

"LYNCH LAW!" FRANK RICHARDS' Smashing Story of School and Wild West Adventure— **INSIDE.**

The **GEM** 2^d



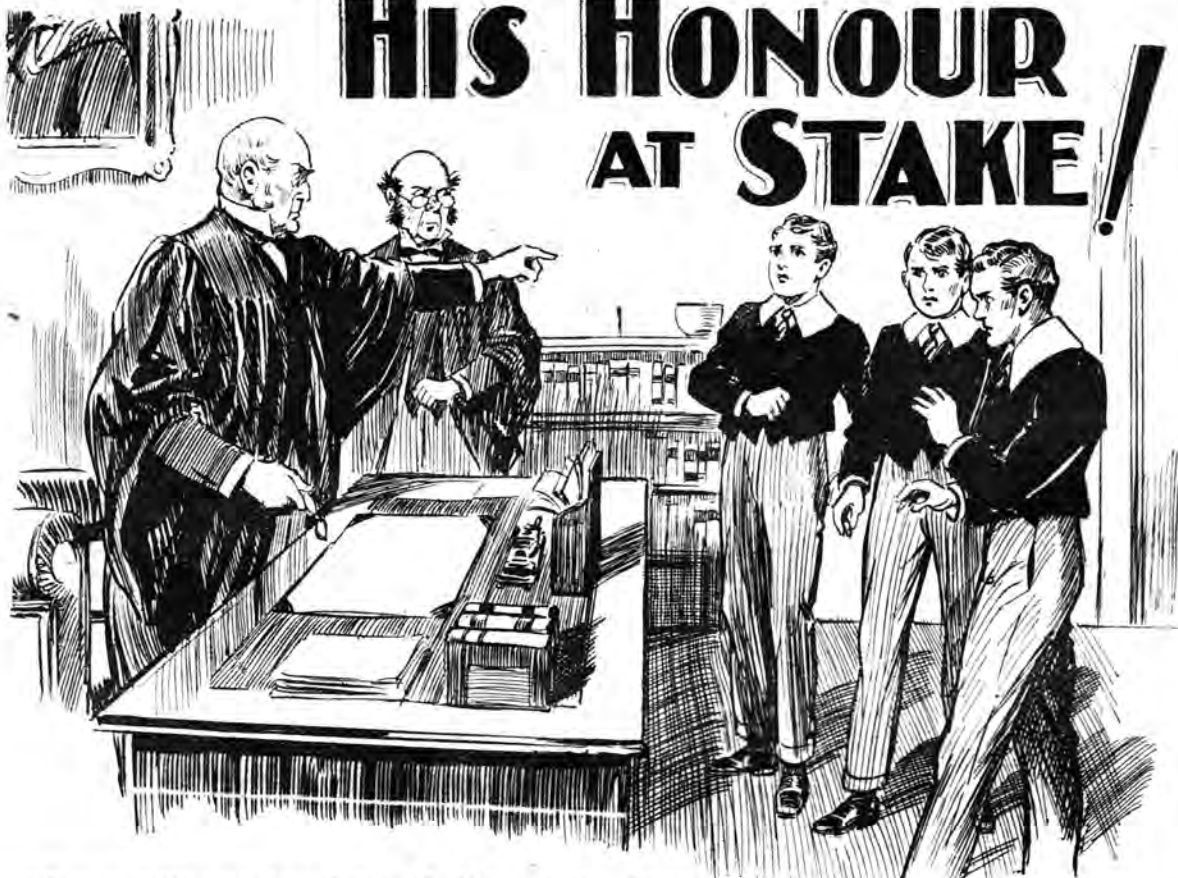
A Dramatic Incident from This Week's Best School Yarn "HIS HONOUR AT STAKE!"—WITHIN.

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

Week Ending March 9th, 1935.

HIS HONOUR AT STAKE!



"Have you anything more to say?" asked Dr. Holmes sternly. "No, sir," replied Tom Merry & Co. "Then you may go," continued the Head. "After prayers to-morrow morning, the school will be assembled in Hall to witness the flogging of you three boys!"

CHAPTER 1.

Figgins is Not Ready!

"ARE you weedy, Figgins?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's called up the question from the quad to the open window of Figgins' study in the New House. There was no reply, and Arthur Augustus took out his famous gold ticker and looked at it, with an expression of impatience on his aristocratic face.

"Figgins, deah boy!" he called out.

Three juniors came across the quadrangle from the School House and joined D'Arcy. They were Tom Merry and Lowther of the Shell, and Blake of the Fourth. All of them were dressed very nicely. Not that they could bear comparison, for a moment, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus was resplendent. The shine on his silk hat was only equalled by the beautiful polish on his boots, and nothing could exceed the neatness of his beautiful tie, unless it was the perfect fit of his Eton jacket, or the crease in his trousers.

Arthur Augustus was ever thus; but the unusual elegance of Tom Merry and his companions showed that they were bound upon an expedition of more than usual importance. Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye and was pleased to look upon them with approval.

"You'll do, deah boys," he said.

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"Thanks!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I was feeling quite nervous about what you would think, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And you'll do, too, Gussy," said Monty Lowther, eyeing the swell of St. Jim's with a critical eye. "The tie is a little too loud, perhaps, but then, that is really what we expect of our Gussy."

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah. The tie is in perfect taste," said D'Arcy, with a glance downward at his tie, which, indeed, exhibited most of the hue of the rainbow. His monocle dropped out of his eye, and he replaced it carefully. "Figgins isn't weedy."

"Well, we're not pressed for a minute or two," said Blake.

"I twust you do not suggest wunnin' the wisk of keepin' Cousin Ethel waitin' at the station, Blake," said D'Arcy severely. "I weally wondah why Figgins isn't weedy. He nevah twoubles about dwessin', or I could excuse him—"

"He generally puts on a clean collar when Cousin Ethel's coming," said Lowther. "Give him a chance."

"Oh, wats! Isn't Mannahs weedy, eithah?" asked D'Arcy.

"Yes; he'll be here in a minute," said Tom Merry. "He's missed his camera; somebody has borrowed it without asking permission." He shouted up to the window: "Figgins!"

"Figgy, deah boy!"

"Buck up, Figgy!"

A head was projected from the study

window above. It was the head of Figgins of the Fourth. Figgins' face looked a little red and flustered, and he had no collar on.

"Bai Jove! Haven't you finished dwessin', you ass?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Just a minute," said Figgins. "I'm trying on a new necktie."

"Oh, my hat!"

Figgins' head disappeared. A few seconds later his voice could be heard floating from the open window.

"Where's that stud? Fatty Wynn, you ass, have you moved my stud?"

"Haven't seen it, Figgy."

"Did you shift my stud, Kerr?"

"No, Figgy."

The juniors in the quadrangle below grinned. Figgins was never careful in his dress, excepting when Cousin Ethel was coming to St. Jim's. Then he would make a sudden effort to make up for lost time as it were. Figgins was in a very excited frame of mind now. He had burst the stud-hole of one collar, and had to put on another, and now he had lost his stud. Kerr and Wynn were very sympathetic. They hunted for the stud, Figgins finally finding it in his waistcoat pocket, and the collar was satisfactorily adjusted at last.

Then Figgins looked over the three ties he had on the table, and invited criticism of Wynn and Kerr.

"What about the blue one?" said Figgins dubiously.

"Good!" said Kerr.

"But the one with the red spots suits

—FEATURING ALL THE FAVOURITES OF ST. JIM'S.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

my complexion better, don't you think?" said Figgins.

"Well, perhaps you're right," said Kerr.

"But the brown one—"

"You can't wear all three, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn. "Better toss up for it."

Figgins glared.

"If you're going to talk out of your hat, Wynn—"

"Sorry," said Wynn meekly. "I should recommend the brown one."

"The brown one, decidedly," said Kerr.

"Oh, all right!"

And Figgins put on the brown one.

Four voices came floating up from the quadrangle.

"I say, Figgy, aren't you ready?"

The three New House juniors turned to the study door. Figgins paused, and took a final look in the glass.

"I think I'll have the one with the red spots, after all," he said suddenly. Kerr drew a deep breath.

"All serene, Figgy; we'll wait," he said.

"Certainly," said Fatty Wynn.

There was a yell from the quadrangle.

"We're starting, Figgins."

Figgins put his head out of the window.

"Start, and be blowed!" he roared.

"Bai Jove!"

"The noble Figgins is getting excited," said Monty Lowther, with a grin. "Cousin Ethel would be pleased if she knew what a flutter she made in Figgins' study. I wonder he doesn't turn Kerr's hair grey."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Manners hasn't come yet," said Tom Merry, looking towards the School House. "Hallo! Here he is!"

Manners of the Shell came up, red and panting.

"I haven't found the camera," he said. "Some silly ass has borrowed it. I'll scalp him when I get back. I shouldn't wonder if it was Levison. I caught him messing about with my camera once before, and gave him a thick ear. Come on, we shall be late for the train."

"Waiting for Figgins," said Tom Merry.

Manners gave a snort.

"You don't mean to say that you're going to keep me waiting, when I've bolted out without staying to find my camera!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you see—"

"You fellows start!" shouted Figgins from the window. "I'll cut along and overtake you on the road."

"Yaas, wathah; we'd bettah!"

"Sure you don't mind, Figgy?" called out Tom Merry.

"Oh, I shall be glad!" snorted back Figgins.

And the School House juniors grinned and started. In Figgins' study, that excited youth had dragged off the brown necktie. Kerr and Wynn were waiting patiently; too patiently, Figgins thought, by their expressions.

"Don't you fellows wait," he said.

"Oh, we'll wait," said Fatty Wynn.

"Don't trouble—buzz off!"

"But—" began Kerr.

"Start, I tell you; I can easily catch you up!"

"Oh, all right!"

And Kerr and Wynn left the study. Figgins was left alone, with a flushed

face before the mirror, tying the tie, which, as was natural in the circumstances, persisted in tying itself in a way that was eminently unsatisfactory, and required continual readjustment.

CHAPTER 2.

A Licking for Levison!

LEVISON of the Fourth Form stood by his study window in the School House, with a very unpleasant expression upon his face. Ernest Levison, the cad of the Fourth, never looked very pleased; but just now he looked more unpleasant than usual.

Mellish, his study-mate, was sitting at the table watching him. Levison was looking out towards the gates of St. Jim's. He had just caught a glimpse of the plump form of Fatty Wynn disappearing through the grey old gateway.

"They're gone!" he said, turning from the window.

"Now's your chance, then," said Mellish. "You'll find his study empty now, Levison, if you cut across to the New House."

"I suppose so."

"You know how careless Figgins is," said Mellish. "He leaves his things about, and never dreams that anybody might look at them. You'll find all the work that he's been doing for the Southcote Examination, and you'll be able to

Not many fellows would face up to a public flogging to save the good name of a chum. Yet that is the sacrifice Tom Merry & Co. are prepared to make when George Figgins' honour is at stake.

tot up what chance he's got. My opinion is that he's got a good chance. He hasn't very much brains, you know, but he can work like a horse. I think he'll get the exam by sheer swotting."

Levison nodded.

"I must win the Southcote," he said. "It was a stroke of luck only Figgins and myself being entered for it. If Figgins loses, I win—and he must lose. He hasn't the brains for it; and if I worked hard, I should beat him easily."

"Only you don't work," said Mellish, with a grin. "You've hardly worked at the subject at all."

"Oh, hang it! It's too late to jaw about that now," said Levison. "I was always going to swot, only—"

"Only you never did."

"Still, I don't believe Figgins can beat me. But—but I want to know just how he stands. He's bound to have left his work in his study. You might cut across and get the papers for me to look at, Mellish. It wouldn't look so bad if you were caught in his study."

"No fear!"

"One of the fellows might see me there, and guess what I've come for," urged Levison.

"I don't see it. Anyway, I'm not going, and that's flat!" said Mellish. "You want to see what Figgins has done, now's your chance; but I'm not

pulling your chestnuts out of the fire for you—no, thanks!"

Levison scowled, and rose.

"I suppose I can risk it!" he muttered.

"Of course you can. I should be jolly glad to see you win, Levison. I hate Figgins as much as you do—hang him! Look here." Mellish sank his voice. "It's close on exam day now, and if you could burn up what Figgins has done, and get rid of his books, it would give him a set-back, and might make a difference on the day."

"I'll try."

Levison left the study, and the House, and strolled across to the New House with as careless an air as he could assume. It was a half-holiday, and a burst of sunshine had made the old school very bright and cheerful. The playing fields were crowded, and the Houses were almost deserted. Levison encountered no one as he walked into the New House and went upstairs to the Fourth Form studies.

His eyes glittered as he paused outside Figgins' study. Truly, it was a chance; he seemed to have the place to himself. An uninterrupted ten minutes in Figgins' study, and he would be able to ascertain what progress Figgins had made in his work for the Southcote Examination, and might be able to play some treacherous trick which would hinder Figgins in his work, as Mellish had suggested.

He opened the study door quietly and stepped in. He had not the slightest doubt that the study was empty.

But as he entered, he gave a sudden guilty gasp.

Figgins, the necktie tied to his satisfaction at last, turned from the glass, and met the cad of the School House face to face.

He stared at Levison in amazement.

The cautious way Levison had entered, his sudden pale face and startled eyes all told of guilt.

Figgins' brow grew dark.

He advanced towards Levison, who cowered back, so taken by surprise at the unexpected sight of Figgins in the study that all his usual self-command and cunning had deserted him.

"I—I—I thought you were gone with the others!" he stammered.

Figgins' eyes gleamed.

"And you came sneaking into my study, because you thought I was gone," he said.

"I—I—"

"What did you want here?"

Levison's eyes rested involuntarily upon a page of Latin prose on the table. Figgins glanced at it, and he understood.

"You cad!" said Figgins, between his teeth. "You came here to spy on my work for the exam."

"I—I didn't!" panted Levison. "I—I—"

"Then what did you come here for?"

"I—I—"

Levison's voice trailed away. As a rule he was not at a loss for a falsehood, but just now he was so taken by surprise that all his usual cunning had deserted him.

Figgins eyed him angrily and scornfully.

"You cad! Are you trying to think of a lie?" he said scornfully.

"I—I came here to—to—"

"Well, what?"

"I—I was just going to raid the study," replied Levison. "It—it was just a House raid, that was all."

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"You couldn't think of that at first," said Figgins. "If it was that, you would have said so at once. I know what you came here for; it would have been easy enough for you to spy on my work if I'd been gone, as you thought."

"I didn't want—"
"Oh, rot! Don't tell any more lies!" Levison's eyes gleamed. Contempt, it is said in the Eastern proverb, will pierce even the shell of a tortoise, and Figgins' scorn woke something like anger in Levison's breast.

"Get out of my study!" said Figgins. "I shall lock the door when I go now, and put a stop to your rotten tricks. Get out before I put you out!"

"You wouldn't find that so easy," said Levison, with a snarl.

Figgins laughed contemptuously. "I'll jolly soon show you!" he exclaimed.

And he came straight at the cad of the Fourth.

Levison, setting his teeth savagely, caught up a heavy inkstand from the table and whirled it in the air. The ink-pot slid off and crashed upon the floor, smashing as it did so.

"Hands off!" muttered Levison, raising the inkstand threateningly. "For—"

Figgins did not even pause. He came right on, and the inkstand crashed down, just missing Figgins' head, and landing upon his shoulder. Figgins gave a sharp cry; the pain was very severe. But he hit out again, and Levison, inkstand and all, crashed to the floor.

"Let me alone!" he shrieked, as the New House junior bent over him.

"I'm going to throw you out, you cad!"

"I—I— Oh!"

Figgins' strong hands closed upon the cad of the Fourth, and he was whirled bodily to the doorway and hurled through into the passage.

"Now buzz off!" roared Figgins.

"Ow!"

"Are you going, or shall I start on you with my boots?"

"Groogh!"

Levison picked himself up and ran, and went bolting headlong downstairs.

"The rotten cad!" Figgins muttered, as he returned to his study. "I wish I'd given him a licking now!"

He looked into the glass. His jacket had been torn, and his collar and shirt were splashed with ink, and there was ink on his face. It was impossible to go to the station to meet Cousin Ethel in such a state. Figgins, breathing fury, changed his collar and jacket, and the difficult business of the tie had to be gone through again. He knew now that he could not overtake Tom Merry & Co. before they reached the station. The utmost he could hope was that he would meet the party as they came towards St. Jim's from Rylcombe.

Figgins rallied the New House at last, still with traces of angry excitement in his face, and with a bitter twinge of pain in his shoulder, where Levison's cowardly blow had fallen.

Meanwhile, the cad of the Fourth had returned to the School House. Mellish was waiting for him in his study, and he stared in astonishment as Levison came in and threw himself into a chair, groaning.

"What on earth's the matter?" Mellish demanded.

"Figgins wasn't gone!"

"Phew!" Mellish whistled. "Did he catch you there?"

"I walked right in on him!"

"I suppose he licked you?" said Mellish.

perhaps not entirely without a trace of satisfaction in his tone.

Levison ground his teeth.

"He went for me," he said. "I'll pay him out for it! The brute guessed what I had come for, and there won't be any chance again. But I'll make him suffer for it, the cad!"

"But I say—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Mellish shrugged his shoulders and left the study. His study-mate was evidently not in a reasonable mood. Levison, with a savage scowl on his face, stamped to the window. He saw Figgins as he hurried out of the gate, and ground his teeth. A scheme of vengeance upon the New House junior was working in Levison's brain.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison's New Interest!

"CAKE, of course?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes; and tarts—"

"And some cream puffs—"

"Good!"

Tom Merry & Co. had but recently returned from meeting Cousin Ethel at Rylcombe Station. They had been rather surprised that Figgins had not put in an appearance, but on returning to the school they had learned from the New House leader that he had taken the short cut through the woods to save time, and so had missed the juniors and Cousin Ethel returning along the line from the station.

Tom Merry was now making up a list of the good things for the spread to be held in honour of Cousin Ethel's visit.

"Got any suggestions to make, Manners?" asked Tom Merry. "We want to get a decent tea for Cousin Ethel."

Manners grunted.

"I'm thinking about my camera."

"But you can't eat cameras," said Monty Lowther innocently. "My dear chap, you must be off your rocker! What's the use of a camera?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Manners.

"I tell you some rotter has borrowed my camera, and I want to know where it is."

"Leave that over till to-morrow—"

"Rats! The ass may be using it, and perhaps damaging it. Besides, there was a new roll of films in it, and films cost money. I'm not going to have the ass who's borrowed my camera squandering my money."

"Well, never mind that now—"

"Ass! Look here, you can worry over the grub. I'm not having tea till I've found my camera."

"Oh, bosh! I suppose tea-cakes would be all right if we could get them nicely toasted?" Tom Merry said thoughtfully.

"What about having Fatty Wynn over here to toast them?"

"Good!" said Lowther.

"Do you know where Levison is?" asked Manners.

"In his study, perhaps. Half a dozen tea-cakes—"

"I've looked in his study."

"Nicely toasted—"

Manners snorted and left the study.

He was quite as keen as the others about properly entertaining Cousin Ethel, but he was anxious for his camera. It was an expensive camera for a junior to possess, and it was an old and trusted friend, too. And the films in it were new—no inconsiderable item to a fellow in a junior form.

Manners looked into Levison's study once more. Lumley-Lumley was there, and so was Mellish, but Levison was

not, and they could give him no information.

Manners looked into the Common-room, without finding the cad of the Fourth, and the Form-rooms and passages were drawn blank. Then, remembering some of Levison's nice little ways, Manners directed his steps towards the woodshed.

He knew that the cad of the Fourth sometimes went there to smoke. The smell of tobacco greeted him as he looked in, and he knew that he was in the right place at last.

Levison was seated on a pile of faggots smoking a cigarette and reading a sporting paper.

Manners gave him a contemptuous sniff.

"Studying for the exam, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes."

"Questions about horses in the exam papers, of course, and jockeys, and so on?" Manners suggested sarcastically.

Levison bit his lip.

"Mind your own business!" he retorted. "I suppose it's got nothing to do with you what papers I read?"

"Not at all," said Manners. "You can keep on and get yourself expelled, and the sooner the better, so far as I am concerned. What I want now is my camera."

Levison threw away the stump of his cigarette.

"I can guess that you borrowed it," said Manners. "I thumped you for borrowing it before without asking permission. You want another thumping, I suppose?"

Levison yawned.

"Thanks, no! I'm quite willing to pay for the films I've used."

Manners started.

"Then you admit having borrowed it?"

Levison nodded.

"You cheeky cad!" Manners exclaimed wrathfully, and he pushed back his cuffs in a suggestive way.

"Oh, don't play the goat!" said Levison. "If you lay a finger on me I won't tell you where the camera is, and you can hunt for it."

Manners paused.

"Where is it?" he demanded.

"I wanted to take some pictures to send to my people," Levison explained.

"They wanted some views of the school. I know how to use a camera, and I haven't hurt it. I've taken all twelve films, but I haven't been able to get them developed. If you want the camera will you develop the films for me?"

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"Oh, rats!" said Levison. "You can do it quite easily, and I haven't any apparatus, and I've never done any developing, either. I don't see why you can't do it. As far as the price of the films are concerned, here is the money."

He drew the money from his waistcoat pocket.

"Well, it was like your rotten cheek to take my camera without my permission," said Manners, "and worse still to make terms about giving it back. But if you're getting a taste for photography, it's the most decent thing I've seen about you, and I'm quite willing to help you. I'll develop the films for you with pleasure if they are any good, and if you pay for them you can keep them."

"There's the money."

"Very well."

"You'll develop the films properly and hand them to me?" asked Levison.

"I can trust you?"

"Of course, you silly ass!"

"All right; come into my study and I'll hand you the camera."

Manners followed the cad of the Fourth to his study in the School House.

Exasperated as Manners was by the borrowing of his precious camera without his permission, he was less angry now than he had been. Anybody with a taste for photography could not be wholly bad, Manners considered, and he was really interested to see how well or otherwise Levison had taken the pictures.

Levison unlocked a drawer in his desk and took out Manners' camera.

"There you are!" he said. "The pictures are still in it. You'll let me have

"Oh, your camewah!" said D'Arcy indifferently.

"Yes, ass! Levison's been taking photographs with it, and I've promised to develop them," said Manners. "I suppose I shall have time before tea?"

"You'll have to buck up, then," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

And Manners disappeared with the camera. The amateur photographer went down to the hobby club-room, where he spent a good deal of time in darkness with his negatives. Tom Merry & Co. continued their preparations for tea, but Manners did not return. It was extremely probable that

so she could not very well avoid stopping; but she frowned a little as she did so. Miss Cleveland did not like Levison. Her frank and honest nature recoiled from the dark and tortuous character of the cad of the Fourth.

"I hope I did not startle you," said Levison, raising his cap. "I want to speak to you, if I may, just for a minute."

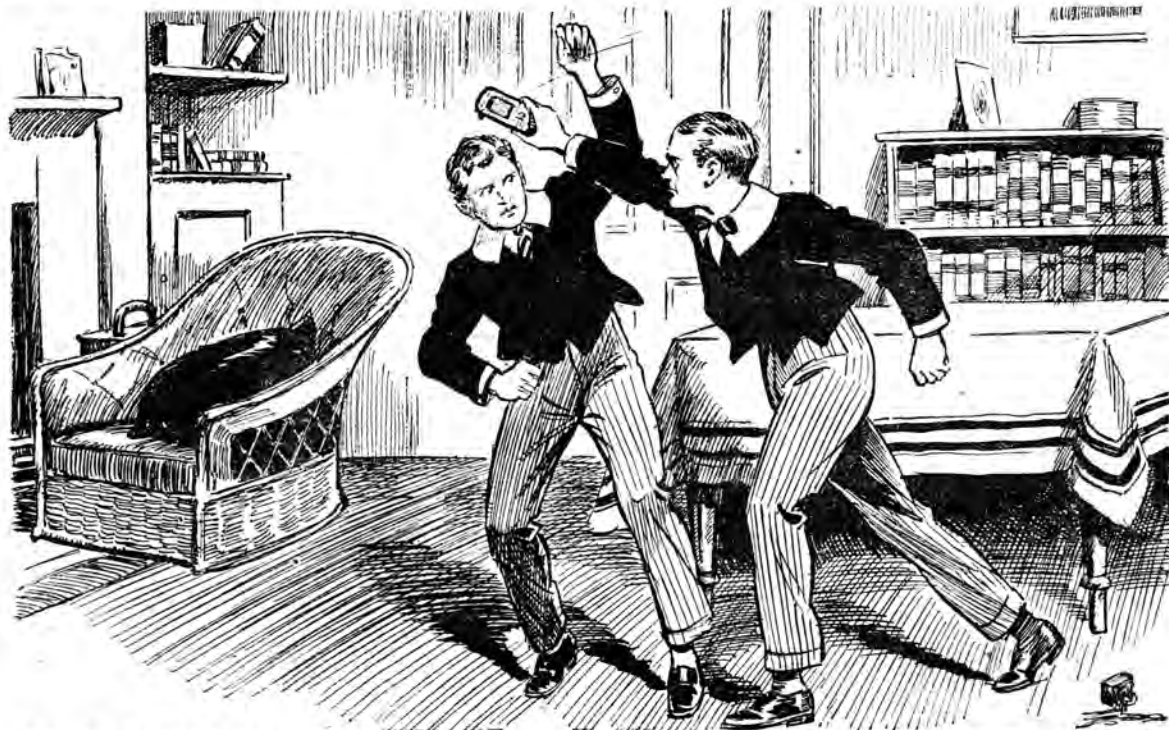
"I am in a hurry," said Cousin Ethel.

"Only a minute—and it's very important."

"Well?"

"It's about Figgins," explained Levison.

Ethel's face grew icy.



"Hands off," said Levison, raising the inkstand threateningly, "or——" Figgins did not even pause. He attacked the cad of the Fourth; but next moment the inkstand came crashing down, and Figgins gave a sharp cry of pain.

them as soon as they are developed, won't you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You can keep copies if you like, of course," said Levison. "They are views of the School House and the New House, and I think they're pretty good."

Manners nodded and left the study with the camera in his hand. Lumley-Lumley looked up from his work and stared at Levison.

"Taking up photography on the cheap?" he said.

"Mind your own business!" said Levison cheerfully.

Manners went into Tom Merry's study. The table was laid with a nice white cloth, and Fatty Wynn was kneeling before the fire with a very ruddy face, toasting tea-cakes. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were in the study, too, making themselves useful—at all events, three of them were. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seemed to confine his usefulness to giving directions which nobody obeyed.

"I've got it!" announced Manners. D'Arcy's eyeglass glimmered at him.

"Got what, deah boy?"

"My camera."

in the engrossing interests of developing the films Manners had forgotten all about tea.

CHAPTER 4. The Backbiter!

THE early dusk was settling over the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. Lights were gleaming from the windows of the School House into the shadows of the quad.

Cousin Ethel came out of the old stone porch of the Head's house with her light step. She was on her way to the School House to keep the appointment with Tom Merry & Co. for tea in the study. Whenever Cousin Ethel came to stay with Mrs. Holmes, she had tea at least once in the study with the chums of St. Jim's. And on those occasions the juniors were in the habit of expending reckless sums at the tuckshop and raiding other studies for clean crockery and extra chairs and spoons, knives and forks.

"Miss Cleveland!"
Cousin Ethel started, and paused, as a shadow loomed up from the old elms. She knew Levison's voice.

He had stepped into her path, and

"Surely you do not imagine that I shall allow you to talk to me about Figgins—behind his back, too?" she said. "Let me pass!"

"I want you to help him."

Levison had calculated well. Ethel's expression changed at once.

"To help Figgins?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I do not understand you."

"I will explain. I suppose you know that Figgins is entered for the Southcote Examination? There is a money prize of twenty-five pounds, and it is awarded every term."

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, as it happens, there are only two names down this term—mine and Figgins. I do not think Figgins has any chance—"

"That will be proved by the exam, I suppose?" said Cousin Ethel dryly.

"Yes. Never mind that," said Levison hastily. "Only I think Figgins thinks the same, judging by what he's done."

"What do you mean?"

"He did not come to meet you at the station to-day," said Levison. "He sent the other fellows off with an excuse, and

stayed behind for a good reason. I suppose you don't know the conditions of the exam? The Southcote Examination was founded by Lord Southcote, who was a chap here once. He was a New House chap fifty years ago or more. The conditions of the exam are that the examination is held in the New House under the New House master, who draws up the paper. Mr. Ratcliff has drawn up the paper for the Southcote Examination this time, and he keeps it, of course, in his study. As there are only two entrants for the exam this term, the paper is not being printed; but a copy will be made for exam day, and Figgins and I will have one each. I haven't found that out myself, you know. Mr. Ratcliff said so."

"Well, I don't understand what this has to do with me," said Ethel coldly.

"Please let me explain. This afternoon was a half-holiday, and as it was fine everybody was out of doors. Figgins sent off Kerr and Wynn with the rest to the station, and stayed behind in the New House by himself."

"That was an accident," said Cousin Ethel. "Figgins told me he was delayed by somebody."

Levison smiled unpleasantly.

"I was the somebody," he said.

"You!"

"Yes," said Levison coolly. "I knew—I mean, I guessed what Figgins' little game was, and I went into the New House to see just before I took some photographs. I found Figgins in Mr. Ratcliff's study."

"What!"

"You can guess what he was there for. I did. As soon as he saw me he came for me." Levison rubbed his jaw reminiscently, and Ethel, looking at him, saw the very plain mark where Figgins' heavy fist had struck. "He

turned me out of the House. He's stronger than I am, the cad, and—" "If you call Figgins names, I shall not listen to you!" said Ethel sharply. "You would not do so if he were here to hear you!"

Levison sneered.

"Very well," he said, "I won't. Anyway, he turned me out of the House, and I had to go. I knew perfectly well that he was going back to Mr. Ratcliff's study to look at the examination question paper—"

"It is not true!"

"It is true!"

"I do not believe you!"

"I haven't finished yet," said Levison. "I didn't know what to do to stop him. But I had Manners' camera with me. I had borrowed it to take some photographs. I thought of snapping Mr. Ratcliff's study. I thought if I could snap Figgins in the study I should have him."

"It would be difficult."

"Yes, but it was a chance, and with a proof like that I should have him on the hip," said Levison, with a grin. "I took out the camera, and went over to the elms just opposite Mr. Ratcliff's study window, and watched there, and, as it happened, Figgins looked out of the window, most likely to see whether I was coming back. I got three snaps of him while he was at the window."

Ethel's heart seemed to turn to ice.

"You have three photographs of Figgins at Mr. Ratcliff's study window?" she faltered.

"Yes."

"I—I don't believe it! I know photographs can be made up. It is quite possible to put a figure from one picture into a window-frame from another. I've heard of such things."

Levison laughed

"I expected some objection of that sort," he said. "As a matter of fact, the films are not developed yet, and Manners is going to develop them. It was his camera I used, and I gave it back to him with the films in it. He doesn't know what the pictures are like. He won't know till they come out of the developing. When he gives me a proof of them I'll let you see it."

"I can't believe you!" said Ethel.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Why have you told me this?" the girl asked.

"I want you to interfere. Figgins has seen the exam questions, and I haven't. Something will have to be done. If I speak to Figgins on the subject, he will hammer me again. That won't do any good. But I'm not going into the exam with Figgins knowing all about the paper in advance. It's not to be expected. Figgins will have to withdraw from the exam, or else Mr. Ratcliff's paper will have to be destroyed, so that he will have to draw up a new one. If nothing is done, I shall go to Dr. Holmes. I'm not going to let Figgins beat me in an exam for twenty-five pounds by foul play!"

"I don't believe you!" Cousin Ethel cried passionately. "It sounds plausible enough; but—but you have lied before. I know that you are untruthful!"

"When you see that photograph—"

"I have not seen it yet."

"I can show it to you this evening, I think," said Levison. "I am willing to let the matter rest until then."

"Let me go now."

Levison stepped back, and the girl hurried on, her face very pale, and her heart beating very fast.

Was it true?

Was it possible that Figgins—whom she had always believed to be so frank, honest, and true, had done this mean and dishonourable thing? It was impossible!

But if the evidence of the photograph bore out Levison's statement, what was she to think then? And if it did not bear him out, why should he tell her these falsehoods, which would be immediately disproved?

In spite of herself, in spite of her faith in Figgins, Cousin Ethel's heart was heavy with fear and anxiety.

She hurried into the School House. She wished she had not listened to Levison; and yet, if it was true—if Figgins had really yielded to this wretched temptation, she might save him—save him from himself. It was better to know.

Left to himself, Levison stood in the shadows of the elms, his face a little pale, his eyes gleaming. He was amazed, himself, at the facility with which plausible falsehoods had rolled from his lips. There was not one of them that had not a specious resemblance to truth; and Levison, as he reflected upon the web he had woven round the unsuspecting Figgins, could not see a loophole through which the unfortunate junior could escape. He had blackened Figgins in the eyes of Cousin Ethel, in the eyes of all her friends to whom she should tell what she knew, and the cad of the Fourth was satisfied.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins' Denial!

F IGGINS sat down in Tom Merry's study, rose again, and sat down once more. He had repeated that performance five or six times, when Tom Merry looked at him inquiringly.



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"Chair not comfy, Figgins?" he asked. Figgins turned red.

"Yes, the chair's all right," he replied.

"Then what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You seem to be in a wathah bad state of uneasiness, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the New House junior.

"I? Oh, no!"

"Time Cousin Ethel was here," said Blake, taking D'Arcy's watch out and looking at it, and then leaving it dangling at the end of the chain.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Yes. I—I thought I heard a step in the passage," said Figgins.

He rose to his feet again. This time he did not sit down. He flew to the door and opened it. It was really Cousin Ethel's step at last, and the girl came into the study.

"Here we are again!" said Digby cheerfully.

Cousin Ethel smiled.

But it was not her usual bright and cheery smile. It was somewhat strained, and her manner, as she replied to the greetings of the juniors, was not so happy as was her wont.

All the juniors saw in a moment that Cousin Ethel was not her usual sweet and happy self. They concluded that she was tired from the train journey, and they busied themselves in trying to make her comfortable.

Cousin Ethel sat down, and Tom Merry stirred the fire under the kettle, which began to sing at once. Figgins came to help him.

"Better let me make the tea," he said. "I know just how Ethel likes it."

Tom Merry grinned, and yielded the teapot to Figgins. Figgins made the tea with special care, and did not spill any hot water, which was quite a record for Figgins.

Cousin Ethel certainly did feel better when she had her cup of tea. But the cloud remained in her eyes.

She could not help thinking of what Levison had told her. It could not be true—and yet how could she be as frank with Figgins as of old, with that dreadful doubt in her mind?

"Manners is not here," she remarked presently.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, he's developing!" he replied. "Time and space are quite lost to Manners when he gets into a dark-room. He's developing something for Levison, I believe."

Cousin Ethel started.

"For Levison?" she echoed.

"Yes. Levison had the cheek to borrow his camera, and he's been taking pictures about the school, and Manners is returning good for evil, you see, by developing the films for him. Awfully decent of Manners, I think."

"So do I," said Figgins, "considering what an awful beast—" Figgins paused and coloured. He did not like speaking against any fellow in his absence.

"Yes. You had a row with Levison to-day over in your House, didn't you?" said Monty Lowther.

"Yes. Never mind that," said Figgins hastily.

"What did he come into the New House for?" asked Lowther.

Figgins hesitated.

"Spying, as usual, I expect," said Herries, who always said out what he thought, and left reflection till afterwards. "Was that it, Figg?"

"Well, yes," said Figgins; "but never mind now."

He did not want to discuss Levison and nose-punching in the presence of

Cousin Ethel. But the girl noticed his unwillingness to speak on the subject, and she could not help thinking how it fitted in with Levison's story, which she had just heard in the quad.

Levison had been spying. His own story was that he had been investigating, which was another word for the same thing. Was the story true, after all? Certainly he had been in the New House, just as he declared, and had had a row with Figgins there. More and more plausible the story seemed now to the girl.

The subject of Levison was dropped, by common consent, but it remained in Ethel's mind.

She found herself feeling keenly anxious for Manners to come. When he came she might hear about the photographs.

Tea was half over before Manners came in, with his fingers still stained, in spite of a hasty wash.

"Hope I'm not late!" he exclaimed. "Weally, Mannahs—"

"Yes, you're late, and all the toast is done in, and it serves you jolly well right," said Tom Merry.

"I'm so sorry, Cousin Ethel," said Manners ruefully. "But I've been developing some queer photographs. Levison would make a good photographer if he took it up. I believe that chap could do a lot of things if he chose to work. He'd wipe you out of the Southcote, if he swotted over it, Figg."

"Let him try," said Figgins dryly. "That's just what he won't do—he's too much of a slacker," said Manners.

"But about these photographs."

"Oh, blow the photographs!" said Lowther.

"Look here, Lowther—" "Yes, let's hear about the pictures," said Cousin Ethel.

"Trust a girl to talk sense!" said Manners admiringly. "They're really good, you know. Three views of your House, Figg. What have you been doing in old Ratty's study to-day?"

Figgins started. "I?"

"Yes, you."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Figgins, puzzled. "I haven't been in Ratty's study to-day."

"Caught!" grinned Manners.

"What do you mean?" Figgins demanded warmly.

"I mean what I say—caught! If you've been japing Ratty, you're bowled out!" said Manners, with a chuckle. "You needn't mind owning up!"

"Of course not!" said Tom Merry. "If ever a Housemaster wanted japing baldheaded, it's your Housemaster, Figg!"

"But I haven't done it," said Figgins. "I'd admit it if I had. I know you fellows won't jaw. But I haven't! I thought it too thick last time, for one thing!"

"That was a week ago," said Kerr. "Figg put treacle in his armchair, and Ratty sat down in it!"

"Blessed if I know how Ratty traced the treacle to our study," said Figgins.

"But he did, and when he asked me plainly

whether I had done it, of course I had to own up. I believe he would have been pleased to catch me in a whopper!"

"Nice man!" grinned Lowther.

"I had three on each hand," said Figgins. "Ratty can lay it on, too! Since then I've let him alone."

"Until this afternoon—eh?" said Manners.

Figgins stared at him.

"Blessed if I understand you, Manners!" he said. "I tell you I haven't been in Ratty's study to-day. It doesn't matter whether I have or not, so far as I can see; but, as a matter of fact, I haven't. I suppose you can take my word?"

"Oh, of course!" said Manners, very awkwardly.

And he dropped the subject at once. But he looked very queerly at Figgins several times, as Cousin Ethel could not help observing.

The girl's heart was like lead.

Manners' remark could only mean one thing—that he had found Figgins in the window of Mr. Ratcliff's study, in the photograph of the New House. The photograph bore out Levison's statement.

And Figgins denied it.

He had spoken an untruth. Ethel felt her cheeks burning. The tea-party, which should have been so jolly, became a torture to her. She was anxious for it to be over. She felt that she must question Manners to learn the truth, but she would not shame Figgins by drawing it out before the others.

CHAPTER 6.

Guilty, Or Not Guilty?

TEA was over at last. Cousin Ethel's preoccupation was so evident that the juniors felt depressed by her evident want of spirits. A gloom fell upon the little party in Tom Merry's study. Manners was openly constrained, and Cousin Ethel could hardly speak. Much as the juniors had looked forward to that tea-party, they were all pleased when it was over.

The three New House juniors departed first. Figgins hesitated a little, hoping for a single encouraging glance from Ethel, so that he could offer to take her back to the Head's house. But Ethel carefully avoided meeting his eyes, and Figgins departed in a mood of depression.

He felt that there was something wrong, somehow, between himself and Cousin Ethel, though he could not imagine in the least what it was.

"Ethel's annoyed about something, I think," said Figgins, as he tramped

(Continued on next page.)



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with his two chums through the dusk back to the New House.

"A mole could see that," said Fatty Wynn. "She must have been upset. She ate hardly anything."

"But with me, I think," said Figgins. "Somebody been making mischief, perhaps," said Kerr, whose practical mind generally went right to the heart of anything.

"But who? How?" said Figgins. And Kerr had to confess that he gave it up.

In Tom Merry's study, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy prepared to take his cousin back to the Head's house. But Ethel did not rise. Digby went away to begin his preparation, and Herries to feed his bulldog, Towser.

But Blake lingered with Arthur Augustus.

Cousin Ethel looked at them. Her frank nature could not bear keeping secrets.

"I want to speak to Manners about—about something," she said. "Tom Merry will take me back, Arthur."

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy looked a little surprised. But D'Arcy was too polite to think of disputing a feminine wish.

"Vewy well, deah gal!" he replied. And he left the study with Blake.

Cousin Ethel remained alone with the Terrible Three. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther glanced at her. That she had something unusual to say they felt certain, and they wondered what it was.

Cousin Ethel was silent for some moments, and the chums of the Shell waited. When the girl broke the silence at last, her cheeks were very red, and her voice faltered.

"I—I want to ask you—"

She paused.

"Shall we get out?" asked Lowther. "It's Manners you want to speak to, isn't it?"

"Yes; but—but I know you three never have any secrets from one another," said Ethel, "and—and I want to know what you think about it, too. Stay here."

"Right-ho!"

"It's about Figgins," said Ethel, the colour deepening in her fair cheeks.

"I—I am afraid that Figgins is in trouble. Levison says that Figgins stayed behind this afternoon on purpose, so that he could go into Mr. Ratcliff's study and see the paper for the South-cote examination."

Tom Merry started.

"Impossible!"

"Levison says he had a camera with him, and he took photographs of Figgins at the window of Mr. Ratcliff's study. He says Figgins was looking out of the window to see whether he was gone."

"Then we know it's all rot," said Tom Merry, "for Figgy just said himself that he hadn't been in Ratty's study to-day."

"Where are the photographs?" asked Lowther. "It's no good Levison yarning like that if he can't produce the photographs. And photographs can be faked, too."

"So I told Levison; but—but he says he gave Manners the films to develop."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom Merry and Lowther together.

"It all depends upon the films," said Cousin Ethel. "That is what I wanted to speak to Manners about."

Tom Merry and Lowther looked at their chum. The amateur photographer of St. Jim's was looking uncomfortable.

"You can settle this, Manners," said Tom Merry abruptly. "You have

developed the photographs Levison took?"

Manners nodded.

"Any photographs of the New House among them?"

"Three."

"Did they show Ratty's study window?"

"Yes; all of them."

"Oh! And Figgins—"

"I—I don't know whether I ought to speak about it," said Manners, very uncomfortably.

"Please tell us the facts," said Cousin Ethel, in a low voice. "If it is possible that Figgins has done this, we can never respect him again; but—but he must be saved from doing what he is thinking of."

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther. "You'd better speak out, Manners. Was Figgy in the picture?"

"Well, he was!" said Manners.

"In the picture of Ratty's study window?"

"Yes. That is why I said what I did when I came in. I thought Figgins had been in there japing Ratty while he was away. I knew Ratty was out this afternoon."

"You are sure?" asked Tom Merry anxiously. "Of course, you haven't been able to take a print."

"I shall take some prints to-morrow, and that will settle it," said Manners. "But it was plain enough to me in the developer. It gave me a surprise when Figgy's face came up. I am quite certain about it."

There was silence in the study for some minutes. The chums of the Shell were dismayed; Cousin Ethel was very white. This was proof, as positive as could be desired.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly. "Levison may have taken those photographs another time. He would lie about the time—"

Manners shook his head.

"He didn't have my camera before to-day," he said. "You remember I missed it just before we got ready to go down to the station. I used it this morning myself."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry, disappointed.

"And the films were still in the camera—he hadn't taken them out," said Manners. "The camera hasn't been in his hands more than a few hours. It was a fresh roll of films I put in this morning myself. Levison did it to-day."

That was unanswerable.

Figgins, who had always been believed incapable of a mean action or a falsehood, was convicted! He had lied in the study before all of them; it was plain now. And if he had lied, why—if not because he had visited Mr. Ratcliff's study for a motive he dared not explain? It all seemed only too clear to Cousin Ethel and the chums of the Shell.

Figgins was guilty!

"We'll keep this dark," said Tom Merry uneasily. "It's frightfully rotten of Figgins, but—but I don't like the idea of giving him away."

"No, no!" said Manners hastily. And Lowther nodded.

"Besides, there's a chance yet," said Tom Merry. "It's possible to make a mistake. Anyway, there's a chance. We'll wait till Manners has printed proofs of the pictures before we make up our minds."

"I can do that in the morning," said Manners.

Cousin Ethel rose.

There was a slight chance that the schoolboy photographer was mistaken in what he had seen on the film as he

developed it, but the morning would show. Slight as the hope was, the girl clung to it. She would not easily lose her belief in Figgins' honour.

Tom Merry walked back to the Head's house with Cousin Ethel. They spoke hardly a word on the way. Both were silent and miserable. It was a shock to both of them, and the hope they had was very slight.

Tom Merry returned to his study and found Manners and Lowther looking very glum.

"Do you think there's a chance you made a mistake, Manners, old man?" Tom Merry asked.

"No," said Manners.

And Tom Merry could not help thinking so, too.

CHAPTER 7.

The Proof!

MANNERS was up very early the next morning.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther came down with him, and watched him while he printed the films. Manners gave them a sight of the pictures before they were fixed in the solution.

The face of Figgins at the window of Mr. Ratcliff's study came out in one of the pictures with startling clearness, and in the other two it was unmistakable. The Terrible Three were very silent when they went down to breakfast. There was nothing to say. Figgins' presence in Mr. Ratcliff's study on that occasion was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt, and Figgins had denied it point-blank. The conclusion was obvious.

The chums of the Shell felt miserable and dejected. Figgins, the leader of the New House juniors, had always been their rival in House rows, but at bottom they had always liked one another well, and, in spite of House rivalry, they were good chums.

And Figgins was the very last fellow at St. Jim's whom they would have suspected of dishonesty or falsehood of any sort. To discover that their chum was dishonourable was a shock to the juniors. It seemed impossible, but it was true—the photograph could not lie.

If Levison had shown them finished photographs they would have suspected a "fake." Manners, above all, knew how easy it was to fake photographs, and combine parts of different pictures into the same scene. But Manners had actually developed the films himself—the photographs had been unseen by any eye until his had seen them.

How could there be any fake about the matter?

The chums of the Shell had arranged to meet Cousin Ethel and show her the photographs after the third lesson, when the juniors had a quarter of an hour to themselves.

By that time Manners had finished the pictures, and he had three good proofs. Cousin Ethel came to the gate of the Head's garden, and there the three juniors met her. Ethel looked eagerly at Manners, who had an envelope in his hand.

"You have the pictures?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Here they are!" said Manners.

He drew the proofs out of the envelope and passed them to Cousin Ethel. Ethel looked at them, and her face grew very pale. Each of the pictures showed the window of Mr. Ratcliff's study, and in each of them Figgins was shown at the window. In one of them the portrait

was very distinct—it was the clearest possible photograph that could have been taken of Figgins.

"Levison knows how to use a camera," Manners remarked. "The exposure is just right in each case."

"There can't be any mistake?" Cousin Ethel said, handing the pictures back to Manners, at last.

Manners shook his head.

"It would not be possible for Levison to arrange this somehow?" said the girl wistfully.

"Impossible. You see, the films were undeveloped—if they had been exposed to the daylight they would have been ruined. Levison handed me the camera with the films still in it—he couldn't have touched them in any way."

Ethel gave a sigh.

"This is terrible!" she said.

"It's rotten!" said Tom Merry miserably. "Who'd have thought it of old Figgins? If any chap had told me that Figgins would do a thing like this, I'd have punched his head. But there's no doubting one's own eyes."

"It seems clear, then, that Figgins has seen the examination paper?" said Ethel, in a low and troubled voice.

"Well, he must have been in Ratty's study to see it, and as he had the place to himself, I suppose he did."

"Then if he wins the prize—"

"It will be cheating."

"It must not happen!" said Cousin Ethel hastily. "I—I don't know what has made Figgins do this—it is not like him. But—but he must be saved. You must speak to him, and tell him that he must not use the knowledge—he must not!"

Tom Merry whistled softly.

"That means that he'll have to withdraw from the exam, and leave Levison a clear field," he said.

"That is better than winning dishonestly."

"I don't know whether Figgins will do it."

"He must! You must speak to him, and point it out to him," said Cousin Ethel earnestly. "Figgins must not be allowed to do this! I don't know what has made him think of it, but he is not mean—he is not base."

"We'll do our best," said Tom Merry.

Cousin Ethel nodded, and went up the garden path, looking very dejected. The juniors knew, by their own feelings, what a shock this must be to Cousin Ethel.

"Figgins will have to chuck the exam, that's all," said Tom Merry, when the Terrible Three returned to their study.

"But he won't!"

"And we can't give him away in public, or let Levison do it," said Monty Lowther. "He's always been decent, and it would be altogether too rough."

"It would be," agreed Tom Merry. "And you can bet that all the New House fellows would persist in thinking that it was a School House plot against him. They'd never believe that he was guilty, if the evidence were as clear as daylight. It would make fearfully bad feeling between the two Houses."

"No doubt about it."

"It mustn't come to that," said Tom Merry decidedly. "Look here, I've thought of a wheeze, and I think it will work. The way Figgins has acted shows pretty plainly that he has really seen the exam paper. If he enters for the exam, he will win unfairly. But suppose the exam paper was destroyed?"

"Destroyed?"

"Yes. Suppose it was destroyed? It would be rather hard on old Ratty,

having to draw up a new one; but that's better than disgracing Figgins, or letting him win unfairly."

Monty Lowther whistled.

"But who's going to destroy it?" he asked.

"We are!"

"Jolly risky business, getting into a Housemaster's study and meddling with his papers—in the New House, too!"

Tom Merry set his lips.

"Can you think of any other plan?" he asked.

"Not without giving Figgins away," said Monty Lowther, after a long pause. "and I suppose we've decided not to do that."

"But it's frightfully risky," said Manners. "Blessed if I care to risk a flogging for the sake of a chap who wants to cheat at an exam."

Tom Merry nodded.

"You're right," he said. "It's my idea, and it's only fair that I should carry it out; and one could do it as easily as three, if it can be done at all. I'll go."

"Alone?" asked Manners.

"Yes."

"Bosh!" said Manners promptly.

"You won't do anything of the sort. If you go, we go. That's understood, of course. We sink or swim together."

"You bet!" said Lowther.

"But there's no need for you fellows to run the risk—"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"Well, we'll settle on that, then, unless some other plan turns up," he said. "You can see Cousin Ethel, Manners. You can tell her what we've thought of, and see what she thinks of it. She's a jolly sensible girl, you know, and her opinion's worth having. Only don't pile on the risk. No need for her to think that we're running into danger."

"Right-ho!"

The Terrible Three left the study, and Manners went to see Cousin Ethel. He returned in a quarter of an hour.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

"Cousin Ethel thinks it's the very thing to be done," said Manners; "and she says she's very grateful to us for taking the trouble and risk."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We'll do it."

And that was settled.

During afternoon school, Tom Merry thought out a plan of action—somewhat to the detriment of afternoon lesson. When Mr. Linton asked Tom Merry in what century the Cape of Good Hope was discovered, and Tom Merry replied that it was discovered in Mr. Ratcliff's study, the master of the Shell stared at him, as well he might.

"You will take a hundred lines for inattention, Merry," said Mr. Linton; "and if you allow your mind to wander again, I shall cane you!"

And Tom Merry tried to think of his work after that. He was glad enough when afternoon lessons were dismissed; he had, as he told Manners and Lowther, something more important to think of.

The Terrible Three had agreed that the raid in Mr. Ratcliff's quarters must be made after dark. The hour of tea was the most suitable time, when most of the New House fellows would be in their studies or in Hall, and Mr. Ratcliff would be at the head of the Fourth Form tea-table in the New House. It was but seldom that Mr. Ratcliff had tea by himself in his own study. If he were there, of course, the attempt would have to be postponed.

"Comin' to tea, Tom Mewwy?" asked

(Continued on next page.)



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"I say, old chap," said one spectator to another, "do your players ever score goals?"

"Can't say, mate. I've only seen 'em play for two years!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Glazier, Eastleigh, West End, Woking, Surrey.

* * *

TAKING NO CHANCES!

Nervous Old Lady (in aeroplane): "You won't go any faster than thirty miles an hour, will you?"

Pilot: "No, ma'am."

Old Lady: "And you will slow down at corners, won't you?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Vickers, 95, West Street, Havercroft, nr. Wakefield.

* * *

TO BE CONTINUED!

Pat (reading from paper): "The car was travelling at sixty miles per hour—the cliff was only twenty yards away—the driver had lost control—"

Mike: "Well, go on."

Pat: "Can't—they don't give much paper with a pennyworth of chips!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Naylor, 339, Manning Road, Durban, South Africa.

* * *

"DE." FINED!

"What is the meaning of the big D on the dustbin?" asked the new boot-boy.

"The D on the dustbin," replied the aloof butler, "denotes that the despairing domestics of this detached domicile desire that the dutiful dustmen during their daily diversions will deem it their delightful duty to dislodge, deliberately and definitely, the dirt and dust deposited in that disagreeable dustbin!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Chadwick, 20, Myrtle Terrace, Ivel Lane, Sowerby Bridge, Yorks.

* * *

CAUSE AND EFFECT.

Visitor: "I can't tell you how delighted I am, Mrs. Giles, that my son Reggie has won a scholarship."

Mrs. Giles (the farmer's wife): "I can understand your feelings. I felt just the same when our pig won a medal at the cattle show."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. Pettit, 6, Deanfield Gardens, St. Peter's Road, Croydon, Surrey.

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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sighting the hero of the Shell in the doorway of the School House just before six. "We've got wathah a spread in Study No. 6."

"Thanks, Gussy—no! We're going out."

"Wight you are, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went up to Study No. 6 without a suspicion of where the chums of the Shell were going. Dusk was thick now in the old quadrangle, and the Terrible Three slipped out from the School House.

Lights gleamed from the windows of the New House as they approached it. There was a light in Figgins' study, and they caught a glimpse of Figgins passing the window. The window of Mr. Ratcliff's study was quite dark.

"He's not there!" Monty Lowther whispered.

"Good!"

The Terrible Three had chosen their moment well. The passage was deserted, and they reached the door of Mr. Ratcliff's study unnoticed.

Tom Merry tapped at the door and opened it. If by any chance Mr. Ratcliff had been there, he would have made some excuse; but the study was empty.

"Quick!" muttered Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three stepped into the study, and Tom Merry closed the door quickly behind them. For a second or two the three juniors stood there in the dark breathlessly, their hearts throbbing with suppressed excitement.

CHAPTER 8.

Caught in the Act!

THERE was a dull red glow from the grate in Mr. Ratcliff's study, and as the junior's eyes became accustomed to the surroundings, they found that the study was not so dark as it had seemed at first.

Objects loomed out dimly in the dim glow of the fire. The study was very silent—the suppressed breathing of the juniors was the only sound audible there, and it seemed strangely loud to their ears.

"It's all right!" Tom Merry muttered.

"Let's get to work; Ratty may come in any time."

"Well, he's bound to stay in the dining-room another quarter of an hour at least, I should think. But let's buck up."

"We shall have to have a light."

Tom Merry switched on the light. The place was theirs for the time, but they hesitated to begin. Up to the moment they had thought only of accomplishing the task they had set themselves, but now a hesitation seized upon them. Mr. Ratcliff was a hard and unpopular master, and they would willingly have played any jape upon him.

But to search among his papers—it struck the juniors, now that they were in his study, that it was not an action worthy of them. But it was to prevent dishonesty—to save a chum whose honour was at stake. Surely they were justified. And the destruction of the Southcote paper only meant a little work for Mr. Ratcliff.

"We've got to do it," said Tom Merry at last. "It's no good wasting time. Let's begin."

And they began. They looked on Mr. Ratcliff's table, and then raised the lid of his desk. Tom Merry uttered an exclamation:

"Look!"

On the top of all the other papers in the desk, lying full under their eyes, was a sheet, with a list of questions, marks, and numbers, and across the top

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was written in Mr. Ratcliff's cramped hand:

"SOUTHCOTE PRIZE EXAMINATION."

"That's it!"

"What luck!"

"Oh, good!"

Tom Merry picked out the paper.

The questions were written out in Mr. Ratcliff's handwriting, but the paper did not seem to be complete. There was a second sheet attached to it with a paper-clip, and on that sheet were numbers marked, but without the questions attached.

"Ratty hasn't finished the paper,"

Tom Merry remarked. "He's done about three parts of it—enough for a fellow to win the exam on, if he's copied down the questions and mugged them up in advance."

"Yes, rather!"

"But it shows there's no second copy made yet, as he hasn't finished this," said Tom Merry sagely; "so that's all right. We've only got to get rid of this, and the sooner the better."

The Terrible Three were feeling elated.

They had run a considerable risk in coming there, and they had been by no means sure of success, but fortune had favoured them. They had found the paper in a few minutes, and the fire, burning in the study, afforded a quick and easy means of getting rid of it.

They gathered round the fire. Monty Lowther stirred it to a blaze, and Tom Merry tossed the paper upon it.

It flared up at once in a flame.

The chums of the Shell watched it breathlessly.

For the moment they were too engrossed by what they were doing to have eyes or ears for anything else.

They did not hear a light step in the passage—they did not hear the handle of the door turn, or the door open.

As they stood before the fire their backs were to the study door, and they saw nothing.

Mr. Ratcliff, with the quiet, almost stealthy tread that was habitual to him, came into the study.

He gave a violent start at the Terrible Three.

But he did not speak.

He gazed at them with his little, keen eyes, and the soar expression upon his thin face grew sourer and more forbidding.

He closed the door quietly, and put his back to it, his arms outspread, as if to stop any sudden rush of the juniors to escape.

Then he spoke:

"So I have caught you!"

Mr. Ratcliff's voice was thin and acid, like his face and his nature. But in the silent study, to the startled juniors, it seemed to have a sound like thunder.

They started, and swung round.

They could not speak at the moment. They could only stare at the Housemaster in dumb dismay.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled sourly.

"What are you doing in my study? What paper are you burning there?"

No reply.

The Terrible Three were utterly taken aback.

As a rule Tom Merry & Co. had plenty of nerve, and seldom lost their presence of mind. But the entrance of Mr. Ratcliff was so sudden and so stealthy that for once they were completely thrown off their balance.

They could only stare at the hard face of the Housemaster like animals fascinated by the glare of a serpent.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes never left their faces. In the gleam of his eyes could be seen his triumph and his satisfaction. He disliked the Terrible Three more than any other fellows at St. Jim's—and he disliked a good many. He had never been able to catch them in any action that was really culpable, but now his chance had come. They were at his mercy.

"What is that paper?"

The last fragment of the paper had been reduced to ashes.

Still the Terrible Three did not speak.

Mr. Ratcliff's glittering eyes left their faces at last and roved round the study. He was curious to know what they had done. His instant suspicion was, of course, that they had deliberately destroyed some of his papers for revenge and for many petty injuries he had done them.

"What is that paper burning?"

He made a quick stride forward. He knew where the examination paper had been left, and he saw that it was missing. Then he knew the truth.

He turned upon the Shell fellows with savage anger in his face now.

"You have burnt the Southcote paper!" he said harshly.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"You have deliberately taken that paper from my desk and burnt it?" said Mr. Ratcliff, hardly able to believe himself that it was so. Much as he disliked the Terrible Three, he had never thought that they would, from sheer wantonness, be guilty of such an action as that. For the preparation of a new paper would mean hours of work for him, and that was not a joke.

Mr. Ratcliff's feelings at that moment were a strange mingling of surprise, anger, and satisfaction—satisfaction, because this discovery gave him a just cause for the long grudge he had borne against the chums of the Shell.

It was pleasant to find that his judgment had been correct—that they deserved his antipathy—that, like the prophet of old, he did well to be angry.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"I can hardly credit it," said Mr. Ratcliff slowly. "You have always been disobedient, unruly, and insubordinate boys, but I should never have suspected this, even of you. You are aware that drawing up such a paper is a long and troublesome task?"

"I—I suppose so, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yet you have destroyed it?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know," said Mr. Ratcliff, "that I could not possibly remember what I had written there with any distinctness—that I shall have, in fact, practically all my work to do over again."

"I suppose so, sir. I'm sorry."

"Your sorrow comes a little late, Merry," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I have never in all my experience come upon such an example of unfeeling, detestable spite. Have you any excuse to offer for your conduct?"

The juniors were silent.

"Have you any explanation to give—anything at all to say that may make your conduct appear less heinous?" demanded the Housemaster.

They did not speak. They could not speak without betraying Figgins, and that was not to be thought of.

Mr. Ratcliff's sharp eyes read their faces. He read there nothing but confusion, guilt, and dismay. His teeth closed together sharply.

"Very well!" he said. "Follow me! You will explain your conduct to the Head."

The Terrible Three followed him in silence.

CHAPTER 9.

The Head's Sentence!

DR. HOLMES was in his study. He looked surprised when Mr. Ratcliff entered, his face white with anger, with three silent and dismayed juniors at his heels.

He looked more than surprised when the New House master told his tale. He was shocked and grieved. Unlike Mr. Ratcliff, the Head of St. Jim's had always had the highest opinion of the Terrible Three, and he was a far better judge of boys.

"I have brought this matter before you, sir, because I feel that I ought not to deal with it myself," said Mr. Ratcliff. "It is too serious a matter for a Housemaster, and these boys, too, are under the authority of Mr. Railton."

"Quite so!" said the Head. He turned his gaze sternly upon the juniors. "Have you anything to say, Merry?"

"No, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Or you, Manners—Lowther?"

"No, sir."

"You do not deny, of course, having done what Mr. Ratcliff states?"

"No, sir."

"You entered his study during his absence, abstracted a paper from his desk, and burnt it in the fire, knowing perfectly well that it was a paper upon which Mr. Ratcliff had expended a great deal of time and trouble, which would have to be spent over again if the paper was destroyed?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"I can hardly credit it of you," said the Head sternly. "I am afraid that my opinion of you has been a mistaken one. You have been guilty of a base action."

The Terrible Three winced. They

knew in what light their action must appear to the Head and to Mr. Ratcliff, but there was no help for it. They could not exculpate themselves without betraying Figgins.

"I am astonished and grieved," said the Head. "I am very disappointed in you. Is it possible that you were actuated simply by dislike of a master when you acted in this discreditable and dishonourable way?"

"No, sir," said Tom Merry hastily. "We didn't mean it against Mr. Ratcliff, sir. I am very sorry about the trouble he will have doing the paper over again."

"But you knew—"

"Yes, sir, we knew; but—"

"But what?"

"We didn't want to give Mr. Ratcliff any trouble."

"Then why did you destroy the paper?"

The juniors were silent.

"Do you mean that you had some other motive, Merry, which I am not acquainted with?" asked the Head.

"Well, yes, sir."

"What was the motive?"

"I—I can't explain."

The Head's brow grew very dark.

"This is near prevarication, Merry," he said sternly. "You cannot expect me to listen to that. Mr. Ratcliff, I leave the punishment of these boys in your hands."

Mr. Ratcliff's lips seemed to grow thinner and harder.

"Thank you, Dr. Holmes. I think that they should be publicly flogged, in Hall, before the assembled school, and that I should inflict the punishment."

"It is perfectly just," The Head turned once more to the Terrible Three. "You have nothing more to say?"

"No, sir."

"Then you may go. After prayers to-morrow morning the school will be assembled to witness your punishment, and you will be in your places."

"Very well, sir."

The Terrible Three left the Head's study. In the passage they looked at one another, without speaking, for some moments.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry at last. "We've done it now, and no mistake!"

"Fairly done it," said Monty Lowther. "It's impossible to explain, of course. I think I'll go over to the New House again, and punch Figgins' head, though. That would be some comfort."

"Not much good in that. We've given old Ratty an excuse to get at us, and he's on our track with a vengeance. A flogging in Hall, by Jove!"

"And the Head thinking that we're a set of cads," said Manners gloomily. "That's worse than the flogging. Hang it all, we're in a pretty hole! If we had burnt Ratty's papers out of malice, it would have been a rotten trick like one of Levison's or Mellish's. No wonder the Head was waxy!"

"No wonder! But it's beastly hard on us!"

"Poor us!" said Monty Lowther.

The Terrible Three walked away in a gloomy mood. Blake and his chums were coming out of their study as the Shell fellows went upstairs.

"Had your tea?" asked Digby.

"No."

"There's supplies left in our study, if you're stony," said Blake generously. "We've been blueing a fiver of Gussy's. Never shall it be said that we refused to give everybody a share of Gussy's fivers."



Manners gave a contemptuous sniff as he looked into the woodshed and saw Levison, seated on a pile of faggots, smoking, and reading a sporting paper. "Studying for the exam, I suppose?" he said. "Mind your own business!" retorted Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "No; it's all right," said Tom Merry. Blake looked at him curiously.
 "It isn't all right," he replied. "It's all wrong. You're looking as cheerful as a boiled owl. What's the matter?"

"I suppose you'll know soon, so we may as well tell you," said Tom Merry miserably. "We're booked for a flogging in Hall to-morrow morning after prayers."

"What?"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "A flogging!"
 Tom Merry nodded gloomily.
 "But what have you done?" asked Blake, in astonishment.

"Raided Ratty's study."
 "Well, that was an asinine thing to do, with Ratty loose about the premises," said Herries. "But surely they won't flog you just for raiding a study? A caning is enough for that."

"We burnt a paper of his."
 "What paper?"
 "The Southcote Examination paper."

"Phew!"
 "That was a beastly thing to do, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a solemn shake of the head. "It means a lot of work for Watty, and work is a howlid thing at any time. I would neval have a hand in any twick that made a fellow work."

"Hang it all," said Blake, "that was rather thick, wasn't it? I don't think even old Ratty deserved that!"

Tom Merry flushed.
 "It wasn't a jape," he explained. "We had a special reason for getting rid of the paper, and if it had belonged to Mr. Railton, or the Head himself, we should have done it just the same. It's just our rotten luck that it belonged to Ratty, and that he caught us. We had to get rid of the paper, that was all; it wasn't up against Ratty in any way, though, of course, we can't expect him to believe that."

"What on earth did you want to get rid of the paper for?" asked Digby. "You're not entered for the Southcote; and if you were, you'd have no right to mess about with the exam paper."

"That's the worst of it," said Tom Merry glumly. "We can't explain. It's a secret, you see, and it concerns another chap. But we simply had to do it; it couldn't be helped. But I hope you fellows won't think we did it to spite old Ratty. That would have been mean, I know that. I suppose the school will think we did it out of spite."

"Blessed if I can see what else they are to think, unless you give a reason," said Blake, puzzled. "Of course, we take your word for it, if you tell us you weren't doing it out of spite. But I'm blessed if I can guess why you did it, then."

"Pway explain your extwaordinawy conduct, dear boys."

"Shan't!"

"Why not?"

"It's a rotten secret," growled Monty Lowther. "We can't say a word."

"It's jolly queer," said Blake.

"Cousin Ethel knows about it," said Tom Merry. "I should think that that's sufficient guarantee that it was all fair and square."

"Quite suffish, dear boys."

"My hat," said Blake, "the plot thickens, as they say in the newspaper serial! Looks to me as if you're all off your chumps. Does Cousin Ethel know you're going to be whopped to-morrow morning?"

"No, no," said Tom Merry hastily; "and she's not to know, either. I want you fellows to help us keep that dark. She would be awfully cut up if she knew."

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"You'll be awfully cut up, too, I think," said Blake. "It's rotten, and I'm sorry. But it does really look to me as if you went out hunting for trouble."

"Yaas, wathah! But I'm awfully sowwy, dear boys."

The Terrible Three went to their study, leaving the chums of the Fourth in a state of great amazement. Tom Merry & Co. ate their tea with little appetite. It was not only the flogging they minded, though that was bad enough. But the disgrace of a public punishment, with all the school looking on, and thinking they had been guilty of a mean action—that cut them more deeply. And they had forfeited the good opinion of the Head, whom they deeply respected.

It was, as Monty Lowther said, a rotten business all round. Figgins was the cause of it all, and their feelings towards Figgins were not amiable just then.

"I told Cousin Ethel we'd let her know how it went," Manners remarked. "She'll be anxious to hear. Shall I go and tell her about it?"

"Tell her the paper's burnt," said Tom Merry. "Not a hint about the flogging, mind. She would very likely give the whole show away to save us, and that would ruin everything. We've got to stand it. She needn't know anything about it till afterwards."

"Yes, that's best."
 And a little later Manners called in at the Head's house, and saw Cousin Ethel for a few minutes. The girl learned that the examination paper was destroyed, and that was all. Of the punishment that was to fall upon the Terrible Three she had no suspicion.

CHAPTER 10. Facing the Music!

IN the Common-room in the School House there was only one topic that evening—the coming punishment of the Terrible Three. The juniors could talk of nothing else. The Terrible Three bore such a good character in the school that the mere idea of their being flogged in public was at first scouted.

But it had to be believed, and when it came out what they were to be flogged for, the general amazement increased. What the chums of the Shell had done was so unlike them, that most of the fellows were convinced that there was some mistake.

There was indeed for some time a constant procession to Tom Merry's study, to learn the precise facts, until Tom Merry locked the door and refused admittance to all comers.

It had been impossible to keep the matter a secret—if the juniors themselves had said nothing, it would have made no difference—for Mr. Ratcliff talked, and the prefects had received instructions to assist in the punishment on the morrow morning.

Everybody in both Houses knew of it. The New House fellows were all angered by the burning of the examination paper; some of them, indeed, suspected that it had been done in order to benefit the School House candidate for the prize in some unknown way.

The Southcote Examination was one that specially concerned the New House. It had been founded by an old New House fellow, and the examination had to be held in the New House, and managed by the New House master. The interference of the School House was altogether out of the picture, as Thompson of the Shell said. Why couldn't they

mind their own business? And it was a mean thing to give even old Ratty a lot of extra work to do for nothing. As for the Terrible Three's denial that they had wanted to jape Ratty, if they hadn't done it for that, what had they done it for? Why couldn't they explain, if they had any explanation to give? That was what the New House fellows wanted to know, and the question could not be answered.

Even in the School House, where Tom Merry was second in popularity only to Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of the School, the fellows had had a painful shock. If Levison, Mellish, or Crooke had done this, they would not have been surprised. But Tom Merry had done it! They wouldn't have believed it, in spite of any evidence; but Tom Merry had admitted it. After that, there was no more to be said.

The chums of Study No. 6 stood up for their friends. They held that there was more in the matter than met the eye, and that if it all came out, it would not be to the discredit of the Terrible Three.

But that view found many scoffers. Even fellows like Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, Bernard Glyn, and Lumley-Lumley—all staunch friends of Tom Merry—did not know what to say.

But whatever view the House took of the matter, one thing was certain—the Terrible Three were to be flogged in the morning before the assembled school.

They kept to their study that evening; they felt that they could not endure the talk, the comments, the glances of the crowd in the Common-room. Tom Merry was chiefly anxious about one thing—that Cousin Ethel should not learn anything of the matter till it was over. Then it would be too late for her to take any step, and she would realise that it was best to keep silent.

For, in spite of all, the chums of the Shell were anxious to keep Figgins' guilt a secret—to save their dishonourable friend from public disgrace.

They had prevented what he intended—that was enough. He was saved from himself, and now it was best for nothing to be said.

Many curious glances were cast at the Terrible Three when they went up to their dormitory that night, but they refused to answer any questions, and the juniors gave it up at last.

After prayers the next morning the school was assembled in Big Hall. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther entered the Hall with a firm tread, and took their places quietly in the ranks of the Shell.

There was a slight buzz in the crowded Hall when Mr. Ratcliff entered by the upper door.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced towards the breathless school, and then raised his hand.

"Manners, Merry, Lowther!"
 The three juniors stepped out from the crowd of Shell fellows.

"Come here!"
 Every eye was upon the trio as they advanced up the Hall and stepped upon the platform.

"You three boys are aware of the punishment to which you have been sentenced by the Head for an act of outrageous vandalism," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I trust that you have the good sense and proper feeling to realise the justice of your punishment."

"I have nothing to say, sir," said Tom Merry.

"You deliberately, and without the

slightest excuse, destroyed an examination paper, upon which I had expended several hours of hard work," said Mr. Ratcliff.

The juniors were silent.
"Have you anything to say before you are punished?"

"No, sir."
"No excuse to offer for your wicked and outrageous conduct?"

"No, sir."
"Very well. I do not see, indeed, what excuse you could have to offer," said the New House master. "Prefects, take these boys up."

Monteith, Baker, and North, who were already on the platform, obeyed. The school understood now what were the orders Mr. Ratcliff had given them. They were to hoist the juniors for flogging—a duty usually assigned to the school porter. But it pleased Mr. Ratcliff to have the three hoisted at once, in order to make the spectacle more impressive, and the prefects had no choice but to obey the Housemaster's orders.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther made no resistance.

They submitted quietly to being hoisted upon the broad backs of the Sixth Formers, and Mr. Ratcliff grasped his cane a little harder, with a gleam in his eyes.

A pin might have been heard to drop in the crowded Hall as the New House master raised his hand.

CHAPTER 11.

At the Eleventh Hour!

COUSIN ETHEL came into the great arched doorway of the School House, with a perplexed expression upon her face. The girl was looking unusually pale that morning.

The discovery, beyond a doubt now, of Figgins' guilt, had been a terrible shock to her, and one she was not likely to recover from for some time.

The destruction of the examination paper had relieved her mind. At all events, Figgins could not make use now of the knowledge he was believed to have gained of the examination questions. But the girl was feeling very uneasy on account of her friends. That Mr. Ratcliff would miss the paper, and that he would make searching inquiry about it, was certain; and she feared for Tom Merry and his chums, if inquiry should be turned in their direction.

Of the fact that the discovery was already made, she knew nothing as yet; but she was anxious to see the chums of the Shell before morning school, to ask them how matters were going.

She had expected to see them without difficulty after chapel, if only as they went to their Form-room; but matters did not seem to be going on as usual at St. Jim's that morning. There were no juniors lingering in the quadrangle and there was no one in the passages. The Form-rooms, as yet, were deserted.

Ethel realised that the school must be assembled in Big Hall, and she wondered, with growing anxiety, why.

Taggles was standing outside the big oaken door, with a stolid expression upon his face. The school porter touched his hat to Miss Cleveland. Even tough, bad-tempered old Taggles could not help having a soft corner in his heart for the kind and bright-eyed girl.

Ethel came up to him almost breathlessly.

LEAGUE LEADERS ROUT THE "RABBITS."

SAINTS SWAMP ST. JUDE'S.

Playing away against St. Jude's, who are "knocking the bottom out of the table," St. Jim's strengthened their position in the League by a handsome win, and they are now at the head of affairs. St. Jude's were the first to score, Lunn, their centre-forward, getting a snap goal. Thereafter, however, the Saints' forwards overwhelmed their opponents' defence, and but for some inspired play by the St. Jude's goalie, they would have run up a cricket score. By half-time, St. Jim's were leading 5-1, Merry having scored four goals and D'Arcy one. In the second half the Saints cased up a little. Even so, their forwards found goal-scoring fairly easy, and Merry notched two more goals, and Blake and Lowther got one each. In the last few minutes the St. Jude's forwards make a quick attack, and Kerr

accidentally handled in the penalty area. Lunn took the kick, and left Fatty Wynn helpless with a fast drive. Final result: St. Jim's 9, St. Jude's 2.

FULL RESULTS.

ST. JUDE'S ..	2	ST. JIM'S ..	9
Lunn (2)		Lowther, Merry (6)	
		Blake, D'Arcy.	
CLAREMONT ..	3	REDCLYFFE ..	3
BAGSHOT ..	2	RIVER HOUSE ..	4
ROOKWOOD ..	5	ABBOTSFORD ..	4
HIGHCLIFFE ..	2	RYLCOMBE G. ..	0

LEAGUE TABLE TO DATE.

	P.	W.	D.	L.	F.	A.	Pts.
St. Jim's ..	17	12	3	2	95	41	27
St. Frank's ..	17	12	2	3	72	39	26
Grayfriars ..	17	11	3	3	77	36	25
Highcliffe ..	18	10	4	4	52	29	24
Rookwood ..	18	10	4	4	64	49	24
Rylcombe Gram.	17	10	3	4	47	35	23
River House ..	17	7	4	6	46	44	18
Redclyffe ..	17	3	4	10	33	73	10
Abbotsford ..	17	4	2	11	26	31	10
Claremont ..	17	3	3	11	33	65	9
Bagshot ..	18	2	4	12	23	45	8
St. Jude's ..	18	0	4	14	19	70	4

"Where is everybody, Mr. Taggles?" she asked.

Taggles jerked his thumb towards the door.

"In 'All, Miss Cleveland."

"Is the school all assembled there?"

"Yes, miss."

"What for?"

"To see the flogging, miss."

Ethel caught her breath.

"The flogging, Mr. Taggles?"

Taggles nodded.

"Yes, miss. That was the horders—the whole school was to see it. And I must say I 'ope it will do them young ribs good. Burning up a master's papers, indeed! I never 'eard of sich goings hon!"

"Who—who is to be flogged?" gasped Ethel.

"Merry, Manners, and Lowther, miss."

"What for?"

"You ain't 'eard?' asked Taggles, very gratified at having such an interesting piece of information to give. "They was caught red-'anded in a manner of speaking, burning up Mr. Ratcliff's examination papers, in the New 'Ouse, miss."

"Oh! And they are going to be flogged?"

"Yes, jest now," said Taggles.

"You say they were caught burning the paper?"

"That's 'ow it was, miss. Mr. Ratcliff comes into 'is study, and—"

"And Manners never told me!" murmured Ethel. "They were going to keep it a secret! Oh, what shall I do?"

Taggles was still talking, but Ethel did not hear him. Her brain was in a whirl. Tom Merry & Co sentenced to a disgraceful punishment for what they had done—what they had done to please her, because she wanted to save Figgins! She knew that Tom Merry could not have told the facts, or if anybody was flogged, it would be Figgins. The Head, and even Mr. Ratcliff, must forgive the juniors for what they had done if the real motive was known. It was not known—but it was her duty to make it known.

Figgins would suffer. But what then? If anyone was to suffer, it must be the guilty, not the innocent. Ethel was not long in making up her mind upon that point. She must save the chums of the Shell, who were facing this for her sake; she must save

them, even if she had to toll all and leave Figgins to his fate.

"Mr. Taggles! Open the door—quick!"

Taggles stared at her.

"Eh?" he ejaculated.

"Open the door! I must go in!"

"Go hin?"

"Yes, yes—at once! I must stop the flogging!"

"It can't be done, miss! Why, I should get into trouble if I let you go hin and interrupt the proceedings!" said Taggles. "I never 'eard—"

"You don't understand!" cried Ethel, her voice becoming almost shrill with fear and anxiety.

"I understand this much—that you can't go hin!" said the porter. "And I says—"

"Let me in! It may be too late if you delay me!" cried Ethel. "Let me in! I tell you I must go in!"

The girl was in an agony.

Even at this moment the blows might be falling, and she might be too late to stop the punishment.

"Now, look 'ere, miss—" began Taggles persuasively.

But Ethel did not listen. The girl was too anxious and excited to waste words upon Taggles further. She caught the sleeve of the porter, and with a strength she would never have believed herself capable of tore him aside. Taggles snorted angrily, and tried to stop her. But the girl was past him in a flash; she had thrown the door open and dashed into the Hall.

Taggles stood, dismayed.

"Well, my heye!" he murmured. "There will be a row about this here! I never 'eard of sich goings hon!"

Ethel ran into the Hall.

Her fleeting glance took in the whole scene—the school ranked there, seniors and juniors in their places; on the platform the three prefects, with the juniors hoisted for punishment; Mr. Ratcliff with the cane in his hand, raised to strike. The first blow was about to fall upon Tom Merry.

A buzz, growing to a shout of amazement, burst from the school as Ethel ran on to the platform.

"Stop!" she cried, raising her hand. "They must not be flogged!"

Mr. Ratcliff paused, and gave an unpleasant glance round, with his hand

thrown back ready to bring down the cane.

"You must not flog them, Mr. Ratcliff!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel. "They are not to blame! I know all about it! I will tell you!"

"What!"

The whole Hall was in a buzz.

The three prefects had led the juniors slip from their backs. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther stood in dismay. They knew that all must come out now; but Tom Merry made a last attempt to ward it off.

"Ethel," he exclaimed, "don't say a word!"

"I must!"

"It's all right! We can stand it!" said Monty Lowther. "You needn't worry about us! Run away, Ethel! Let's get it over!"

"I cannot!"

CHAPTER 12.

A Shock for the School!

"WHAT does this mean?" asked Mr. Ratcliff sharply. "I do not understand! Miss Cleveland, this interference on your part is extraordinary! I am astonished! You know perfectly well that you have no right here, and Taggles will be severely reprimanded for admitting you!"

"It was not his fault!" the girl exclaimed breathlessly. "He tried to stop me! But I had to come! You must not punish them, Mr. Ratcliff! I will tell you what happened; they were not to blame!"

"Nonsense!" said the New House master. "You cannot know the facts! I caught them in the very act of burning my papers!"

"Yes, yes! But—"

"I cannot listen to you, Miss Cleveland! It is exceedingly wrong of you to interrupt a punishment in this way! If you do not immediately retire, I shall complain to Dr. Holmes of your conduct!"

If looks could have knocked people down, Mr. Ratcliff would have fallen at once under the glances the St. Jim's fellows cast upon him.

Mr. Railton interposed quickly.

"It appears that Miss Cleveland has something to tell us, Mr. Ratcliff. Would it not be better to hear her before proceeding with the punishment?"

Mr. Ratcliff gave him a sour look.

"I do not think so!" he retorted. "The matter has been settled, and I decline to reopen it to please a foolish girl!"

"But—"

"The punishment will proceed!"

"I object!" said Mr. Railton firmly. "These boys belong to my House, and I ask for a further inquiry before they are punished, in the circumstances!"

"The matter is settled!"

"Do you refuse my request, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Yes, I do!" said the New House master tartly. "You have no right to interfere here, Mr. Railton! The punishment will proceed!"

"Then I shall appeal to Dr. Holmes!" said Mr. Railton quietly. "Kildare, will you go to the Head at once, and ask him to step into the Hall, if he will be so good, as Miss Cleveland is here and offers fresh evidence on the subject."

"Certainly, sir!" said the St. Jim's captain at once.

And he quitted the Hall.

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Mr. Ratcliff bit his lips. He felt that perhaps his victims were escaping him. But, in the circumstances, he could hardly proceed with the punishment until the Head came. Mr. Railton, indeed, was determined that he should not, and the New House master would have gained nothing by an open dispute.

There was a long and painful silence in Hall. Mr. Ratcliff was chafing; the boys were all eager and excited, wondering what Ethel had to say that would throw new light upon the strange affair. Only the Terrible Three knew.

The Head entered.

He came the instant he received Mr. Railton's message, and there was a hush in the crowded Hall as he came in by the upper door.

His face was very grave.

"I understand that you have something to tell us about this strange affair, Ethel," he said. "In the circumstances, it is quite right to delay the punishment. Please proceed."

Cousin Ethel caught her breath. The excitement that had buoyed her up till now had passed, and she was painfully conscious of hundreds of eyes fixed upon her. But she kept her courage, and spoke in a voice that only trembled slightly.

"They are going to be punished for burning Mr. Ratcliff's examination paper, sir?"

"Precisely."

"They were not to blame."

"But they were seen to do it, my dear child, and they have not denied it," said the Head gently.

"Yes, I know—I know; but their motive—"

"Their motive was wicked spite and revenge," said Mr. Ratcliff acutely.

"No, sir—oh, no! They destroyed the examination paper because—because they thought—"

"Yes?" said the Head kindly.

"Because they knew someone had seen it, and they did not want that boy to win the examination unfairly!" gasped Ethel.

"Good heavens!" murmured the Head.

Ethel stood firm.

"That was their reason, sir. Now I think you will not blame them. They could not betray the boy to you, and they could not let him win the prize unfairly. They thought it their duty to destroy the paper."

"If this is correct, I certainly should pardon them for what they did, and I am sure Mr. Ratcliff would regard their conduct leniently," said the Head gravely. "Certainly, they ought to have reported it to me, instead of taking the law into their own hands, but—"

"That would have been sneaking, sir," said Monty Lowther.

"Yes, I admit that," said the Head. "The situation is very curious, and very difficult. You certainly had no right to touch Mr. Ratcliff's paper, but if this is correct your action may be pardoned. But is it correct? Surely Miss Cleveland is labouring under a mistake?"

The Terrible Three were silent.

"I ask you, Merry, to give me an account of the matter," said the Head. Mr. Ratcliff was quite in the background now. "Is Miss Cleveland's statement correct?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"You three boys knew that someone had seen the examination paper in advance?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was it?"

Silence.

"It must, of course, have been one of the boys entered for the Southcote Prize," said the Head. "No one else



"So I have caught you!" Tom Merry & Co., watching the startled faces, as Mr. Ratcliff's acid voice suddenly sounded master. The three

would have had any object in looking at the paper."

"Yes, sir."

"As it happens, this term there are only two competitors entered for the Southcote Prize," said the Head. "The boy in question must, therefore, be either Levison or Figgins."

No answer.

"It must be one or the other, if it was either," said the Head. "I demand the name of the boy whom you suspected of seeing the examination paper, Merry."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"Unless the name is given, and the whole matter investigated and cleared

up, I can take no notice of what Miss Cleveland has said," went on the Head. "It is a case that requires clear proof. What was the name, Miss Cleveland?" Ethel's lips trembled.

"Must you know it, sir?"

"Certainly."

"I—I mean, will the punishment proceed unless I tell you?"

"Most decidedly."

"Then I will tell you, sir," faltered Ethel.

There was a breathless hush in Hall.

"Go on," said the Head.

Ethel's voice was faint as she answered.

"It was Figgins, sir!"

suspected Figgins of anything of the sort, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"No, sir," said the New House master.

"What reason had you to suppose that Figgins had seen the examination paper, Merry?"

"He only knew what I told him, sir," said Ethel. "I was told about it, and I asked them to interfere, to prevent a wrong being done."

"Oh! You were told that Figgins had seen the examination paper?"

"Yes, sir."

"By whom?"

Cousin Ethel hesitated.

"Must I tell you, sir?"

"This matter must be thrashed out to the very end now, my dear child," said the Head gently. "I think you have been deceived. At all events, I hope so. I must know the name of your informant, in order to call upon him to prove his allegation."

Some of the Fourth Formers noticed that at this moment Levison turned very pale. Cousin Ethel replied in a low voice, which was, however, heard by everyone present.

"It was Levison, sir."

"Levison! Figgins' rival in the examination!" said Mr. Ratcliff sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Levison, come forward!" Levison dragged himself from the ranks of the Fourth and approached the Head. If ever a rascal repented of his rascality, Levison did so then. But it was too late; he had to go through with the matter now, and he meant to brazen it out.

"Figgins!"

"Here, sir!" said Figgins.

Figgins came up the Hall with a firm step, his bearing a very marked contrast to that of the cad of the Fourth.

Figgins did not look at Cousin Ethel, and she did not look at him.

He halted before the Head.

"Do you deny having seen the paper, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Levison, you informed Miss Cleveland that Figgins had seen the examination paper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Upon what grounds?"

"I saw him in Mr. Ratcliff's study on Wednesday afternoon, sir."

"Is that true, Figgins?"

"No, sir."

"You did not enter Mr. Ratcliff's study on Wednesday afternoon?"

"No, sir."

"Where were you?"

"I remained behind when the other fellows went out to meet Miss Cleveland at the station. I was going to follow them when Levison came into my study. I guessed that he had come to look over the work I had been mugging up for the exam to discover how I stood, and I kicked him out. He upset ink over me, and I had to change before I could go out."

"I missed Miss Cleveland at the station, and came back alone. After

that I was with Kerr and Wynn all the time, as they can prove."

"Quite right, sir," said Kerr.

"Miss Cleveland," said the Head quietly, "did you allow Levison's bare statement to convince you that Figgins had entered Mr. Ratcliff's study to look at the examination paper?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Ethel breathlessly. "I would have taken Figgins' word against anybody's, especially against Levison's, for I know that Levison is not truthful."

"That is my experience of the boy, also," said Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. "If it is Levison's word against Figgins', sir, I should unhesitatingly believe Figgins."

The Head nodded. He was of the same opinion.

"I must understand, then, Miss Cleveland, that Levison offered you some kind of proof?" asked the Head.

"He did, sir."

"A proof which satisfied you and satisfied Merry Lowther, and Manners, in spite of your previous faith in Figgins?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was the proof?"

"It is here, sir," said Manners.

He drew the three photographs from his pocket, and passed them to the Head. Dr. Holmes took them in surprise, looked at them, and handed them to Mr. Ratcliff.

"This is a photograph of the New House, showing the window of my study, with Figgins at the window," said Mr. Ratcliff in surprise.

"Yes," said the Head. "That proves that Figgins certainly was in your study at the time the photographs were taken. Did you take these photographs, Manners?"

"No, sir; Levison did."

"When did you take them, Levison?"

"On Wednesday afternoon, sir."

"Oh!" The Head glanced at Figgins.

"You have denied being in Mr. Ratcliff's study on Wednesday afternoon, Figgins?"

"Totally, sir."

"Can you prove that these photographs were taken on Wednesday afternoon. Levison? It all rests upon that."

"Manners can, sir," said Levison.

"What have you to say, Manners?"

"Levison borrowed my camera on Wednesday morning, sir," said Manners. "When I made him give it back to me, I found that he had been taking photographs, and all the films were used up."

"I developed them for him, and these three pictures were among them. The pictures must have been taken on Wednesday, because Levison didn't have my camera until then. You know, sir, that if the films are exposed to light they are useless. These had not been exposed—Levison could not have touched them. Only he knew what pictures he had taken."

The Head looked very thoughtful.

"And you regarded this as conclusive proof that Figgins had been in Mr. Ratcliff's study on Wednesday?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the fact that he denied it made you think that he had been there with an unworthy object, such as looking at the examination paper in advance?"

"Exactly so, sir."

"What have you to say, Figgins?"

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exam paper being consumed in the fire, swung round with "What are you doing in my study?" asked the House-masters were fairly caught!

CHAPTER 13. On Trial!

"Figgins!"

The name was repeated up and down the Hall in every tone of amazement.

"Figgins!"

As the matter lay between two boys, Figgins and Levison, everybody had expected to hear Levison's name uttered, for the character of the cad of the Fourth was very well known. The name of Figgins came like a thunderclap.

"Figgins!" repeated the Head. "Impossible! I—I mean, this is very extraordinary. You would not have

CHAPTER 14.

Convicted!

Figgins was very pale.

"I don't know what to say, sir, excepting that it is rotten to be suspected by chaps who have known me a long time. I wasn't in Mr. Ratcliff's study on Wednesday; I never thought of going there. Levison is telling lies. About the photographs, I simply can't understand it."

There was a murmur in Hall.

To the crowd of fellows, as to the Terrible Three, the evidence appeared conclusive enough. But there was one fellow there whose keen, acute brain seized upon a chance. It was Kerr of the Fourth, the Scottish chum to whom Figgins had always turned for advice when he was in difficulties, and who did not fail him now. Kerr came out of his place.

"May I speak, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly, if you have anything to say upon this matter," said the Head.

Figgins' look, almost haggard now, turned hopefully upon his chum. He felt that Kerr might be able to help him.

"How do we know that Levison hasn't a camera of his own?" said Kerr.

"By Jove!" murmured Tom Merry.

"That is beside the point, Kerr," said the Head. "These photographs were taken in Manners' camera, and the films were still inside it when it was handed back to Manners, so I understand."

"That is so, sir," said Manners.

"Yes, sir," said Kerr eagerly. "But just look. Suppose Levison had a camera the same size? Manners' camera is an ordinary Kodak. Levison could easily hire one in the village of the same size exactly. Suppose he took photographs with it—he could roll up the films inside, ready to be developed. When they're rolled up they can be taken out of the camera, of course. Then it would have been perfectly easy for him to put that roll of films into Manners' camera, and pretend that they had been taken with that camera."

"What!"

"My hat!" said Manners.

"Figgins was in Mr. Ratcliff's study one day last week," said Kerr. "Mr. Ratcliff will remember that; he caned Figgins for it. On that occasion I remember that Figgins went to the window to see if Ratty—I mean, Mr. Ratcliff—was coming."

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn. "I remember that only Mr. Ratcliff came in the other way."

"Well, sir, suppose Levison took the photographs then, and put the roll of films by," said Kerr quietly. "When he borrowed Manners' camera, he only had to take Manners' roll out and put his own roll in, and then hand the camera back to Manners, pretending that he had taken the photographs that day, though they were really a week old."

"My only hat!" roared Jack Blake, forgetting where he was in his enthusiasm. "Kerr ought to be a giddy detective! Talk about Sexton Blake!"

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

The Head turned his glance upon Levison. The cad of the Fourth was white as chalk, and seemed hardly able to breathe.

"Oh!" murmured Cousin Ethel. "How could I suspect that? Oh, I was wrong!"

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Cousin Ethel looked at Figgins for the first time.

Kerr's suggestion had brought a flood of light with it. The girl only wanted the least reason for believing in Figgins; if there was a loophole in the evidence she would take advantage of it, whatever others thought. And here was at least a loophole.

The Head was speaking.

"Your suggestion is a very ingenious one, Kerr. But it is almost impossible for me to believe that any boy could be wicked enough and cunning enough to lay such a scheme. Do you not see that, if this is correct, Levison must have planned a week ago to blacken Figgins' character in this way, and must have proceeded with utter unscrupulousness to his end."

"I think he is quite capable of it, sir."

"It is a lie, sir," said Levison huskily. "I haven't a camera; I don't really know how to use one."

"That's not true," said Manners sharply. "I remarked at the time how wonderfully well you had taken the photographs, and I thought it very queer that you had the exposures so exact, if you hadn't handled one before."

"Are you willing, Levison, that your belongings should be searched for a camera, and that inquiries should be made in the village as to whether you have hired one?" said the Head.

"Yes, sir."

"That means that he hired it from a distance, perhaps by post, sir," said Kerr.

"Kerr is against me, of course, sir," said Levison. "He sticks up for Figgins, because Figgins is his chum. He'd blacken me to anybody else to save Figgins."

Some of the fellows nodded. Certainly it was plain enough that Kerr was only thinking of helping his chum.

The Head was silent for some moments. That the Terrible Three were not to be flogged now was clear enough. But a much more important matter had arisen out of Cousin Ethel's revelations. Had Figgins seen the examination paper? If he had, he deserved to be expelled from the school; if it could be proved, he undoubtedly would be expelled from the school. The proof had appeared conclusive, till Kerr's curious suggestion threw doubt upon it again.

Was it possible to believe that Levison could have concocted this deeply laid plot to blacken Figgins, and perhaps exclude him from the examination, in order to make sure of the prize?

If not, the proof against Figgins was clear. He had gone to Mr. Ratcliff's study, and his denial that he had gone there was proof enough that he had gone to see the examination paper.

A strange expression had been coming over Mr. Ratcliff's face for some minutes. His eyes were watching Levison very sharply. He spoke now, as the Head was silent and perplexed.

"You have stated that you saw Figgins in my study on Wednesday afternoon, Levison?"

"Yes, sir," said Levison boldly. He was feeling bold enough now; matters seemed to be going his way. Whether he convicted Figgins or not, he was safe himself, and the balance of evidence was

certainly against Figgins. Levison was no longer sorry that the matter had been brought out into public notice.

"You thought he had gone there to see the examination paper which was in my desk?"

"Yes, sir."

"The paper which Merry and his companions found and burned—with the name of the examination written upon it," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Why did you think Figgins had gone to see that paper?"

"Well, I suspected that was his little game, sir."

"But did you actually see him with the paper?" said Mr. Ratcliff. "He might have gone there to play some trick, as on a previous occasion."

"He went to see the paper, sir."

"How can you know?"

"Because I saw him reading it."

"He was actually looking at the paper of questions for the Southcote Examination?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, appearing very much struck by Levison's statement.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, sir," exclaimed Figgins, "it's not true! You know me well enough to know that I wouldn't do such a thing, sir."

"We all do, Figgy, dear boy!" called out Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hear, hear!"

"Silence!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Let Levison finish. The paper for the Southcote Examination which Merry and his companions destroyed was a double sheet, fastened by a paper-clip, and the words 'Southcote Prize Examination' were written upon it in large letters. You are sure that this was the paper Figgins was looking at, Levison?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you were in a court of law, upon oath, would you be prepared to make the same statement, Levison?"

"Quite ready, sir."

"Then you are a most wicked and unscrupulous boy," said Mr. Ratcliff, suddenly changing his tone. "Dr. Holmes, it is perfectly clear now that Levison is lying."

There was a buzz. Everybody in the Hall, including Levison, had supposed that Mr. Ratcliff was dead against Figgins, and helping to pile up evidence against him. They realised now that he had been trapping the false witness; not in a particularly scrupulous way, either, but the fellows could forgive him that for getting at the truth.

"I—I do not quite see it, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head.

"It is quite clear, sir. Levison is prepared to swear, if necessary, that he saw Figgins in my study, looking at a paper which was marked 'Southcote Prize Examination,' on Wednesday afternoon. As a matter of fact, I first drew up that paper on Wednesday evening. I intended to do so on Wednesday afternoon, but I went out to see a friend. It was left till the evening. Many persons, I have no doubt, imagined that the paper was already drawn up, as they are sometimes done weeks in advance. But on Wednesday afternoon, sir, there was no paper of questions in my study, or anywhere in the school, bearing the words 'Southcote Prize Examination,' as Levison states."

Levison staggered.

Dr. Holmes drew a deep breath.

"Yes, it is quite clear now, as you say," he said grimly. "Have you anything to say, Levison?"

Levison's tongue clove to his mouth.

(Continued on page 28.)



**Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.**

HALLO, chums! Snakes alive! I've just been reading a letter from an Australian reader, and that expression strikes me as being appropriate in the circumstances to start telling you what he has written to me. This Aussie chum lives in Seymour, and a little while ago the good people of that township got the scare of their lives. A snake is never a welcome visitor; but when they arrive in hundreds—well, it's a case of walking warily. All sorts and sizes of snakes came crawling into Seymour, and the reptiles invaded everywhere. It was not safe to venture out of doors unless armed with a weapon. For days the snakes infested the township, and made things mighty unpleasant for all concerned. Why the reptiles should pay the town a visit in such numbers was a mystery, but they outstayed their welcome—if any! Eventually, however, Seymour was cleared of the plague.

"THE FAITHFUL FAG!"

Many readers have written asking for another story about the adventures of little Joe Frayne, the waif from the London slums, and so it is that Martin Clifford has provided us with another yarn about this popular character. If there's one type of story that shows our author at his very best, it is undoubtedly the one you will read next Wednesday.

Since Joe came to St. Jim's he has proved himself to be one of the best—honourable, straightforward, and good-natured. There is something touching in the simple faith Joe has in the fellows who are his best friends. One of them is Arthur Langton, Joe's fag-master, and there is nothing the waif would not do for the kindly Sixth Former. So when Langton, in a moment of folly, lands himself in the soup, it is Joe who comes to his help—but at what cost to himself! This powerful and dramatic narrative of a fag's faithfulness and self-sacrifice will be sure to appeal to every reader.

"BRAND BLOTTERS of KICKING MULE!"

Changing the brand on cattle belonging to a neighbouring rancher is an old

trick of cattle thieves, and when, in Frank Richards' next gripping yarn of the Packsaddle pals, cattle begin to vanish from Kicking Mule Ranch, it is suspected that brand blotters are at work. But to catch them at it in the wide expanse of the ranges is not an easy matter. Yet, strangely enough, it is a plot by Steve Carson, the bully of Packsaddle School, to get Dick Carr a licking that eventually sets the tenderfoot on the trail of the brand blotters. On no account must you miss the thrills of this story of the Texas cow town school.

To wind up this grand programme—which, in my opinion, is one of the best of the year—there is another thrill-packed instalment of "The Secret World!" In these chapters you will read what happens to the St. Frank's adventurers when they reach Gothland, the enemy country of Northestria, where they have gone to rescue Prince Oswy from Kassker the Grim.

Then there is another batch of prize-winning jokes, and also our other interesting features. Look out for this ripping number, chums.

SPECIAL TO MY GIRL READERS!

It is very evident from the contents of my daily letter-bag that the good old GEM has a very large number of girl readers. Many are the appreciative letters I am getting from girls all over the Empire. It is easy to gather from these that the GEM has a special appeal for the live, up-to-date, athletic type of girl, for whose taste the ordinary "girls' paper" is too "soft and namby-pamby," as one of them puts it!

I would like to-day to say a word of special welcome to these girl chums of mine, whom I am proud to number among the great company of Gemites.

PEN PALS COUPON

9-3-35

In my work of editing the GEM, I have always in mind the fact that I have girls as well as boys to please. In this paper it is my aim to supply the youth of the Empire with stories which cannot be beaten for adventure and thrills, for schoolboy fun and drama, and for throbbing human interest—stories which are all this and more, but are perfectly clean and wholesome throughout. I can give you the guarantee that no story ever appears, or will appear, in the GEM that you need be ashamed of reading, whatever company you are in.

I believe the GEM to be the best girls' paper, as well as the best boys' paper, on the market!

A SHOCK FOR THE PAINTER!

The man who moved twenty tons! No; he is not a Samson or a Sandow, but just a painter in the workshops of the London, Midland & Scottish Railway at Crewe. The man was engaged in painting up the wheels of the tender of the famous Royal Scot engine. When he had finished the lower halves of the wheels, it was necessary to get the top halves to the bottom to paint them. After shifting the chocks from the wheels, he called for someone to give him a hand to move the tender. Then he leaned on a buffer to wait for help—and the massive tender started to move! The painter fell over, while the tender began to gather speed. Fortunately, however, an accident was prevented, for another man leaped on to it and applied the brake. It just shows how free in movement and well balanced the twenty-ton tender of a crack express engine is.

GRATITUDE REPAID!

A homeless, half-starved mongrel dog was Mickey, but he was intelligent for all that. One day he found a good home, and recently he has fully repaid the kind master who took him in. Mickey became very pally with his master's seven-year-old son, and he was playing with him and other children on a railway track when his doggy instinct warned him that danger was fast approaching. He gripped his young master's leggings and started dragging him away from the track down the embankment. The other children followed, and barely had they got clear of the track when an express train thundered over the metals on which they had been playing! It was a lucky day for Mickey's master as well as for Mickey when the little stray was given a home.

TAILPIECE!

Father: "Johnny, do you like going to school?"

Son: "Yes, father. And I like coming home, too; but I don't like staying there between times!"

THE EDITOR.



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Robert Ball, 14, Henry Road, Yardley, Birmingham, wants correspondents; age 17-20; literature, history, geography, customs of foreign countries, cycling, boxing, camping.

F. Adams, 64, Northborough Road, Norbury, London, S.W.16, wants a pen pal; age 14-18; shooting, amateur theatricals.

Miss Jean Langrich, Crow Hill Lane Club, Mansfield Woodhouse, Notts, wants a girl correspondent; age 14-17; sport, films, cars.

Miss Mary Davies, Ingleside, 61, Culverden Park, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, wants a girl correspondent; age 14-15; North Africa, Spain; sport, radio stars, films.

Leslie E. Dunn, 7, Beechholm Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey, wants correspondents in Scotland, America, China, India, Australia, France, Africa; age 12-16; cycling, books, photography.

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FRANK RICHARDS' GRIPPING TALE OF TEXAS SCHOOL ADVENTURE.

out, I'm going down to take a hand in the game!"

Barney Bailey reined in his horse outside the school porch. The Kicking Mule foreman's rugged, bearded face was excited and savage.

"Say, Bill Sampson!" he roared, his powerful voice ringing through the cow town school. "I guess we want you down to Packsaddle! That doggone Lick is holding us off at the calaboose with his gun, and he allows that he's keeping the fire-bug Judson for the Rangers! We sure want you to come along and tell him where to get off!"

"You doggone son of a prairie gopher!" roared back the schoolmaster of Packsaddle. "You figure that me, a schoolmaster, is aiming to back up a lynch mob? Forget it, and forget it soon!"

Barney Bailey glared down at him from the prancing bronco.

"Doggone you!" he roared. "I guess we're getting that fire-bug, marshal or no marshal! I'm telling you, the Judson gang shot up three good men afore we wiped them out at Squaw Mountain yesterday! I'm telling you that one of them was a man in this bunch, a Kicking Mule man, and every guy on Kicking Mule has moseyed along to lend a hand in stringing him up! And up he goes!"

There was a howl of approval from the five or six punchers riding with the Kicking Mule foreman. Dark looks were cast on the cow town schoolmaster as he stood in the porch facing them, with his thumbs hooked in his gunbelt. But dark and threatening looks had no effect on the burly, brawny schoolmaster of Packsaddle.

"Jumping painters!" hooted Bill. "Forget it, I'm telling you! Ain't there any law and order in this here county of Santanta, you pie-faced geeks? There's a Ranger guy coming over for him, and I guess the marshal is going to hand him over safe and sound to that Ranger guy! Chew on that, you ginks, and go back and punch cows!"

"I guess we ain't punching cows none till we seen that fire-bug up on a riata!" snarled Barney. "Ain't there a dozen shootings and hold-ups to his tally? And what's the good of sending him to trial? I guess we're making sure of him while we've got him!"

"Guess agin!" snorted Bill.

"Marshal Lick's a good man, and we ain't hornin' to hurt him any," said Barney. "You come along and talk turkey to him, Bill. He'll sure listen to you. Get him to slide out and leave us to carry on. We're getting Judson if we have to fill up Mister Lick full of lead! You get me?"

"I get you!" snorted Bill. "And now you get me! I'm sure coming down to Packsaddle, and I'm coming with my guns! And if you want to lay a finger on Jud, you got to walk over them guns to do it! Chew on that!"

"You backing up that gink Lick?" roared Barney.

"All the way, and then some!" roared Bill.

Barney's hand dropped on his gun. Instantly Bill's hand shot up from his hip, with his big Colt in it.

Bang!

The roar of the Colt rang like thunder through Packsaddle School. A wild, fierce yell came from Barney Bailey. For a second the breathless bunch reckoned that Bill had shot up the Kicking Mule foreman as he pulled his gun—as by all the laws and customs

of the cow country he was fully entitled to do. But the next second it was seen that Barney was still in his saddle, sucking the fingers of his right hand frantically, with howls and gurgles of pain. His revolver lay on the ground, shattered. Bill had shot it out of his hand as he pulled it. There was no man in Texas quicker on the draw and quicker on the trigger than Bill Sampson.

Bill's smoking gun covered the group of horsemen, his eyes glaring fiercely over it. Barney sucked his numbed fingers and howled. From one of the fingers a strip of skin had been torn by the bullet that had struck the Colt from his grasp.

"Say, you guys come here a-shooting?" roared Bill. "Get on with it, doggone your hides! I'll say that they'll be short on the tally at the Kicking Mule bunkhouse when you're through!"

"Doggone you, Bill!" growled one of the punchers. "We ain't hunting trouble with you, you pesky schoolmaster! But I'm telling you that, if you back up Mister Lick, they'll want a noo schoolmaster at Packsaddle, and don't you forget it!"

"Ride, you 'uns!" snarled Barney Bailey, and with his injured hand he swung round his bronco and dashed away, followed by his men. They galloped through the gateway and roared

When "Judge Lynch" comes to Packsaddle, it's the pals of the cow town school who cheat him of his victim!

away down the trail to the cow town, to rejoin the lynch mob yelling and parading there.

Bill Sampson gave a snort. Without a glance into the excited school-room, he strode away, bound for Packsaddle, to back up Marshal Lick in saving his prisoner—if he could—from Judge Lynch. Small Brown was left to carry on in the cow town school, but he soon gave up the attempt, his squeal drowned by the buzz of excited voices.

When school was out Steve Carson mounted and rode away with his friends, Poker Parker and Slim Dixon, to mingle with the mob, and several other fellows followed him. As the sun sank lower behind the bluffs of the Staked Plain and lights gleamed out in the dusk, the roar of the lynch mob from the cow town grew deeper, wilder, more menacing. That starry night there was to be wild work on the banks of the Frio.

Dick's Daring Scheme!

DICK CARR hardly ate his supper at the trestle table in the chuckhouse. Again and again before the sun went he had climbed the school fence and stared towards the cow town. The school was only a short distance from the town, and through the openings of the buildings he could see the excited mob parading, loosing off revolvers, goading one another to wilder frenzy. The calaboose, a strong timber building with corrugated iron roof, faced the plaza, and from the school only the rear of it could be seen, mostly shut off by a high fence.

There, Dick knew, lay Jud Judson,

the man he had helped to capture. But for him Jud would have succeeded in fleeing to the Staked Plain and keeping his liberty. Dick could not wish that that had happened, for the man was a reckless desperado with many a wild shooting and hold-up to his credit. But it sickened him to think of even such a wretch being dragged out by a mad-dened mob and hurled into eternity, riddled with bullets amid roars of execration. When darkness shut off the view he went into the chuckhouse to supper with the rest of the bunch, but his thoughts were with the man in the calaboose.

Slick Poindexter nudged Mick and grinned as he glanced at the clouded, thoughtful face of the tenderfoot. Half the bunch were away, gone down to Packsaddle to mingle in the riot. When Bill was absent Small Brown had little chance of keeping the bunch in check.

"I guess the tenderfoot's feeling sick," grinned Poindexter.

"Sure, he's new to Texas, and so he is," answered Mick.

Dick rose from the table.

"You fellows come out!" he said. "I've got something to say."

Slick and Mick followed him into the playground, glimmering under the softly gleaming stars of Texas.

"What's the game?" asked Slick. He peered curiously at Dick's face in the glimmer of the stars.

"It's through us that that man's going to be lynched!" said Dick Carr abruptly. "They'd never have got him if we hadn't chipped in."

"Through you, most of all!" grinned Poindexter. "Don't you worry, old-timer! I tell you, Jud's the hardest case in Texas."

"They're not going to get him if I can help it!" said Dick Carr, in a low, determined tone.

Slick and Mick stared at him blankly. "Can it, you gink!" said Slick.

"When that mob gets going Marshal Lick and Bill won't be able to stop them. What you figure you can do? You going to face that crowd with a ruler in your grip?"

Mick chuckled.

"I've been thinking it out," answered Dick quietly. "It's up to us, and I want you to help. We put him where he is, and it's up to us to save him, if we can, till the Rangers come for him. Bill's standing up for the law, and what Bill thinks is good enough for us."

"You said it!" agreed Mick. "But what?"

"Nothing doing, you gink!" granted Poindexter. "I'll say I'd back up Bill all along the line, and then some. But I'm telling you, if we go down to the calaboose and tell him we've come to help, he'll sure give us a lick with his quirt for our trouble."

"Sure thing!" grinned Mick.

"That's not the idea," said Dick Carr. "I've been watching the place ever since we got out of school. There's a mob in the plaza, in front of it—hundreds of them. But there's nothing to stop us from climbing the fence at the back—"

"Oh gum!" said Slick. "I guess we could get in at the back of the calaboose if we wanted, but what's the good? I tell you the Texas Rangers, if they was there, couldn't stop that mob when it starts."

"If we get Judson away—"

"Get him away!" howled Slick. "Let loose the worst fire-bug in Texas! Forget it, you geek!"

"Who's talking about letting him

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loose?" snapped Dick impatiently. "We get him away and get him here—to keep till the Rangers come for him."

"Groat gophers!" ejaculated Slick. He gave a snort of derision. "Why, you pesky tenderfoot, if the marshal spots a guy breaking into his calaboose he'll burn powder at sight, without waiting to ask whether it's a darn fool schoolboy! And if them lynchers get wise to it, they'll string you up along with Jud as like as not. Forget it!"

Dick set his lips. "I'm going!" he said. "If you won't back me up, you won't!"

He turned and tramped away, leaving Slick and Mick staring. It might be a wild and hare-brained scheme, but whether it was or not, Dick Carr's mind was made up, and he was going to carry on. He had a few preparations to make, and he went into the bunkhouse, where his locker was.

When he came out most of the bunch were grouped in the light from the door of the chuckhouse, listening to the wild roar from the cow town, and talking together excitedly. Dick slipped quietly away to the gate. As he passed through the gateway two dim figures loomed up in the shadows and joined him.

"You pesky gink!" came Slick Poindexter's growl. "You figure that we're letting you carry on this stunt on your lonesome? I'm telling you that you're the world's prize boob, all the same!"

Dick grinned. "Come on!" he said.

And the three schoolboys tramped down the trail together. As they drew near the cow town the roar of the lynch mob came deeper and louder. The cracking of revolvers, fired into the air, was incessant. More and more punchers had ridden into Packsaddle after sundown, and the plaza was swarming with horsemen and men on foot.

Like many Texan towns dating from the old Spanish days, Packsaddle was built round a plaza, on which the principal buildings fronted. The plaza was a blaze of light, naphtha lamps flaring on all sides; but the backs of the buildings were deep in shadow. The mob was gathering and thickening in front of the calaboose, but behind the gaol lay waste land, dark and deserted.

The three picked their way in the gloom over a rugged stretch, cumbered with empty tins, disused boots, and other rubbish. They reached the high fence at the back of the calaboose enclosure. The wall was of solid pinewood, ten feet high, shutting in the yard at the back of the gaol. Mick Kavanagh looked up at it and grinned.

"Sure, ye'll niver get over that, unless your grandfather was a monkey," he remarked.

"Stand close to Slick!" muttered Dick Carr. "You're the heftiest of us three. You get on his shoulders, Mick, and I'll get on yours."

"Faith! And ye didn't lave your brains behind in the ould country when you came to Texas!" commented Mick. "And how'll we get up after you, you gink?" demanded Slick.

"I've brought my lasso."

"Ain't he a broth of a boy, and doesn't he think of everything?" grinned Mick.

Slick Poindexter stood close to the wall, bracing himself to take a weight. Mick climbed on his shoulders with the activity of a monkey, and was just able to hold on to the top of the wall with his finger-tips. Over the two of them Dick

Carr climbed. He was the lightest weight of the three, but there were deep grunts from Slick Poindexter as he stood the strain.

But Dick was swiftly up and astride the top of the pinewood fence. He loosed his rope and dropped on the inner side of the wall. There he put his weight on the rope, till Slick and Mick had climbed over.

The three schoolboys trod softly towards the building. From a small barred window in the dark came a deep growling voice to their ears.

"They'll get me, sure! By the great horned toad, if I had a gat in my grip!"

It was the savage voice of Jud Judson. There was no glass in the window—glass was an almost unknown luxury at Packsaddle. Standing at the window, only the wooden bars separated them from the desperate leader of the Judson gang.

Bill Stands Firm!

"HAVE him out!"

"Lynch him!"

"String him up!"

Bill Sampson gave his gun-belt a hitch. Marshal Lick's face was grim and serious.

Except for the prisoner, the two men were alone in the calaboose. The marshal's deputies, even the gaoler, had disappeared. Probably their feelings and sympathies were on the side of Judge Lynch. Anyhow, they had no hunch for a battle with a lynch mob. In all Packsaddle only Bill Sampson was standing by the marshal. But Bill Sampson was a host in himself. It was Bill's presence that had staved off an attack so far.

Every guy in Packsaddle knew what Bill's shooting was like. And he was there to shoot if the mob attacked the calaboose. His bearded face was grim and unbending as he looked out of the door on to the crowded, lighted plaza.

"I guess they're coming, Bill!" muttered Mr. Lick, as a deeper, louder roar came from the mob.

Bill nodded. He knew that the attack was coming. Barney Bailey, at a little distance, could be seen in the saddle, yelling to the mob, who answered with deep roars. The fury of the lynch crowd was working to a climax.

Sooner or later—more likely sooner than later—the rush would come, scores of infuriated men, with weapons in their hands hurling themselves at the calaboose. And when that deadly rush came, two men, however determined, were not likely to drive it back. But one of the two, at all events, was steady as a rock, though the other was wavering.

Marshal Lick had stood by his duty throughout that day, rather hoping against hope than expecting to be able to hold his prisoner till the Rangers came for him.

One by one his men had slipped away—and, but for Bill Sampson's presence, it was possible that the marshal himself might have found business elsewhere. He was a brave man, and keen on doing his duty, but he felt that the game was up.

"Bill, old-timer, they're coming!" he said.

They were coming! With Barney Bailey and Two-Gun Carson in the lead, the whole mob surged towards the calaboose.

Bill Sampson looked at them coolly and steadily through the doorway for

a moment. Then he shut the door and slammed the bars into position. A minute more, and blows were raining on the stout pinewood.

"Have him out!"

"Lynch him!"

"You, Lick!" came Barney Bailey's deep yell. "You open up, you pie-faced clam! I guess nobody's going to hurt you any if you stand clear! You horn in, and you get yours, and you, too, Bill Sampson! Open up!"

"Not in your life-time, Barney!" shouted back the Marshal of Packsaddle.

"Bring an axe here, you guys!" shouted Barney Bailey.

Crash, crash, crash!

The door, stout as it was, shook and groaned under the crashing blows of the axe, wielded by a brawny puncher.

Bill Sampson quietly pulled the revolvers from his belt. The marshal had his hands on his guns. But he did not draw them.

"Say, you guys!" roared Bill. "You get through that door, and you'll sure hear my guns talk! I'm warning you!"

Barney's savage yell came back:

"You burn powder on this crowd, Bill Sampson, and we'll string you up alongside Jud!"

"I guess I'm burning powder soon's I see a doggoned guy through that door!" answered Bill grimly.

Crash, crash!

The axe rained blows on the door. Bill, standing a dozen feet back from it, lifted one of his Colts to a level. His face was like iron over it. The Marshal of Packsaddle touched him on the arm.

"The jig's up, old-timer!" he breathed. "They'll get Jud—and they'll get us if we burn powder! Forget it, Bill!"

The Packsaddle schoolmaster gave him a glare of scorn.

"And you town marshal of this hyer burg, and letting a lynch mob get your prisoner away!" he snorted. "You forget it! Pull your guns, you geek, and stand up to the racket!"

"They're all our friends, and Jud's a doggoned fire-bug, anyhow!" growled the marshal sulkily. "We done all we can, and the Rangers can't get in till sun-up. I'm telling you that Jud's a goner, and—"

"Aw, can it!" snapped Bill. "I keep on telling you to pull your guns!"

Crash! The edge of the axe came through the pinewood, and as it was jerked back a gleam of the naphtha lamps from the plaza came through.

Bang!

Bill fired at the slit in the wood. He fired high, and the bullet, whizzing through the split door, whistled over the heads outside. A roar of rage from the lynchers followed the shot, and a crash of revolver-fire. Hitherto Colts had been loosed off into the air, adding to the wild din. Now they were aimed at the calaboose door, and hot lead spattered on the wood and splintered it right and left.

Marshal Lick breathed hard. Barney's voice was heard yelling to the lynchers to hold their fire, and the rain of lead ceased to give the puncher with the axe a chance again. Once more the heavy axe crashed.

"You got to let up, Bill!" hissed the marshal. "That door will be down in a minute more, and they'll be coming a-shooting—"

"Can it!" he snorted. "If you got cold feet, there's a back door, ain't there, and a fence you can hop over.



With a final crash, the door was flung open, and the leaders of the wild mob surged in. "Stick 'em up, Bill!" hissed Barney Bailey. "We're giving you a chance to let up, you pesky gink!" "Stick up nothing!" growled Bill. "You ain't lynching Judson while I'm around!"

Vamoose the ranch, and leave me to handle that crowd. I guess I can do it!"

"The Texas Rangers couldn't handle them now their blood's up!" yelled the marshal.

"The Texas Rangers ain't got nothing on me!" retorted Bill. "I'm mentioning that I can handle that crowd! Ain't you swore me in as a deputy, you gink, and ain't it my dooty! Burn the wind while you've got a chance if you ain't standing to it! Quit, you quitter!"

Crash, crash, crash! came the heavy blows of the axe. Bill did not fire at the gaps in the door again. He had fired once in warning. Now he was ready for the door to fall—with levelled guns. Bill figured that he could stand up to the rush and drive it back. Mr. Lick figured nothing of the sort; but he did not take Bill's tip and vamoose the ranch. It was easy enough, for the whole crowd swarmed in front of the calaboose, and escape was open through the yard behind. But he was not the man to run when another man was standing to it.

With a final crash the door went! The fragments hung to the leather hinges, and the doorway was open to the wild mob.

Barney Bailey and Two-Gun Carson surged in, Colt in grip; behind them the pressing crowd, a leading puncher with a riata ready in his hand. With a roar, they pressed in at the doorway, only to halt, suddenly, savagely, in front of Bill's levelled guns.

Steady as a rock stood the Packsaddle schoolmaster, fingers on triggers. But the crowd behind were pressing on, and the halt was likely to be brief.

"Stick 'em up, Bill!" hissed Barney

hoarsely. "We're giving you a chance to let up, you pesky gink!"

"Stick up nothing!" growled Bill. "I'm shootin' if you wade in! You ain't lynching no Jud Judson while I'm around!"

"You'll get yours, Bill!" snapped Two-Gun Carson.

"Mebbe!" grunted Bill. "And I guess your young Steve, up at the school, will be a pesky orphan about the same time."

There was a fierce growl, and a surging from the mob, pressing at the doorway.

Marshal Lick gave a shout:

"Hold on, boys! I'll say we're letting you through! Bill, you ornery geek, put up your guns! I order you, as marshal of this here burg!"

"Order your Sunday shirts!" retorted Bill. "I ain't letting up, not so's you'd notice it!"

A fierce roar pealed from the lynch mob. There was a forward surge, and the leaders were pushed on. Guns were raised on all sides. Bill's eyes flashed, and in another second the roar of Colts would have split the air. Marshal Lick made a sudden grasp at Bill's arms and dragged them down.

"Jumping painters!" roared Bill. "You pesky geek—"

He had no time for more. The instant they were no longer threatened by Bill's guns, the lynchers rushed on, and the brawny schoolmaster of Packsaddle went down under the rush.

He roared and struggled fiercely, but five or six hefty punchers had hold of him, and they kept hold.

Swaying to and fro in the grasp of half a dozen pairs of hands, Bill Sampson raged in vain. They grinned at him as they held him.

"Forget it, Bill!" said one of the Kicking Mule punchers. "We got you by the short hairs, old-timer, and we ain't hurting you any. But you don't horn in on this deal!"

With Bill struggling in vain in many hands, and the marshal standing with folded arms resigned, the lynchers had it all their own way. With yells and shouts they spread through the calaboose, and from the mob crowded in front came the deep roar:

"Have him out! Lynch him!"

Saved From the Mob!

"BY gum! Listen to them!" breathed Slick Poindexter.

"They're sure mad!" muttered Mick.

Dick Carr did not speak. The fearful din from the front of the calaboose told that the crisis was at hand. There was no moment to be lost. Across the window of the outlaw's cell were two thick, strong wooden bars, and until they were gone, there was no help for the desperate man within. Dick had brought a small saw with him from the school, knowing what would be wanted, and he was sawing hard at the wooden bars, putting all his strength into it.

Within, a fierce, savage, bearded face glared at the schoolboys in the star-glimmer. Jud Judson, when he heard them at the window, figured for a moment that some of the lynchers had come round behind the calaboose, to get him from that quarter. But in the starlight he recognised the schoolboys who had captured him the day before. In sheer amazement he glared at them, and it slowly dawned on his mind that they were there to save him from the lynchers. As he realised that, hope

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lighted again in the ruffian's desperate face, and he watched Dick Carr's saw at work, panting with eagerness.

His brawny grasp fastened on a half-sawn bar. He wrenched it out, with an exertion of his huge strength. His head came out at the aperture, but his brawny shoulders could not follow. He jerked back into the cell.

"Quick!" he breathed.

Dick did not heed him. He sawed hard at the other bar. Twice the outlaw wrenched at it while he sawed, but failed to break it, and had to wait with snarling impatience. But the saw worked swiftly, and at last a third terrific wrench tore out the bar.

The way was open for Jud Judson.

His head and his brawny shoulders came through. Then Dick Carr spoke, quietly and coolly.

"Stop! Hands first, Jud! Tie his hands with that rope, Mick."

"You bet!"

The ruffian clenched his fists fiercely, his deep-set eyes burning at the Packsaddle schoolboys.

"Get clear!" he snarled.

He strove to force his way from the window.

"Collar him!" said Dick, and the three grasped the ruffian's arms and held. "We're not letting you loose, Jud Judson; we're keeping you for the Rangers. Keep quiet. One call from us will bring that mob round the gaol, and if they get you—"

Judson panted with rage. But he ceased to struggle. The schoolboys were there to save his life, not to set him free; and his life hung on a thread. One call would have brought the mad mob surging round the building to cut off his escape. Savagely, glaring like a wild beast, the chief of the Judson gang submitted while Mick bound his brawny wrists together with the end of Dick's lasso.

Then he was allowed to wedge through the window. They helped him to the ground outside. As he landed there, the fearful crashing in front of the building told that the door had fallen in.

"Beat it!" breathed Poindexter.

They hurried away across the yard, the outlaw following on the rope. Dick Carr's heart was beating hard. Only the fact that the marshal's men had deserted him, in fear of the lynch mob, had made the rescue possible. But the three had got away with it. They reached the high fence. A muttered word, and Jud Judson braced his gigantic form against the pinewood, and the schoolboys scrambled over him like cats to the top of the fence. Dick had taken a turn of the rope under the outlaw's arms to drag him up in his turn. Sitting astride of the fence, the three hauled on the rope; but they had to exert every ounce of their strength to drag the heavy ruffian up.

But they got him up and over, and lowered him on the other side. They jumped down after him. From the calaboose came a wild roar, and the sound of banging doors and trampling feet. The mob were in the gaol.

"By gum! I'll say we were only on time!" breathed Slick.

"Doggone you, let me loose!" hissed the outlaw.

"Cut that out!" snapped Dick. "Get on, you fellows, quick!"

They crossed the open space at a rapid run, the outlaw stumbling after them, dragged on the rope. The roar that pealed from the calaboose was terrifying in its wild rage.

"He's gone!"

"Lynch him!"

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The schoolboys hurried on. They had barely dragged the ruffian out of the grasp of Judge Lynch. It was certain that there would be immediate and furious pursuit and search; the lynchers were mad with rage at the escape of their victim. Panting, breathless, the schoolboys tore on to the school, with the outlaw panting behind.

Small Brown was in the gateway, staring out with uneasy eyes through his horn-rimmed spectacles. His startled eyes nearly popped through those horn rims at the sight of Jud Judson.

"What—what—" squealed Small Brown.

Unheeding him, the schoolboys led Jud on into the school yard. There was a shout from the bunch as they came crowding up.

"Stick him in the alfalfa shed!" said Slick Poindexter; and into that building Jud was led. He cursed loudly and fluently as his rescuers bound him fast to a beam. They left him there, and closed and locked the door on him. Jud was safe now till the Rangers came for him—if the lynch mob did not discover where he was hidden. And they were not likely to guess that he was hidden at Packsaddle School.

A Surprise for Bill Sampson!

"CARRY me home to die!" ejaculated Bill Sampson.

He stared into the empty cell. The marshal of Packsaddle stared over his shoulder.

The gaol yard was crowded with lynchers; the gate was unlocked and open; the whole building was surrounded now. With yells and oaths, the mob searched and hunted for the man who had vanished. Some of them were still rooting through the calaboose; others were raging through the streets of the cow town, gun in hand; and many had mounted their broncos, to scour the prairie trails and cut off Jud's escape before he got out of reach.

"I should smile!" said Bill.

No more than the lynchers had Bill guessed that the outlaw had made his getaway. He turned from the door of the cell, with a shrug of his broad shoulders and tramped away from the calaboose. The prisoner was gone; the lynch mob had broken up into search parties; the "rookus" was over. The Packsaddle schoolmaster headed for the school. He stopped at the sight of Steve Carson, Poker Parker, and Slim Dixon in the cow town street.

"What you young guys figure you're doing out of school?" he roared.

The three stared round at him.

"Great gophers! It's Bill!" exclaimed Steve. "Beat it!"

And they ran from the school trail.

After them roared Bill. Now that the rookus was over, Bill remembered that he was a schoolmaster. Up the trail to the school scuttled Steve, Poker, and Slim; after them came Bill, his long legs covering the ground like lightning, and he overtook them half-way up the trail. Bill hadn't his quirt with him, but he had on the biggest and heaviest boots in Santanta County. One of those boots landed on Steve Carson from behind like a battering-ram, and the gunman's son yelled, and flew headlong. Poker and Slim bounded on; but Bill was after them like a shot, and his powerful foot shot out twice, and Poker rolled to one side of the trail, Slim to the other.

Bill halted and glared down at the gasping trio.

"You figure Packsaddle boys are let

join up with a lynch mob!" he roared. "Say, I guess I'm booting you all the way home! Jump for it!"

Steve, Poker, and Slim jumped for it. They fairly raced up the trail to the school, bolted in at the gateway, and did not stop till they had scuttled into the bunkhouse. Bill Sampson tramped in at the gate, with a frowning brow. It was bed-time at Packsaddle, but not a guy was in bed. But at the sight of Bill's tall figure swinging in at the gate there was a general scuttle for the bunkhouse.

But three fellows stopped to greet Bill with grinning faces—Dick Carr, Slick Poindexter, and Mick Kavanagh. Bill glared at them.

"Why ain't you in your bunks?" he roared. "You figure you're staying up all night because there's a rookus in the burg? Mister Brown, you jest get me my quirt from the schoolhouse, and get it quick!"

"Forget it, Bill!" said Slick, with a chuckle. "We've sure got something to surprise you, old-timer! Say, where's Jud Judson?"

"That fire-bug has sure made his getaway!" snorted Bill. "That's what we got to tell the Ranger guys when they hit Packsaddle and want to know! Where's that quirt, Mister Brown?"

"But we got a surprise-package for you, Bill!" grinned Mick. "Look in the alfalfa shed!"

"What guff you giving me?" growled Bill.

Dick Carr unlocked the shed and threw open the door. Slick held up a lantern. Bill stared in, and almost fell down at the sight of Jud Judson roped to a beam.

"Jud!" he gasped.

"All ready for the Rangers, sir!" said Dick Carr, with a chuckle.

Bill fairly gaped.

"These boys, sir!" squealed Small Brown. "They brought that—that dreadful ruffian here, Mr. Sampson! They appear to have got him away from the gaol! They left the school without permission! Here is your quirt, sir!"

"They got him!" said Bill dazedly. "They beat Judge Lynch, and got him here—safe and sound—all ready for the Ranger guys to pick up! Carry me home to die!" He took the quirt from Small Brown and stared at him. "You figure I'm quirting these young geeks for what they've done, Mister Brown?"

"Certainly, sir! I consider—"

"Waal, I ain't quirting them none!" said Bill. "But I'll say that I'll quirt you, Mister Brown, if you ain't out of my reach in two shakes of a beaver's tail!"

Small Brown was out of Bill's reach in less than one shake of a beaver's tail. Dick Carr and his friends chuckled as they beat it for the bunkhouse.

In the sunrise a bunch of Texas Rangers rode into Packsaddle for Jud Judson. Marshal Lick could only tell them that the fire-bug of Santanta County had made his getaway. But Bill Sampson had another tale to tell; and when the Rangers rode away again they rode with Jud Judson, bound to a horse in their midst. Jud was safe in the grip of justice, and the schoolboys of Packsaddle had defeated Judge Lynch.

(Next Wednesday: "BRAND BLOTTERS OF KICKING MULE!"—telling of the thrilling adventures of Dick Carr against cow thieves!)

MORE BIG-THRILL CHAPTERS FROM OUR SUPER ST. FRANK'S STORY!

The SECRET WORLD!



"Go!" said Princess Mercia. "In faith, I was wrong to refuse to let thee venture into Gothland to rescue Prince Oswy." "By George, you're a brick!" exclaimed Handforth, grasping the princess' hand and shaking it with vigour. "Then it's O.K.?" "Good egg!"

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Captives in the Castle!

PRISONERS in the hands of the Northstrians, an ancient race living in an unknown world, Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee & Co. are unable to convince their captors that they have not come from Gothland, Northstria's enemy country. However, Edward Oswald Handforth, the St. Frank's junior, by saving the life of Princess Mercia, the girl ruler, is made captain of the guard. He discovers from spies where Prince Oswy, the princess' young brother, is kept prisoner in Gothland; so to prove their allegiance to Northstria, twelve of the St. Frank's party are to be chosen to go to Gothland to rescue him—a task fraught with deadly peril.

LORD DORRIMORE thoughtfully fingered a piece of rope. "I wonder," he said abstractedly. "By gad, Lee, I wonder!"

Nelson Lee and Captain Waring, who were talking close by, turned and gazed at the sporting peer. They were in the great hall of Athelstane Castle, and a meal had just been finished. Nipper and Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Archie Glenhorne and a number of other St. Frank's fellows were standing about, looking rather dejected and forlorn.

It was two days since the feast, but

except for Handforth & Co., and Willy and the Moor View girls, all the airship party were still prisoners.

They had expected to be released after the great feast, but to their surprise they had been taken back to Athelstane Castle again.

"What are you wondering about, old man?" asked Nelson Lee.

"No, I don't suppose it would be much good," said Dorrie, with a weak grin. "I was thinkin' that this rope might come in useful," he added, holding it up.

"My dear man, you're dreaming," said Lee. "The rope isn't more than a yard long, and it wouldn't bear a man's weight, anyhow. There's no way of escaping—"

"Escapin'!" interrupted Dorrie, staring. "Good glory! I was thinkin' about a smoke, that's all!"

"A smoke!" "Well, hang it, we're gettin' pretty desperate, aren't we?" growled his lordship. "I haven't tasted tobacco for days, an' even rope might be better than nothin'. But I haven't got a pipe on me, an'—"

"Let's be thankful that you are pipeless, Dorrie," interrupted the famous schoolmaster-detective. "If you tried to smoke that rope I'm afraid you'd soon be on the sick-list."

"It's a fact!" agreed Dorrie mournfully. "I'd give a thousand quid down

for a packet of cigarettes! And to think that I've got thousands of 'em in the airship!"

Captain Waring winced.

"Poor old Titan!" he said, with a sad note in his voice. "The finest airship of 'er class that ever left the sheds! And there she lies, strewn over that little valley just outside the capital! What a darned shame, Mr. Lee!"

"I've got nothing but praise for the Titan," retorted Nelson Lee. "When we expected to be battered to death in the blizzard, she brought us through, and landed us safely in this haven."

"There may, of course, be different ideas regarding havens," said Lord Dorrimore. "But I've always understood that a haven meant a sort of peaceful spot. Bein' locked up in a feudal castle isn't my notion of quiet comfort."

"I don't think we shall be held here much longer, Dorrie," replied Lee, smiling. "These people are a slow-going lot, by the look of things. They seem to take life very easily, and time, apparently, means little or nothing to them. We can only hope that Handforth and the other juniors will hasten matters."

Lord Dorrimore shook his head. "I'm a great believer in Handforth," he replied. "In his own way he's a wonderful kid, and I couldn't wish for

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a better companion in a good old scrap. But when it comes to a question of tact and diplomacy—well, if I had a hundred fellows to choose from, I should find Handforth's name at the bottom of the list! He's far more likely to start a civil war!"

Nelson Lee made no comment—for, to tell the truth, he had had similar ideas in his own head, although not quite so extreme. Handforth would probably get into trouble, but he was hardly likely to cause a civil war!

"Well, there seems to be some activity to relieve the monotony," said Nelson Lee, as he glanced round. "The boys are crowding at the windows, and they look excited. What is it, Nipper?" he added.

Nipper, the popular captain of the St. Frank's Remove, glanced round.

"There's a whole cavalcade coming up to the drawbridge, guv'nor," he replied, "and Handforth's at the head!"

"He would be!" said Dorrie, grinning. "Gad, there's a chance that this might mean some action! Anythin' to relieve the monotony!"

They joined the boys on the other side of the great hall. The windows on this side overlooked the moat and the cumbersome old drawbridge, with a clear view of the drive beyond. A brave procession was now advancing. At its head rode Edward Oswald Handforth on his charger, gleaming in his chain-mail and helmet, as captain of the bodyguard. Immediately behind him rode Church and McClure and Willy, and then twenty members of the bodyguard followed, with the princess' carriage rumbling onwards immediately behind. Ethelbert the Red trotted beside the carriage on his own horse, and in the rear came Wynwed and another strong detachment of the bodyguard. It was a noisy, glittering cavalcade, full of colour and life, and amazingly reminiscent of medieval Britain.

Handforth thundered across the drawbridge and vanished from sight.

He had passed through the stone archway, and was in the inner courtyard. Apparently he had forgotten his duties as captain, for he left the other members of his bodyguard to escort the princess' carriage within. He flung himself off his horse, and swept past the lackeys who were waiting near the great doorway.

"Stand aside!" he shouted curtly. "Make way for your betters!"

None of the men attempted to stop him. His aggressive manner was sufficient in itself, although the fact that he was the captain of the bodyguard would have been ample warrant.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he roared, as he passed inside.

"Handy!"

"Good man!"

"What's the news, Handy, old son?"

"Are we free now?"

Edward Oswald Handforth grinned. He was fairly surrounded by the eager fellows, and Handforth liked nothing better than the limelight. Even Browne and Stevens of the Fifth joined in the pressing crowd. Nipper and Tregellis-West and Reggie Pitt and Fullwood were among the foremost juniors.

"Steady on! Don't all speak at once!" said Handforth breathlessly. "And you needn't kid yourselves that you're going to be set at liberty yet! Old Ethelbert the Red has brought the princess here, and they're going to choose a round dozen of you for a special mission."

"Hurrah!"

"Action at last!"

"You needn't gloat," said Handforth

gruffly. "There's nothing very glorious about this mission; it only means certain death for the chosen twelve!"

The Goblets of Wine!

"DEATH!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Ods shocks and starts!"

"Chuck it, Handy! You're

spoofing!"

The fellows were all shouting at once again.

"I'm not, and I've dashed in to give you the tip!" said Edward Oswald quickly. "I don't know how you're going to do the choosing, but if the princess asks for any volunteers, don't you jump into the trap!"

"But what is this death mission?" asked Nipper curiously.

"A raid into Gothland!" retorted Handforth. "A scheme to rescue Prince Oswy from the hands of that beast, Kassker! As captain of the bodyguard, it's my job."

"Eh?"

"My job!" repeated Handforth grimly.

"Good gad!"

"So you chaps keep off the grass!" went on Edward Oswald, with a glare. "If there's any call for volunteers, ignore it! This is a mission of certain death, and I'm giving you the straight tip—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come off it, Handy!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "You seem pretty keen on walking into the jaws of death yourself, don't you? I don't believe your spoof, my son? You're jealous; that's the trouble!"

"Absolutely!" nodded Archie Glen-thorne, fixing Handforth with a frigid stare. "I mean to say, dash it, you've heard that some of us are invited into this ripping adventure, and you're absolutely green with jealousy. A frightfully useless sort of trick, Handy, old bird! If it's a question of volunteering, I shall be the first dashed chappie to offer the good old right hand!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We're with you, Archie—we'll rally round!"

"What-ho! I mean to say—"

"Why, you—you—" Handforth paused, his gaze intense. "Do you mean to say that you ignore this warning of mine?" he hissed. "Is this all the thanks I get for rushing in, at the risk of slighting the princess, to warn you?"

William Napoleon Browne waved a benevolent hand.

"Peace, Brother Handforth!" he said gently. "It is needless for me to remark that we appreciate your motives to the full. We extend you our united and heartfelt thanks."

"Oh, well—"

"We realise, brother, that it is your desire to nab this cheery adventure for yourself," continued Browne calmly. "And so, in the fullness of your heart, you come amongst us and talk glibly of death and similar trifles. Fortunately, brother, we understand your ways, and thus we shall know exactly what to do when the volunteers are called for."

"You bet we shall!" said Boots of the Fourth.

"By jingo, rather!" agreed Da Valerie.

Handforth automatically clenched his fists. He had spoofed himself into believing that he was really giving a warning; but the frankly expressed views of his companions convinced him

that their conclusions were right. His real object was to choke them off, so that he could undertake this rescue himself.

But he had no further opportunity of urging his warnings, for he noticed that Ethelbert the Red was already within the great hall; and Ethelbert the Red, moreover, was looking at him with something that was very akin to suspicion.

Indeed, the chief adviser was indicating Handforth to the fair Mercia, whom he was escorting, with other courtiers hovering round.

"Hast thou seen, good Majesty!" murmured Ethelbert. "Our Handforth the Bold did take good care to enter first, and to speak secretly with his kith. Is't further proof thou need'st, my Majesty? By the bones of Senlac, methinks there hath been plotting, even during this brief minute!"

"Thy mind is unduly disposed to evil," frowned the princess.

"A harsh comment, forsooth!" said Ethelbert the Red, aggrieved. "I only desire to be cautious, sweet Majesty! 'Tis well that these people should be put to the test. I faith, I will not trust them else!"

"Have them ranged before me," said the young princess quietly.

Handforth was close by now, and he saluted.

"You want them all lined up!" he asked briskly. "Right-ho! You can leave this to me."

He turned and looked round comprehensively.

"Now then, you chaps, form up in a double line, and look shippy!" he commanded. "Mr. Lee—Dorrie—Captain Waring! Sorry, and all that, but you might obey orders and line up with the rest!"

"I like your infernal cheek!" said Lord Dormore warmly.

"You mustn't forget, Dorrie, that we're the prisoners," murmured Lee dryly. "And I think I would prefer to take my orders from Handforth than these Northeistriens. Besides, I have an idea that there is something big in the wind."

Within a minute the whole party was ranged up and down the quaint old hall. At one end stood the princess upon a raised platform, with Ethelbert the Red hovering near on one side, and Athelstane the Great on the other. The bodyguard had disposed itself round the walls, and all doorways were heavily guarded.

"So!" said Ethelbert when everything was ready. "Fear naught, good strangers; our one great wish is to believe thy professions of good faith. 'Tis her Majesty's desire that an opportunity should be provided for the testing of this loyalty. Ye are to be given a chance of proving your allegiance."

"Good!" exclaimed Dorrie, with relief. "It's all we ask."

"But why should any proof be necessary?" put in Handforth, appealing to the princess. "I'm loyal enough, and so are all these others! I think they ought to be released—"

"Hold, good Handforth!" interrupted Ethelbert. "Her Majesty would speak."

Edward Oswald felt suddenly confused. The string of words that had been on the tip of his tongue became lost. The Princess Mercia was looking straight at him, and there was something in the expression of her deep blue eyes which made him quail.

"Fear naught, fair youth!" she said softly. "Thou wilt not be sent into

danger. Thy place is near me, as captain of my bodyguard. Never will I let thee venture forth upon a mission of deadly peril."

"Oh, corks!" muttered Handforth. "But—but—"

The princess turned from him and looked at the captives.

"Tis upon the advice of good Ethelbert that ye are to be put to the test," she said, in her soft, musical voice. "Ye know of Prince Oswy, my brother. It has reached the ears of all of ye that my gentle Oswy is a captive in the hands of the vile Gothlanders. And 'twas Handforth the Bold who secured the knowledge of Prince Oswy's exact whereabouts. His place of captivity is known. And 'tis my wish that he should be rescued and brought hither to my side."

"You want us to go on this rescue raid, then?" asked Nelson Lee. "Your Majesty, we shall be eager to comply."

"Rather!" said Lord Dorrimore. "Only too glad. What do you say, Umlosi?"

"Wau! I am with thee, N'Kose," rumbled the African chieftain. "These days of idleness have turned my blood to water and my bones to jelly! If it is a fight, m' father, then will I enter it with joy!"

"Hear, hear!" "We'll all go and rescue Prince Oswy!"

There was a general shout of eager acquiescence, and the princess gave Ethelbert the Red a curious little glance.

"How now, good adviser?" she murmured. "Art still fearful lest these good strangers should be enemies?"

"Tis, mayhap, a ruse," said Ethelbert obstinately.

"Marry, but thou art as the mule!" retorted the princess, with a toss of her head. "Is't never possible to convince thee, stubborn one? These good people are our friends, as thou shouldst know."

"I urge thee, nevertheless, to send them forth," said Ethelbert tensely.

The young princess sighed.

"Let the twelve goblets of wine be brought in," she commanded. "'Tis with reluctance I pursue this course. But thou art a man, Ethelbert, and thou hast greater knowledge of men than I. Thou canst have thy way. But, by my faith, I think mine own judgment of human kind is better than thine! For myself, I would have none of this testing, for I am full satisfied already."

So it was perfectly clear that Ethelbert the Red was the real obstacle. He was a man of slow-going ways—a man with settled, stubborn convictions. Before admitting these strangers into full and complete freedom, he needed a concrete proof of their good will.

Happily, they were only too ready to supply the proof.

The Chosen Twelve!

TWELVE lackeys now appeared, and each one carried a polished metal salver. Upon this rested gleaming goblets, filled almost to the brim with red wine. There were over thirty of these goblets, and all the members of the party received one each—but they were commanded not to drink.

"Hold on!" said Handforth, as the lackeys were departing. "Where's mine?"

"And mine?" demanded Willy.

"Thou art not included in this ceremony, Handforth the Bold," said Ethelbert. "Neither are thy companions of

the bodyguard. 'Tis her Majesty's desire."

"Yes, but look here! I mean, hang it—"

"You've had your hour, Handy," interrupted Nipper. "This is our show."

"What-ho! Absolutely!"

"So, cheese it, old horse, and try to look pleasant!" grinned Pitt.

Handforth "cheesed it," but his efforts to look pleasant were scarcely a success. In point of fact, he looked very far from pleasant. The expression on his face was one of bitter resentment. Here was the commencement of the finest bit of excitement yet, and he was left out of it!

"I thank ye all, good people, for your willingness of spirit," the princess was saying softly. "But 'tis a dangerous mission ye are to venture upon. Perchance death will be the only reward—for in Gothland there is naught but cruelty. I am giving ye fair warning of this, and 'tis my desire that ye shall have a fair chance. Twelve are to go upon this mission, but only twelve. And thus it will be left to chance."

"In what way, your Majesty?" asked Lee.

"Each of ye holds a goblet of wine," replied the princess. "Twelve of them are marked with a cross in the bottom of the bowl. At my word of command, ye will drink, and ye who hold the marked goblets will go."

"This is gettin' interestin'," remarked Dorrie, peering into his wine.

"By jingo, I hope I'm one of the lucky ones!" said Pitt eagerly.

"What-ho!" breathed Archie. "The same laddie, with brass fittings!"

But it was useless to look into the depths of the wine, for the liquid was deep red, and slightly opaque. They could only wait until the order came for them to drink, for not until the wine had been swallowed could they know their fate. A dozen of them were to be chosen, not by their captors, but by chance.

"Before I command ye to drink, I would have ye know the nature of this

mission," continued the princess earnestly. "As Handforth the Bold hath discovered, my dear brother is a captive in the hands of Kassker the Grim, and we know precisely where he is to be found—the very castle—the very doorway by which entry can be made—the actual dungeon in which he lies. All this is known to us. When ye have been chosen by Fate, then will directions be imparted."

"We are ready—and willing!" declared Nelson Lee.

"Thou art of a brave heart," said Princess Mercia. "But hast thou an inkling of thy peril? Thou and thy companions must land upon Gothland soil, proceed to this castle fortress, and wrest Oswy from his cruel guards. 'Tis a mission that might well cause the stoutest heart to quail. So I have commanded the use of the marked goblets. I wish ye all to have an equal chance of life."

"That sounds pretty cheerful, your Majesty, but you needn't worry," said Lord Dorrimore genially. "Personally, I don't think these Gothlanders will prove such a handful as you believe. Anyhow, I am ready enough to take a chance—an' I'm just bubblin' over with eagerness to have a look at the bottom of this goblet!"

"Then I bid ye drink, gentlemen," said the princess, rising to her feet; "drink to the success of the enterprise, and to the health and safety of Prince Oswy."

"Hurrah!"

"To the success of the enterprise!"

They all raised their goblets, and drank. The wine was very mild—exactly similar to some they had tasted during the recent feast. To the last drop, the wine was drained, and eager eyes examined the polished metal at the bottom of the cups.

"By glory!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "I'm one of the lucky twelve!"

"Hurrah!" yelled Nipper. "So am I! Guv'nor, what about you?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

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"Yes, there is a cross for me," he said quietly.

"Oh, rats!" said Tommy Watson disgustedly. "I'm out of it!"

"And so am I, blow it!" growled Tregellis-West.

"Fear nothing, brothers, for I shall be going on this mission," said Browne of the Fifth, as he displayed his own goblet. "Success is assured, since I—"

"Chuck it, Browne!" snapped Stevens. "What about me? I think this is a perfectly rotten idea!"

"Fearful!" said Bob Christine. "I'm out in the cold, too!"

But Umlosi was one of the fateful twelve, and there were three members of the airship's crew also included. It was rather curious how Chance had selected the three fighting leaders of the party—Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrmore, and Umlosi. There were three other men, but all the rest were boys.

"Stand forward, those who have been selected," commanded Ethelbert the Red.

The twelve stood out, well in advance of the others.

"Tis well," commented the princess, nodding. "I am glad that so many of ye are men grown. I pray for your safety—"

"I protest, your Majesty," declared Lee earnestly. "I beg leave to utter a strong protest against this procedure." "What is thy objection?" demanded Ethelbert curtly.

"There are other men here," replied Lee, indicating Captain Waring and the rest of the airship's officers and crew. "Let six of them be substituted for these six boys."

"They have been chosen," said the princess hesitatingly.

"Of course we have, sir!" roared Nipper. "We're going, too!"

"Absolutely!"

"You can't dish us out of it, sir!"

"I urge you let these boys stand down, and to choose six men in their places," went on Nelson Lee, ignoring the youthful protests. "You have described this mission as one of peril—as one that may possibly lead to death. It is wrong that such young people should be deliberately sent—"

"Oh, chuck it, sir!" shouted Pitt. "We want to go!"

"Yes, rather, Mr. Lee!"

The princess was nonplussed.

"I will grant that thy wish is a reasonable one," she said. "But, strangely enough, the good youths are eager for the enterprise. And if they are so willing, why should I change that which Fate has decided?"

Ethelbert bent, and spoke into her ear.

"Nevertheless, I urge you to reconsider—" began Lee.

"Nay, 'tis over," said the princess, evidently influenced by her adviser's whisper. "The goblets have decided—and 'tis not for me to make any changes. The die is cast."

"Where do I come in, your Majesty?" asked Handforth, striding forward.

"Thou wilt remain in the Royal castle, good Handforth," said the princess softly. "'Tis thy duty to remain, and to watch over my safety. Is not that the greatest honour of all?"

And she gave him such a look of admiration and affection that Edward Oswald stood there, helpless. Speech left him, and he could only lower his gaze in utter confusion.

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The Rescue Party Set Off!

FIVE minutes later the twelve adventurers were out in the courtyard, and the princess was already being escorted back into Dunstane, the capital. Edward Oswald Handforth, much against his will, had been obliged to ride at the head of the cavalcade.

Ethelbert the Red, however, remained behind, and a number of the Athelstane soldiers—for each feudal lord had his own guard—were in charge of the twelve captives. Although they had been chosen to go on this mission, they were still treated as prisoners. The rest were again confined within the castle. Their fate would depend upon the success or failure of the rescue trip.

"I bid ye success in this venture, gentlemen," Ethelbert was saying in a grave voice. "With this escort, ye will now be marched to the shore of the lake, where a ship awaits in readiness."

"And what then?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Ye will be taken in this ship to within an hour's row of Gothland," replied Ethelbert. "At that point ye will be transferred into a small boat, and must then proceed alone. If success attends your cause, the ship will be awaiting in the same place upon your return."

"How long will this ship remain at anchor?"

"Full three days."

"Prince Oswy, you say, is imprisoned in Gunmare Fortress?" asked Nelson Lee. "And this building is to be found two or three miles inland, beyond the small village of Vertilla?"

"'Tis so," agreed the chief adviser. "Danzia, the capital of Gothland, lies some miles farther down the lakeside. But it behoves thee to be wary of Hunric Castle, where dwelleth the grim Kassker himself."

"It will be largely a matter of chance," nodded Nelson Lee. "But you may be sure that we shall do out utmost to outwit the wiles of friend Kassker."

"I shall be most interested to meet the gentleman," said Dorrie happily. "Gad, anythin's better than moonin' about day after day! Umlosi, you old chunk of soot, we're out for a fight this time!"

"Wau!" growled Umlosi. "Wonderous words, N'Kose!"

"And we'll show old Kassker something!" declared Reggie Pitt.

"Absolutely!" grinned Archie.

"What-ho! Tally-ho for the good old scrap, as it were! St. Frank's to the rescue, what? Ods battles and skirmishes! Off for the front-line trenches, dash it!"

"Let's get a move on!"

"Exactly what I was goin' to say," remarked Dorrie, nodding. "If we come back with Prince Oswy, we've proved our loyalty, eh? An' all the rest of the fellows will be given full freedom. That's the idea, isn't it?"

"I faith, sirrah, thou art of a brave spirit!" declared Ethelbert, some of his lethargy knocked out of him. "A murrain take these Gothlanders if they should harm ye!"

The chief adviser was beginning to see that these strangers were of a bold type. Far from being appalled at the prospect of their enterprise, they were eager for it. Even the boys were full of impatience. And Nelson Lee could not help feeling rather pleased with them. They knew the dangers well enough, but they were in no way dismayed.

And so, soon afterwards, the fated twelve were being marched under escort towards the lake. Their guards were

quite friendly, and allowed them to talk as they wished. Their only orders were to see these twelve men upon the ship.

"Looks like being a pretty long journey, sir," remarked Nipper, who was walking beside Nelson Lee. "How long did Ethelbert say? With twenty men at the sweeps, the ship will take nearly six hours, won't it?"

"So we have been informed," replied Lee, frowning. "And then another hour in the small boat. So, at the very best—assuming that we are successful in Gothland—we cannot hope to be back here until fifteen or sixteen hours have passed. It is more likely to be in the neighbourhood of twenty-four."

"Do you think we stand a chance, sir?"

"That's a very difficult question to answer, Nipper," replied Lee. "A similar number of Northestrans would, I am sure, be utterly useless. But we have certain advantages."

"This, for example," remarked Lord Dorrmore.

He had pulled his automatic out of his hip-pocket, and Lee nodded.

"Exactly," he agreed. "These people of the oasis know nothing of firearms."

"You've got yours handy, old man?" asked Dorrie.

"I have—and I shall not hesitate to use it."

"Rather a pity about old Umlosi's spear," said Dorrie. "The old beggar left it behind when we were hauled out of the airship. Gad! It seems an age since we left civilised surroundings—which reminds me!" he added, with a start. "I wonder if there's any chance of gettin' near the airship, an' baggin' a pocketful of cigarettes?"

"There's no need to make any detour, anyhow," said Lee, as they reached the top of a rise. "For there's the poor old Titan now—exactly as we last saw her."

"By Jove, yes!"

"Good old Titan!"

"Doesn't she look forlorn!"

Gazing down into the neighbouring valley, they could see the great airship. She had crashed in that spot, and nothing had been touched since. Indeed, the Northestrans had been reluctant to go near that sprawling mass of gleaming girders and torn fabric. They looked upon the airship as something beyond their ken.

The two whippet aeroplanes were standing on the grass just as they had been pulled clear by the airship men. These two little single-seater planes were quite intact, and ready to fly at a minute's notice, if necessary. And there was plenty of fuel, too—for the tanks of the great airship had come to no harm, and were over three-quarters full of the precious spirit.

But until this minute the voyagers had had no chance of going near the vessel again. And even now they were under escort, and far from being their own masters. Dorrie's eyes, however, were sparkling.

"Who's the leader of this bunch?" he asked briskly. "Hang it, it would be a sin to walk right by this—without grabbing a few smokes! Besides, I want some more shells for my automatic. And there's Umlosi's spear."

"Hold on, old man, hold on," interrupted Lee, his eyes gleaming. "I've got a better idea. What about the motor-boat?"

"Eh?"

"She could do that trip across the lake in less than an hour," went on Lee tensely. "That would make a bit of difference to our schedule, wouldn't it?"

"By the Lord Harry!" said Dorrie. "Just a little!"

"There are other advantages, too,"

said Lee. "It might aid our cause in many ways. The very sight of such a craft would cause consternation—"

"She's got a machine-gun on her, too!" interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "Lee, old man, it's a brainwave! This trip to Gothland is going to be a genuine rip-roarin' picnic!"

Not so Easy!

LORD DORRIMORE had provided for almost any contingency when he had given orders for equipping the ill-fated airship. For there were not only the handy little aeroplanes, but a stout motor-boat, with a powerful racing engine. These had been slung on the underside of the great aircraft. All, too, were provided with small but efficient machine-guns.

And in the airship's great cabin—in the store-rooms—were rifles, ammunition, and all manner of warlike material. Notwithstanding the peaceful nature of the airship's mission (for she had merely set out from England to search the Polar regions for a lost explorer), Dorrie had prepared himself for every kind of eventuality.

As he had said, an airship might possibly get adrift, and come down in some wild quarter of the earth. And it wouldn't be much good wishing for weapons then.

"The motor-boat's the thing!" said Nipper enthusiastically. "By Jove, governor, it's a stunning idea! A machine-gun, too! And what about rifles? Can't we all be armed? Why, we could make a raid—"

"Exactly," interrupted Lee. "The perils of this mission will be tremendously lessened if we can obtain the supplies we need. Captain!" he added loudly. "Hi! Who is in command of this escort? A word, good friend!"

A man at the head of the column looked round, and a halt was called.

"We would regard it as a favour if we were allowed to visit the airship yonder," said Lee, pointing, as the man came up. "Instead of using the ship which Ethelbert the Red has provided, we would desire to use our own."

The man gazed, and then shook his head.

"Tis impossible," he replied firmly.

"I don't mean the great ship of the air, but a boat by which we can cross the lake," explained Lee, speaking deliberately. "It is much smaller than your own ship, but considerably faster. It will aid our quest if you will allow us to fetch the boat, and if you will order it to be conveyed to the wafer."

The man looked very dubious.

"In faith I would like to please thee, good friend, but 'tis more than I dare do," he replied. "I have my orders from my lord, and 'twould go ill with me should I disregard them."

"Hang it, you want us to rescue Prince Oswy, don't you?" demanded Dorrie.

"Tis the dearest wish of all North-estria that the young prince should be restored to us," replied the man. "But I fear me that I am unable—"

"We will take the responsibility," went on Nelson Lee. "Our only desire is to bring success to our venture. Let us travel in our own boat. An order from you will be sufficient."

"I grant thee the truth of thy words—but 'tis more than I dare," replied the man, shaking his head. "By the bones of Offa, I believe thee, good friend, and would grant thy wish. But 'tis not in my power."

"What is your name?"

"I am known as Egbert the Fair," replied the officer.

"Then, Egbert the Fair, grant us this, at least," said Lee crisply. "Dispatch a man forthwith to your lord, and acquaint him with our wishes. Perhaps he will grant the request which you, yourself, are afraid to—"

"Nay, 'tis impossible," interrupted Egbert the Fair stubbornly. "My orders are to march ye all to the lakeside, and to see ye safely placed upon the waiting ship. Did I aught else, 'twould be hard with me. My great lord is a man who demands obedience, and I am powerless to listen further."

"But look here—"

"I must give orders to march, and if ye are wise, ye will obey," interrupted the man grimly. "Let us remain friends, I pray ye!"

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore exchanged rather helpless glances, and the other members of the party were equally dismayed. It seemed that nothing could be done. The man had received orders from his master, and he was afraid to depart from them. It seemed that the great idea was to come to nothing, after all.

But the position was not quite so hopeless as it appeared.

For, in the meantime, Handforth the Bold had been getting into one of his most aggressive moods, and that generally meant action of some kind. When the celebrated Edward Oswald really got going, things happened rapidly.

True to his trust, he had escorted the princess back to the Royal castle. This was his duty, and he had performed it without question. But during those three or four miles along the country road and into the city he had literally fumed.

Twelve of the party had been selected to go into Gothland, and he, Handforth, had been coolly left out of the fun! A thing of this sort was simply too ridiculous for words. It wasn't to be stood.

And after the princess' carriage had rumbled over the drawbridge, and after the fair Mercia had made her way into the castle, Handforth withdrew his guards and stormed into his own quarters. He gathered Church and McClure and Willy about him, and glared at them with all his old power.

"Well?" he snapped. "What about it?"

"Something," said Willy, "has got to be done!"

"Glad you know it!" retorted his major. "Something has got to be done! By George, are we going to allow those others to raid Gothland without us?"

"Never!" said Willy promptly.

"We've got to get permission to follow 'em up, and to go on that ship!"

"Why trouble about asking for permission?" said Willy. "It's too much of a risk, old son. Much easier to ride off and say nothing. Old Ethelbert the Rabbit-hearted might have too much to say if we asked for permission."

Handforth had been thinking of this idea himself, but since Willy had mooted it, he naturally put his foot down on the thing at once.

"Not likely!" he snapped. "I'm not going to do anything against the princess' orders! I'm going to her now, and I mean to get her sanction!"

"It's taking a big chance," said Willy dubiously. "Far better let me go, old man. Tact is required here, not bull-headedness. I'll twist the princess round my little fingers in half a minute, and—"

But Handforth, without waiting for his minor to finish, turned on his heel and rushed away. He went into the castle, and although several courtiers

attempted to stop him, he charged through the lot of them. He made straight for Princess Mercia's private quarters, and committed the unpardonable sin of thrusting himself unannounced into her presence.

Handforth on the Job!

THERE was one factor in Handforth's favour.

Princess Mercia was alone, for Ethelbert the Red had not yet returned from Athelstane Castle, and although Handforth had broken all the etiquette of the court, the young princess forgave him, not, however, without a pretence of severity.

"Hold!" she exclaimed frigidly. "What is this? Thou wretch! Knowest thou no better than to enter my presence so boisterously?"

"I beg your pardon, your Majesty!" gasped Handforth, as he pulled up, flustered. "But I've come here to ask for your permission. I want to go into Gothland with the others."

The girl's manner changed.

"I will overlook thy rashness, bold youth," she said softly. "But as for granting thee permission to go upon a death journey, I must refuse."

"Then—then you mean that you've sent all those others to their death?" asked Handforth accusingly. "You've deliberately sent them there to die!"

"They were eager for the adventure," said the princess, rather overpowered by his vehemence. "And 'twas not my scheme, bold Handforth. 'Twas Ethelbert's plan, and I will tell thee that mine own inclinations were against it."

"Oh, well, it's too late now, anyhow," said Handforth. "That's not the point, either. I want to go, your Majesty; and if they are willing to die for you, so am I!" he added, striking an attitude. "It will be an honour, your Majesty."

"I cannot let thee go, my sweet Handforth," murmured Mercia softly. "Thou art here to protect me. 'Tis thy duty to remain as captain of my body-guard."

For a moment Handforth was in grave danger of succumbing. He knew that the lovely Mercia was "soft" about him. But he backed away and flung up a hand.

"Let me go into Gothland to help in the rescue of Prince Oswy!" he thundered. "There is no danger here, your Majesty! Am I to remain idle and useless while those others brave dangers for your sake? Let me brave them, too! I demand it as a right—for Prince Oswy is your brother!"

The young princess looked at him with glowing eyes.

"Thou art right!" she cried. "Go! Thou wilt take success with thee, for thy boldness hath been proven—thy bravery is a byword in Northestria. In faith, I was wrong to refuse thee before!"

"By George, you're a brick!" yelled Handforth. "Then it's O.K.? Good egg!"

The startled princess was nearly bowled over as Handforth rushed up to her, seized her hand, and shook it with vigour. This sort of thing wasn't quite in accordance with the etiquette of the court. But in another moment Handforth had rushed out.

He tore into the quarters of the body-guard, and let out a whoop as Willy, Church, and McClure surrounded him.

"It's all right!" he yelled. "I've got permission!"

"Miracles aren't things of the past, after all, then," said Willy, staring.

"How in the name of marvellous did you do it, Ted?"

"None of your 'cheek!' snapped Handforth. "Where's Wynwed the Jovial? Up, the guard! Rally round, blow you!"

"You're not taking the whole bodyguard, are you?" asked Church, aghast.

"Only as far as the lake," replied Edward Oswald swiftly. "We might as well go in style. But as soon as we get to the ship I shall send the bodyguard back. And I think I'll send you back with 'em, young Willy! This isn't any sort of picnic for kids!"

Willy grinned.

"I've always heard that dotty people had delusions," he said calmly. "Think again, Ted! Why, if you tried to stop me—"

But his major didn't wait to listen. He was running about, yelling out his orders, and the members of the bodyguard were startled into sudden activity. Wynwed the Jovial was exceedingly flustered.

"By my bones, but art thou mad?" he growled. "'Tis time for food, good Handforth! What is this confusion? Have we not done enough for one day?"

Handforth gasped.

"You—you lazy rotter!" he roared. "You do an hour's work, and think you've finished! Order out the full bodyguard!"

Within twenty minutes all was ready, and with Handforth leading, the bodyguard thundered out of the courtyard and galloped noisily over the drawbridge. A hundred strong, they made a stirring picture with their chainmail, their accoutrements, and their decorated steeds.

"Lead the way to the road that the other party is taking!" shouted Handforth, as he galloped beside Wynwed. "The same road, remember! I want to overtake them before they get to the lake!"

And so it chanced that Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore did not find it necessary

to lay forcible hands upon Egbert the Fair.

They had been seriously considering this drastic measure after the man's stubborn refusal to listen to their wishes. He remained obdurate, and ordered the entire procession to march.

It was at this moment that a cloud of dust appeared on the summit of a neighbouring hill. And a large body of soldiers, galloping hard, came into view. The sight was so unexpected that everybody stared.

"Handforth, I'll be bound!" muttered Lee quickly.

"In that case, we may be all right even now," smiled Dorrie. "Upon my word, Lee there's somethin' pretty inspirin' about this Handforth youngster! He may be a bit of a blunderer, and several kinds of an ass, but, by gad, he's a beggar for action!"

(Read next week what happens to the St. Frank's rescue party in Gothland. It's one long thrill!)

His Honour At Stake!

(Continued from page 16.)

What could he say?

He could not unsay his whole story, and make up a new one; and he could not persist that Figgins had been looking at a paper which was not in existence.

He was fairly caught.

He gazed at the Head almost wildly, standing unsteadily, his face like chalk. Cousin Ethel gave a cry.

"Oh, Figgins is innocent! I knew it."

"Yaas, wathah!" came from the ranks of the Fourth. "Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yes, Figgins is innocent," said Dr. Holmes. "That has been proved clearly enough. As for the photographs, there is no doubt now that Kerr's suggestion is the true explanation. Levison has been guilty of base conduct. There will be a flogging this morning, but the boy to be flogged is Ernest Levison. Mr. Ratcliff, I leave him to you, and I trust you will not be too lenient."

"Very good, sir," said the New House master.

Figgins went down the Hall. There was a cheering crowd round him; all order was at an end, and the masters and prefects did not interfere. Cousin Ethel, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were all trying to shake hands with Figgins at once.

"So sorry, Figgy," said Tom Merry. "But how were we to know? We couldn't guess that dodge with the blessed camera."

"It was a rotten criminal dodge," said Manners. "I never suspected anything of the sort; I had no idea that Levison had a camera himself."

"We've been a set of asses," said Monty Lowther. "You can kick us if you like, Figgy."

"And I—I should have known better," said Cousin Ethel. "But—but it all seemed so horribly clear and convincing. Will you ever forgive me, Figgins?"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Figgins.

"But—but I should have known you better—"

"Yaas, wathah! The pity is, deah gal, that you didn't come to me for advice, instead of those Shell duffahs, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a wise shake of the head. "In a case like this, you know, what is wequiahed is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"I must remark that the Terrible Three have been terrible asses," said

Kerr. "But it's all over now, and I'm jolly glad it's turned out so well."

They crowded out of the Hall. From behind came the sound of wild howls, and a deadly swishing. Levison was receiving the punishment he had so nearly brought upon the chums of the Shell; and he was not taking it with fortitude. But his cries fell upon deaf ears; there was no one to pity the miserable plotter, whose cowardly schemes had recoiled upon himself.

The Terrible Three were elated enough. Their chum of the New House was not dishonourable after all, and that discovery meant more to them than their escape from the flogging.

Cousin Ethel had saved them from that, and had been the means of truth coming to light. But the girl was feeling very miserable as she left the School House. She had distrusted Figgins—she had allowed herself to be imposed upon by a cunning slanderer—and how could she expect Figgins to forget it? But Figgins was not the kind of fellow to bear malice or nurse injuries; and when Tom Merry & Co. caught sight of Figgins talking to Cousin Ethel in the Head's garden later that day, it certainly did not look as if Figgins was in anything but the best and happiest of tempers.

(Next week: "THE FAITHFUL FAG!"—another powerful St. Jim's yarn that no reader should miss. Order your GEM early.)

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