but—"

"You know the big beech that overhangs the path, Manders will pass under it. This will drop on him as he passes under."

"Oh crumbs! But—"

"I shall be in the beech, of course."

"But it's lock-up—any fellow going out of the House will be missed, and you'll be spotted at once!" gasped Newcome.

Lovell gave him a pitying smile.

"I'm not going to walk out at the door, with this can under my arm!" he snorted.

"Oh! You're not?"

"No," roared Lovell, "I'm not! Don't be a silly ass, if you can help it."

"I—I—I say, Lovell—" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"You needn't say anything," interrupted Lovell. "I've

got it all cut and dried. We've used a rope from this window before, and we can use it again. Easy as falling off a form. I get down from this window, scud across to the big beech, and climb it. It's black as pitch there, and nobody could spot me, even if there was anybody about. I wait till Manders comes along, mop this stuff over his napper—"

"Oh scissors!"
"Then I bunk, of course," said Lovell. "I get back here by means of the rope, and—there you are! All you fellows have to do is to stay in the study, and help me when I get back."

"Lovell, old man—" implored Jimmy Silver.
"No time for talk," said Lovell. "Leave it to me. I don't want to brag about it; but you fellows know who's the brainy man in this study."

"Oh, my hat!"
"Who was it bagged the reward for finding those lost pearls the other day?" demanded Lovell.
"Who was it that—"

"Who was it cackled at the study window and got Manders on our track?" hooted Raby. "Look here—"

"Rats! Leave it to me."
The chums of the end study really had no choice about leaving it to Lovell. Lovell had taken the bit between his teeth, as it were, and he was not to be gainsaid. Short of collaring Arthur Edward and holding him down by main force, there was no choice about leaving it to Lovell.

Lovell sorted out a knotted rope, and slung it from the study window. He lowered the can on the end of the rope. Then he lowered himself down.

He disappeared in the deep dusk from the eyes of his comrades. Jimmy peered down from the window. He had a dim glimpse of Lovell detaching the can of mixture from the rope, and vanishing with it into the shadows. Jimmy turned from the window with a sigh.

"I wonder what's going to happen?" he said.

"The footling ass!" said Raby.
"The howling chump!" said Newcome.
And the three juniors resumed prep, in a worried mood. It was rather difficult to put their thoughts into prep. Their thoughts followed Arthur Edward Lovell. And they wondered dismally what was going to happen—though their worst forebodings did not come anywhere near the awful truth.

CHAPTER 4.

Horrid for the Head!

DR. CHISHOLM, headmaster of Rookwood School, started a little as nine o'clock boomed out from the clock-tower.

"Dear me!" said the Head.
Dr. Chisholm was pacing, slowly and meditatively, on the path under the windows of the school library. It was a quiet spot, and a secluded spot, and the Head often paced there when he had matters to think out, as he often had. On the present occasion, the Head was thinking out some important remarks he had to make at the Masters' Meeting that evening. At that meeting the Head was going to preside, and the staff were going to listen to his remarks with admiring respect. They were not going to say what they really thought of those remarks till the Head had left the meeting and the staff were at liberty to say what they liked.

Slow and majestic, the Head paced on. Mr. Manders had not yet left his House, but that, of course, was unknown to the junior in the beech, who heard the footsteps approaching below him. There was a rustle in the branches above Dr. Chisholm. He glanced up.

Swooooooooooooooh!

Splash!

"Oooooooooooooooooogh!"

Life is full of surprises; but there had never been a surprise in Dr. Chisholm's life like unto this.

What had happened he did not know. A stream of something liquid, sticky, and smelly descended on his upturned face. He staggered back, gurgling, and sat down.

"Gurrrrrrrrrrrghh!"

Choked, blinded, suffocated, bewildered by that sudden torrent, Dr. Chisholm sat and gurgled.

There was a breathless chuckle in the darkness. There was a sound of an active climber slithering down a tree. There was a faint sound of retreating footsteps—rapid footsteps. But Dr. Chisholm did not hear or heed any of these sounds. He was unconscious of them. He was conscious only of the sticky, smelly mixture that clothed him like a garment.

"Oooogh! Burrrrrgh! Gug-gug-gug! Woocooch! Groooogh! Ooooooooooch!"

Dazed and dizzy, the Head sat up and gurgled. His hands clawed at the sticky mess on his face. It ran in streams down him. He ejected it from his mouth, he blew



What had happened the Head did not know. A stream of something black and sticky descended on his upturned face!

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it from his nose, he gouged it from his eyes. He gurgled, he gasped, he spluttered.

"What—what is that?" came a startled voice. The Head had been gurgling for several minutes, when Mr. Manders came along. The strange, weird sounds from the darkness quite startled Mr. Manders. "What—who—who—what—is that?"

"Groooooooh! Hoooooh!"

"Good gracious! What—what—"

"Groooh! Oh dear! Ooooooh! Help! Woohoh! I am—am—am in a dreadful state! I have been attacked—assaulted—smothered—oooooh!"

"Is that you, sir?" gasped Mr. Manders. He recognised the voice of his chief, muffled and smothered as it was by the mixture.

"Help! Bless my soul! Ooooooh!"

Mr. Manders, amazed and alarmed, groped for him. His hands in the darkness came in contact with the Head. The Head felt damp to the touch. He felt sticky.

"What—what has happened?" gasped Mr. Manders.

"I—I have been—been assaulted—smothered—drenched! Help me to the House, Mr. Manders! Oh! Ooooooh! Ooooooh!"

Mr. Manders groped for a matchbox. He struck a match. He stared at Dr. Chisholm in the flickering light. He jumped! The Head was not recognisable! His face had disappeared under a streaming coat of mixed ink and gum and soot. The match dropped from Mr. Manders' hand as he stared in horror at the horrible-looking countenance.

"G-g-g-good heavens!" gasped Mr. Manders. "Is—is—is that you, sir—is—is—is that really you?"

"Help me up!" gasped the Head. "Give me your arm, sir! Oh dear! I—I hardly know what has happened. I—I think someone was in the tree. I—I have been drenched—smothered—"

As the Head came into the lighted House, leaning on Roger Manders' arm, amazed and horrified eyes fixed on him. Mr. Dalton came up at a run; Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, jumped towards him. Sixth-Form men came out of their studies, staring. The ghost of the headmaster could not have startled the House more.

"What has happened?" gasped Mr. Dalton.

The Head explained.

"Some Classical boy—" exclaimed Mr. Manders.

"I see no reason to suppose so!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"In my opinion, some Modern boy—"

"Absurd, sir!"

"Really, Mr. Manders—"

"No Classical boy—" began Mr. Greely.

"Nonsense!" booted Mr. Manders. "I am assured—"

"Let the boy be searched for at once!" interrupted the Head. "It should be easy to ascertain what boy was out of the House! Let the quadrangle be searched immediately—and the studies—lose no time!"

"Certainly, sir!"

CHAPTER 5.

Not as Per Programme!

"HERE he is!"

"Thank goodness he's got back!"

"Buck up!"

The face of Arthur Edward Lovell grinned in at the window of the end study in the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver jumped to the window. Raby and Newcome jumped after him. They grabbed Arthur Edward and dragged him in.

The rope was swiftly hauled in, coiled up, and shoved out of sight in the cupboard. The window was closed. Then the three juniors stared at Arthur Edward inquiringly. There was ink on his fingers, a daub of soot on his nose. But his grin was expansive.

"Well?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"It's all right!" said Lovell cheerily. "Nothing to be nervous about! You fellows seem as nervous as cats! I got him!"

"You got Manders?"

"Didn't I go out to get him?" demanded Lovell. "It was as easy as falling off a form! I told you it would be, if it was left to me."

"You—you really got Manders with that mixture?" gasped Newcome.

"Of course I did!"

"And—and he never spotted you?"

"Of course he didn't!"

"There'll be a fearful row!" said Jimmy.

"Naturally!" answered Lovell cheerily. "But they won't"

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spot this study! Nobody on this side will care a button about Manders being mopped up with mixture! The prefects will look for the man, but they won't be keen on finding him! Bet you they'll chortle over it."

"Something in that!" agreed Raby. "Luckily, every man on this side hates Manders; and the masters don't like him any more than the rest. Still, there's bound to be a row. If—"

The subject was dropped as the door was suddenly opened, and Tubby Muffin's fat face, blazing with excitement, was put in.

"You fellows—" gasped Tubby. "I say, haven't you heard the row? I say, it's awful! I say, a man's going to be bunked! I say—" Tubby's words tumbled out in a breathless stream.

"Anything happened?" yawned Lovell.

"I should jolly well say so!" gasped Muffin. "I say, I saw him when he came in! He, he, he! You should have seen him! He, he, he! Somebody's smothered him with awful muck—soot and ink, I believe—it looked like it! He was fairly streaming with it—drenched all over— He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Manders thinks it was a Classical man did it—"

"Does he?" grinned Lovell.

"More likely a Modern rotter, if you ask me," said Tubby. "I don't see why a Classical man should rag the Head—"

"Eh?"

"It's the sack for him, anyhow, when they get him! The Head said so! I heard him! I must say he deserves it!" said Tubby. "Smothered, you know! He could hardly speak when Manders brought him in!"

"M-M-M-Manders brought him in!" repeated Arthur Edward Lovell, like a fellow in a dream, while Jimmy and Raby and Newcome stared at Muffin in stony, frozen, horrified silence. "Manders brought who in, you burbling idiot?"

"The Head, of course! Manders found him on the path under the beeches!"

"M-M-M-Manders fuf-fuf-found him on the pip-pip-pip-path under the bub-bub-beeches!" stuttered Lovell. "Found who?"

"The Head— I say, Lovell, what's the matter?" Tubby stared in amazement at Arthur Edward's ghastly countenance. "Manders picked him up and brought him in—he seems to have been coming to the House a few minutes behind the Head, and—"

Tubby Muffin broke off. He was quite startled by the expression on Arthur Edward Lovell's speaking countenance. He gazed at Lovell, and then turned his startled eyes on three stony faces. Jimmy Silver found his voice.

"Has anything happened to the Head?"

"Eh! Haven't I just been telling you? Somebody was in a tree, and dropped a lot of awful muck over the Head."

"N-n-not over Manders?"

"Manders? No! Manders found him and brought him in—"

"Ye gods!" said Jimmy Silver faintly.

"Awful, ain't it?" said Tubby. "It's the sack for the man when he's caught—I heard the Head say so. There's going to be a frightful row! All the beaks and prefects are searching for the man now. You fellows got any idea who it was?"

Tubby Muffin received no answer to that question. He rolled away at last, in search of other fellows who might not have heard the startling news. Raby kicked the door shut.

Then the Fistical Four gazed at one another.

"The—the Head!" groaned Lovell.

"You ass!"

"You idiot!"

"You dummy!"

"How was a fellow to know, in the dark? What the thump was the Head barging about there for? I never thought—"

"That's your trouble—you never do!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "Oh crikoy! We've got to keep this dark—frightfully dark! Oh, my only Aunt Jemima! The Head! Why, they'll root and root and root till they get the man! Oh dear!"

Lovell was silent. For once in his career, Arthur Edward had nothing to say. It had been left to Lovell—as he had insisted it should be. This was the result! And what was going to happen now, Jimmy Silver & Co. did not know. But their anticipations were horrid.

THE END.

(Lovell's in a pickle now—as usual! Get next week's GEM and you will find out what happens to him!)

FURTHER CHAPTERS OF OUR GRIPPING SERIAL.

THE ISLAND CASTAWAYS!

(Introduction on page 26.)



Saving the Situation!

DAD was looking a bit anxious, and Jill gave a nervous glance out of the window at the back of the luxurious saloon.

"Suppose the crocodiles have got your scent and followed you here?" she asked.

"Well, someone would be unlucky," I replied. "But I reckon the only scent they've got is that from our paraffin exhaust, and that's scarcely likely to make them want to take a long walk."

Dad seemed to take it pretty seriously. That tiger the other night, and the sight of the brown man near the camp, had not tended to give one a sense of security. I don't suppose he knew, any more than I did, how far a croc was in the habit of walking from its home, but undoubtedly we'd got some very unpleasant neighbours, from whom we certainly did not desire a call.

"It's a nuisance, boys," he said, as we drove back to our camp. "I particularly wanted to get on with wheat and potato planting, but I think our first task must be to erect some sort of stockade."

Jill agreed that it was a bright idea, but Dad did not seem at all enthusiastic, for it was going to mean hard work, and unless the affair was tall and substantially built it would only serve perhaps to lull us into a false sense of security.

When we pulled up Jill jumped out, and Nigger—who had been sitting beside mother who was making tea as calmly as though preparing for tea on the lawn at home—came fussing round us.

Dud kept dad back and showed him a chip from the rock we had found under the sand.

"What do you make of that?" he asked.

Dad took it in his palm.

"It looks like ordinary rock to me, Dudley. You don't mean to tell me that you've found a gold mine, or something of that sort?"

I suppose old Dad was not feeling in the mood to have his leg pulled.

"It's lava," he said a little grimly.

Dad caught my eye fixed upon the smoking top of the mountain, which towered above the green of the jungle.

"Men have lived a lifetime at the foot of a supposedly active volcano and suffered no inconvenience," he said quietly.

Dud shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, we've lived here about a week, and it wouldn't surprise me if we suffered considerable inconvenience unless our own pet volcano decides to simmer down!"

It was a funny thing, really. At home we'd always regarded old Dad as a bit of an ass, who certainly could not keep a job, but on Necessity Island in a way he seemed boss. Of course, dad was nominally in authority, and not for worlds would I have told my brother that I regarded him as anything else.

"And what would you do to avert the inconvenience?" asked dad a little sarcastically as we left the car and walked towards the others.

"I should dig a trench right round our camp, just in case any molten lava came our way. It would be easy enough for us to dodge any streams which might come down, but if our camp went west—especially our stores—we should have put in a lot of work for nothing."

Dad stroked his lean, tanned jaw.

"There's something in that, my boy. But what makes you think the volcano is going to be offensive?"

"The smoke, for one thing, and old Barry's wireless, for

another. The air is not thundery—we've not seen a flash of lightning, yet he's getting atmospherics that would make the keenest wireless fan switch off and earth the set. You listen to it."

Dad came into my wireless hut. I put on the headphones, so did he. Dad sat in an armchair we had brought off from the saloon, and lit a cigarette.

Crash! Bang! Fizzle!

I was nearly deafened, and hastily switched off. Dad had snatched off the headphones.

"Would an electrical disturbance other than one in the air cause that ghastly din, Barry?" he asked.

"I don't see what else can explain it."

Dad got up.

"We'll dig the trench," he said shortly.

"What trench?"

Mother was standing at the door of our hut, and then, before dad could speak, Dud took his cigarette from his mouth.

"A little drainage scheme we want to have working before the next heavy rain," he said coolly.

"How clever of you!" said mother.

I thought he was rather clever, too!

VOLCANO IN ERUPTION!

New danger besets Island Castaways.

The Volcano Gets Busy!

THERE was no sense in putting the wind-up mother and Jill. But we worked hard. No lava might come from the mountain. If lava did come there were umpteen paths it could take instead of coming to our camp, but with everything depending upon the

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preservation of the stores that we'd worked so hard to get ashore, there was no sense in taking any risk.

It was no joke digging in the glare of the sun, but we wanted to get a fairly deep and wide trench between us and the jungle, and then continue it to the sea.

About half-past twelve Jill, who had walked over to the jungle, came up to us carrying a bunch of wonderful scarlet, blue, and gold flowers. She looked delightfully cool in a white frock and a big white felt hat.

"I do like to see children playing so happily in the sand," she said, looking down at us.

Dud and I grinned, but dad looked hot and bothered, and went on grimly with his job.

It may have been something in dad's anxious manner that made her a little suspicious, for she turned to me, looking rather serious.

"You said you were going to dig a drain," she said, "but surely a drain doesn't need to be three feet wide and about two feet deep?"

"We thought we might as well make a proper job of it. You never know how much rain you may get in a place like this."

Soon after that mother sounded the ship's bell, which we had fixed on a post outside our living-tent, and we were thankful enough to knock off work, and pretty well satisfied with what we'd got through.

We had excavated a trench about ten yards long and a yard wide, and about a couple of feet deep, and had thrown up the sand as a sort of rampart on the camp side. We knew it would take at least a couple of days to dig right round and feel really safe, but we'd made a good start.

Dad was pretty well done up.

"We'll rest during the heat of the afternoon, boys, and then we will extend the trench at either end. Each yard we do gives us a greater security—in fact, if a flow of lava came down in a line with the trench I doubt if we should have anything to fear. It would take the easiest road and fill the trench."

"Anyway, we've protected quite a bit of our property," said Dud. "And, of course, nothing may happen, or there may just be a small firework display and finish."

Mother was complaining about the heat.

"The air seems terribly sultry," she said. "I don't think I've ever noticed it so much since we've been here."

Dud said that she'd evidently been spreading herself in cooking the tempting meal—and she certainly had prepared a top-hole feed.

Suddenly there was a dull rumble, and I could have sworn that my chair moved.

"Is that thunder?" asked mother, who hated storms.

"Pretty much in the distance," said Dud.

Nigger had, as usual, been sitting at my feet, but with a whimper he suddenly sprang on my knee and sent my left wrist sharply against the edge of the table. There was a crack and the glass of my wrist-watch had gone. I was about to cuff the terrier's head when something in his eyes stopped me. The dog looked scared stiff, and he cowered against me, and his long pink tongue began to lick my face.

"Something seems to have bitten your bloodhound, Barry," said Dud. "You can't take that tickler round the corner and pay a bob to have a new glass put in, so take my tip and put it away before sand gets into the works."

"I can't be without a watch," I said, as I stroked the dog's black silky head;—and then we all laughed, for surely there was not a place in which a watch could have been so easily dispensed with.

But, all the same, I hated the idea of being without a watch, and, having soothed the dog, I jumped up.

"Poor young Pollard had a jolly fine gold wrist-watch which had been given to him by a rich uncle when he passed his big exam. He thought it was too good for everyday wear, so he was wearing a cheap watch when he was washed overboard. I might as well use the watch as let it stay in the trunk, so I'll go over to the stores."

"I'll come with you," said Dud, with unusual energy for him, and as we walked out, Nigger, with his tail down, followed close on my heels. Dud lit a cigarette.

"That dashed dog knew!" he said.

I looked at him a little blankly.

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"Knew what?"

"That we'd had an earthquake. Potty affair; I don't think that the others noticed it—and it was certainly nothing to write home about. I believe that the bloke who had the chunk of lava would have called it a tremor. But the unpleasant fact is, old lad, that apparently the best regulated volcanoes send out a tremor or two to announce when they really mean getting to business."

Old Dud spoke lightly enough, but his face was grim as he looked up at the top of the mountain, where the smoke was thicker and blacker.

It wasn't a pleasant job, opening the sea-trunk of a man who has been something of a clum, and whom you have seen swept overboard into a sea running mountains high.

I hauled out the things from the top—some shirts, pants, pyjamas, and a white drill tunic. Then I saw the watch in a washleather bag, and close to it was something rolled up in a flannel shirt which looked rather like a round footwarmer. Carelessly I moved it, then caught a glimpse of glass, and my heart gave a wild leap.

The next instant I was unwrapping the flannel shirt.

"Dud," I yelled, "we're saved! This is the missing transmitting valve! I can get out weak messages now, and, with favourable conditions, they might be picked up faintly a hundred miles away. We've hope, anyway—we'll have a link with civilisation!"

Dud stooped and grabbed hold of the dog.

"Put the thing back for now, Barry!" he said a little hoarsely. "That should be guarded more than all the treasure in the Bank of England. And remember, this beggar did in the other one."

I carefully laid the valve in the trunk, though I was wildly excited and had forgotten the watch—forgotten everything in the delight of my wonderful find. I realised that Pollard had placed the valve in his trunk for safety when we had run into bad weather, and that we might have stayed on the island for weeks or months before discovering that we could establish some sort of link with the outer world.

And then, in the moment of my great delight, came a terrific rumble, like that of a score of thunderstorms. I heard Nigger's piteous whine, heard a scream from the camp, saw the sand under me lift and sway and crack. With an incessant roaring in my ears, sick and giddy, I looked up at the mountain. Rock was being hurled into the air amid flames, and over the edge of the great crater seethed a stream of molten mineral.

And racing ahead of the seething molten mass which came sweeping down the hill towards us, came a brown man, almost naked, his eyes wide with fear as he leapt over our trench and came staggering towards us, holding up his hands.

The Man Called Sunday!

WITH the sand heaving under our feet, with the volcano vomiting rock into the air, and a sea of molten lava sweeping towards our camp, we'd certainly got plenty to think about; but the sight of that badly scared, half-naked brown man staggering across the sand towards us, made me forget our peril in my interest in him.

And then, before either Dud or I could speak, he flung himself on his face in the sand, and lay there, a brown-skinned, trembling, quivering figure, not lifting his head, not speaking a word.

"Thank heavens!" cried Dud. "Look, Barry, the lava's flowing into the trench; it looks as though we've saved the camp!"

The din was ghastly. One could feel the heat of the molten lava, running in a broad river over the sand, and pouring down into our hastily-dug trench. Nigger, who had gone up to sniff the brown man, came whimpering to my heels. Dad had got mother and Jill into a tent as stones were dropping quite close to the camp, and there were we two with the brown man and the black mongrel dog on the stretch of sand between the molten lava and the sea.

It was pretty ghastly, and I stooped down and fondled Nigger, scared stiff that the poor beast would go mad with terror. I saw that Dud's lips were set in a hard thin line, and that his eyes never left that ghastly stream of lava which threatened to enclose us on a small stretch of sand, even if it did not sweep us into the sea.

Then came a rumble. Dad was flung off his feet. I put

Young BARRY MAYNE is on his way to New Zealand aboard the Maglo with his father and mother. DUDLEY, his elder brother, and JILL, his sister, are also with them. During a terrific storm in the Pacific, the ship strikes a coral reef and the party are stranded on a strange island, which they christen Necessity Island. Salvaging a cor, together with some provisions, Barry and Dud tour the island and discover a skeleton buried in the sand. After many fruitless attempts Barry gets Darenty on his wireless set, but has the misfortune to break his transmitting valve immediately afterwards. That same evening he is getting water from a near-by stream, when he suddenly comes face to face with a tiger. Terrified by the light from Barry's torch, the beast turns tail and disappears. The following evening the Castaways find unmistakable evidence of an active volcano. (Now read on.)

my arms round my dog, and I reckon I must have been yelling a bit hysterically at him, and his long pink tongue was licking my face.

A groan came from the man lying down on the sand, and Jill, looking very white, came out of the tent. I saw her eyes open wide at the sight of the brown man. I picked up Nigger and went hurrying towards her, whilst Dud picked himself up, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Oh, Barry, I couldn't stick it in there!" panted Jill. "Poor old mother's getting hysterical. Dad has to stay and comfort her, but he's worrying about you two. Is that the man with the missing toes?"

"Great Scott, kid!" I gasped. "I haven't looked at the beggar's toes! He came dashing out of the jungle in front of the lava, leapt our trench, and flung himself down like that!"

Dud had walked over to the man and was patting him on the head, much as I had been patting my dog. Then came another rumble, but it was fainter, evidently on the other side of the island. The jungle re-echoed with the roar of frightened animals, the wild screeching of monkeys, and the shrilling of birds.

"It's awful!" said Jill, in a low voice.

But the sand was steady under my feet now. The flames from the crater of the volcano were dying down, and the lava showed no sign of overflowing the trench we had dug. The heat was intense and almost stifling, and the whole thing left one dizzy and bewildered; but I know that I suddenly began to feel a bit more cheerful.

"I think we're over the worst of it," I said.

Jill gave a wry little smile, but the panicky look had left her face, and I thought that, for a girl, she was a jolly good plucked 'un. Then she looked back to where Dud was squatting on the sand, trying to cheer up our visitor.

"What are we going to do with Man Friday?" she asked.

"Man Sunday!" I corrected her. "To-day is Sunday, though you wouldn't notice it. I suppose we'll have to keep him with us if he wants to stay. But, I say, I've great news, Jill! Just before the earthquake I found the Maglo's spare transmitting valve in poor Pollard's chest. He'd evidently wrapped it up among his clothes for safety."

"Oh, Barry!"

Jill was wildly elated, and she went dashing off to the tent to tell the others. I could understand her elation. She had never regarded the island as a highly desirable residence, and what had just been happening would certainly not tend to make her love it more.

I walked back to Dud, and the brown man, who had now assumed a kneeling position, was looking at my brother as a badly frightened dog might look at a man of whom he was not sure whether he would kick or caress him.

Our visitor could scarcely be described as an attractive-looking man. His skin looked like polished mahogany, his hair was black and coarse as a horse's mane. His lips were thick, his eyes, brown and large, were turned curiously upon me, and he looked as scared as Nigger. His own fear over, he walked forward, and as he came I saw that the two middle toes of his left foot were missing.

"What can you make of him?" I asked Dud, and my brother shrugged his shoulders and said he thought the man was dazed, but that we'd better fit him up with a pair of white ducks from Pollard's chest, let him see that we were friendly, and then try to find out more about him when he felt better.

I went over to the chest, and after carefully taking out the precious transmitting valve, wrapped in a flannel shirt, found a pair of ducks, and carried them over to the brown man.

"Here you are, Sunday, old lad!" I said, and by pantomime explained the use to which we wanted him to put the trousers. He nodded his head, smiled broadly, even proudly, and then put the trousers on the wrong way round. That meant a lot more pantomime, and by the time we'd got him fixed up properly, dad had joined us. He looked a little haggard, his manner was jumpy, and he showed signs of the strain. He seemed little interested in our beaming visitor, who, with the trousers, seemed to have put on quite an air of importance. But he was clearly interested in the finding of the valve.

"We mustn't build too much on it, dad," I said, "but it does give us a sporting chance of picking up a ship when conditions are favourable. I'm just going to tune in, and if the atmospherics have ceased, I'll be tapping out an S.O.S."

And leaving dad and Dud trying to get something out of the brown man in the white bags of which he was clearly very proud, I went into our hut to test the wireless. The earthquake and eruption were over, the lava was ceasing, the air was less sultry, but there was still a lot of cracking in the set; reception was rotten, so I knew it would be hopeless to attempt to send out the weak signals in such conditions, and I did not want to waste precious juice.

I put the valve safely away, still wrapped up in the flannel shirt, and left the hut.

"We're going to have some tea!" called Jill. "You'd better invite Mr. Sunday. I suppose that's the correct thing!"

I grinned, and went over to cheer up mother, who looked pretty much of a wreck. Then I yelled out to Dud that there would be some tea going, and that he'd better bring along the man called Sunday, just to show there was no ill-feeling.

"I shouldn't have asked him, dear," said mother. "I'm sure the man's a cannibal!"

"Well, if he is, it's better to feed him up with tea and bread-and-butter!" I said.

Mother took me quite seriously.

"There's something in that, Barry," she said brightly. "Jill, get out that plum cake I made yesterday. I'm sure the cannibal would like that!"

I was chuckling, and Jill's rippling laugh came from the kitchen when Dud came up and drew me aside. Some distance behind him came dad and Sunday, making weird signs, and talking.

"Keep 'em cheerful!" said Dud, in a low voice. "They've had enough trouble for one day. Slip over to the hut with me when tea is over. We've got some news out of Dog Toby, or Man Sunday, or whatever you like to call him!"

Something in his manner more than his words sent a cold shiver down my spine.

"Bad news?" I asked.

"Rotten!" said Dud shortly.

The Intruders I

THE strangest tea I had ever had in my life was over. The man called Sunday had sat on the sand beside Dud's chair, much as Nigger sat by mine. In fact, he seemed to attach himself to my brother much as the black mongrel from the Maglo had attached himself to me. It really had been funny to see mother constantly passing bread-and-butter and cake to Dud to give to the cannibal, so obviously in the hope that a well-filled cannibal would be less dangerous!

After tea, Dud followed me into our hut, closed the door, lit a cigarette, and perched himself on his bunk.

"Dad's been having a heart-to-heart talk with friend Sunday," he said. "You see, when dad was out travelling round these parts on a trading steamer he picked up a smattering of native languages, and this brown fellow can understand a few words of what he says, whilst dad can get an inkling of a good deal of what the native says. With that and a good deal of pantomime work, plus a little guess-work, which seems to fit in, we've pieced together his story. He's been here about two years—seven hundred suns, he calls it—that was when our little island was last giving its Brocks' Benefit display. He belongs to a tribe who inhabit the wild part of a large island somewhere between twenty and thirty miles away. I don't think his tribe are nice people—they appear to spend their time killing and eating a more civilised tribe at the other end of their island, who, apparently, do a little bartering with the skipper of a small trading vessel which very occasionally puts in there."

I gave a yell of delight at that.

"Then we're as good as rescued, Dud!" I cried. "Our wireless should carry at fair strength for thirty miles, and sooner or later the skipper of the tramp will pick up our S.O.S."

"Provided he's got a workable wireless, and is sufficiently sober to understand it. Dad knows something of the type

(Continued on the next page.)

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of skipper who comes bartering with semi-civilised natives," said Dud, a little gloomily. "But to return to our guest—he came in one of two large canoes filled with his tribesmen, on a hunting expedition immediately after the last earthquake here, two years ago. He says he was unfortunate in the hunt, and brought on himself the disapproval of his chief. I think that really means that he's not a very bold warrior, and fumbled his job. Anyway, his tribesmen cut off two of his toes to take home to his relatives, and left him on the island to die."

"The brutes!" I said.

"I told you that they were not what mother would call quite nice people," said Dud, with a grim smile as he blew out a cloud of smoke. "However, Sunday, if faint of heart, appears to have been tough of body. He stopped the bleeding with sap from the root of a plant, and, not being a dainty eater, managed to subsist on what he could find on the island. He had a big shock when we rolled up, a bigger one when the volcano began to get busy, and now he's windy about losing some more toes or getting a poisoned arrow into him. You see, there's going to be a reunion—he's expecting the daring hunters of his tribe to roll up at any moment."

That was a nasty cue! I could only stare blankly at my brother.

"It seems that the big chiefs of his tribe know to a minute when our volcano gets busy," went on Dud, in that light, bantering tone which I could see was designed to hide an anxiety every whit as grave as my own, "and the moment it subsides they set out on a hunting expedition, partly because after the shock the wild animals are a bit doxy and easy to capture, and partly because immediately after a do like this afternoon the sea is always as calm as a millpond, which is an advantage when your craft is a long bark canoe. Anyway, the bright idea seems to be only to visit the island immediately after an eruption of the volcano, and as they're great sticklers for keeping up old customs, it's odds on that we shall have 'em on the doorstep within the next day or two, and it isn't very bright."

I walked over to the wireless and started to fit in my transmitting valve.

"What does dad think about it?" I asked.

"Well, he doesn't like it—he's worried about mother and Jill. He's going to shove up a barricade, a sort of fort made from the woodwork washed up from the wreck, and then it will just be a case of good shooting, me with a sporting rifle, you with the revolver, whilst dad, who's no great shot, will blaze at 'em with an ordinary double-barrelled gun."

I could feel myself paling as I switched on, and the precious valve lit up.

"Hang it all, Dud, I don't want to kill a man!"

Dud put his hand on my shoulder.

"Nor do I, old lad; but I've a preference for killing a man rather than that he should kill me. And what we've got to remember is that we've mother and Jill to protect."

And with that he walked out.

I switched on the set. The atmospherics had vanished. I got down on to the short wave of my old fixed transmitter, and with the earphones over my head sat sending out my SOS until my fingers ached from the constant tapping of the Morse key.

I was broadcasting from Necessity Island, but not a sound came back to me across the waters of that lonely stretch of the great Pacific Ocean.

All the next morning we were rigging up the fort. We told mother and Jill it was a hut for Sunday, and mother said she thought it was just the sort of place a cannibal

would like, and that she hoped it would make him feel tame and friendly.

"I was tapping away at the wireless when Jill came in to tell me that dinner was ready."

"Take a rest from it, Barry, old boy," she said. "I know you can charge up the accumulator by running the car engine, but once your high tension battery runs down, we'll be done for even receiving messages, let alone sending them."

There was some sense in that, and though the sending out of a message in the hope that it would be picked up by some unseen ship gave one a faint thrill of hope, it was certainly not as satisfactory as sending it to some ship in sight which was almost certain to hear it.

After dinner Jill took command, insisting that Dud and I should take her for a walk along the coast to have a look at any damage that might have been done.

"Dad can see that Sunday finishes off his stout dwelling," she said, and gave us a quick, curious glance.

Dad looked a little uncomfortable.

"Don't be away too long," he said, and glanced significantly at my brother, who nodded carelessly.

When the meal was over we set off to walk along in the direction of Crocodile Creek. Dad took the sporting rifle, and I put my revolver in my pocket.

Jill looked quite dainty in a cotton frock and a broad-brimmed white felt hat. Only the absence of shoes and stockings spoiled the garden party effect; but Dud and I looked wrecks. Working on our hastily improvised fort that morning, handling tarry timber, had not improved the appearance of our white suits. The white linen hats on our heads were dirty and shapeless, and I suppose our faces showed signs of the strain we had been through the previous day, and the knowledge of a danger we were keeping from our sister.

As we rounded a bend, Jill gave a cry of excitement.

"Look at that! It's a good job we weren't camped out on that stretch!"

Dud whistled, and I caught in my breath.

Some distance ahead of us, somewhere about the spot where we had discovered the pirate's shoe, and later dug up the old curlax, the sand had been flung up into hills and rent in chasms.

"A tidy mess," said Dud. "I say, Barry, we'll have to go along there when we get a chance and make a thorough exploration. You know I told you that I reckoned an eruption had piled sand and lava over some treasure buried there? Well, there's a chance that yesterday's do may have tossed it about a bit."

"What a thrill!" cried our sister. "Come on, boys, we can make it in a quarter of an hour, and—"

She broke off. From behind us a whistle was shrilling loudly, and we knew it was the whistle once used by the skipper of the ill-fated Maglo.

"What's dad whistling like that for?"

Jill's question was challenging; there was not the vaguest suspicion of fear on her sun-tanned face.

"We'll jolly soon know!" said Dud, and the three of us broke into a run.

And round the next bend we knew.

Two long canoes, packed with brown men, were making straight for the island!

(The dreaded cannibals have arrived! How will the Island Castaways fare against such great odds? Boys, there's a thrill in every line of next week's gripping instalment. Don't miss it, whatever you do!)

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