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Every
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The **GEM**

2d

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RAGGING



"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I must say you look wathah wemarkable, Kerr." "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the juniors. "What a giddy rag on Ratty!" exclaimed Blake. "We'll Ratty him!" said Kerr. "Hand me the skirt."

CHAPTER 1.

Very Ratty!

MR. RATCLIFF frowned. Mr. Ratcliff, the House-master of the New House at St. Jim's, was much more addicted to frowning than to smiling. He was not a cheerful person. He had a weak digestion and a strong temper. He looked with a sour eye upon everyone who was more cheerful than himself, and if he could have had his own way entirely the New House at St. Jim's would have enjoyed the silence and solemnity of a mausoleum.

Indeed, as Figgins of the Fourth had remarked, a mausoleum was a cheerful place in comparison with the New House when Ratty was on the war-path.

Mr. Ratcliff's frown, on the present occasion, was caused by the sounds of merriment proceeding from Figgins' study in the Fourth Form passage in the New House.

It must be admitted that the sounds of merriment were somewhat uproarious.

Figgins was evidently entertaining a little party in his study, and, as the Housemaster was supposed to be out, perhaps the guests allowed themselves to "go" a little.

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Mr. Ratcliff, who had just come in, could hear the sound of a chorus from above, and he ascended the stairs and entered the Fourth Form passage with his brows knitted and a very unpleasant glitter in his eyes. Over in the School House, Mr. Railton would have taken no notice of a harmless celebration in a junior study on a half-holiday; but this was not Mr. Ratcliff's way.

Mr. Ratcliff had a perfect genius for interfering. And the noise Figgins & Co. were making afforded him a sufficient excuse.

As Mr. Ratcliff approached Figgins' study the passage echoed with the noise from that famous apartment. It was really not an unpleasant noise—a dozen merry young voices joined in chorus. But it was extremely irritating to the ears of the fussy, faddy Housemaster.

When Mr. Ratcliff, the sour-tempered New House master, becomes more tyrannical than usual, the chums of St. Jim's hit on a corking rag to put a stopper on his petty tyranny!

The chorus finished just as he reached Figgins' door. Mr. Ratcliff paused outside the door for a few moments, in the stealthy way he had, and he was rewarded, as listeners generally are, by hearing no good about themselves.

Figgins' deep voice came quite clearly through the door to his ears.

"Jolly lucky Ratty's out!"

There was a laugh.

"Yaas, wathah!" It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form, a School House boy. "Yaas, wathah, Figgy, deah boy! I am afwaid Watty would go on the wampage if he heard that feahful waw."

"While the cat's away, you know," said the voice of Tom Merry of the Shell. "It's really kind and obliging of Ratty to get out."

"Hear, hear!"

"Chorus, gentlemen!" said Figgins. Mr. Ratcliff opened the door. He opened it quite suddenly, and stood looking into the crowded study, with a grim, sour expression upon his thin face.

Instead of a chorus, there was a gasp of alarm from the juniors in the study. The study was crammed.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, otherwise known as Figgins & Co., were there, of course. Tom Merry, Manners, and

MR RATCLIFF!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD



Lowther, the Terrible Three of the School House, were there. Blake, Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries were there. Kangaroo of the Shell and Reilly of the Fourth were there. So were Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, the three scholarship boys of the New House. It was a wonderful thing that the confined space of the junior study should hold so many, but the juniors were adepts in the art of making the most of a little space.

Some of them sat on chairs, and some on the window-sill. Some of them were standing up. All of them were very merry and happy. The table was loaded with good things, showing that Figgins & Co. were in great funds. The juniors were enjoying themselves. But all enjoyment vanished at the sight of Mr Ratcliff's sour countenance, and a grim silence fell upon the merry party.

The juniors stared at Mr. Ratcliff, and Mr Ratcliff stared at the juniors. And there was a silence that could be felt.

"G-good-afternoon, sir!" said Figgins, at last. "C-can we offer you a cup of tea, sir?"

"No, Figgins, you cannot!" said Mr. Ratcliff acidly.

"I—I hope we haven't been making too much noise," ventured Tom Merry.

"Indeed! Your hope is very ill-founded, Merry. You have been making a most disgraceful noise. I presume that it is your object to turn this House into a bear garden, like the School House," snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "That may be permitted by Mr. Railton. I do not permit it here."

Tom Merry set his lips. Mr. Ratcliff's sneer at the School House master made him very angry, but he could not very well retort. He was silent.

Mr. Ratcliff's unpleasant eye roved over the assembly.

"I will not have this disgraceful uproar in this House!" he said.

"I—I'm sorry, sir," stammered Figgins, turning very red. "I—I was only standing a bit of a feed to the fellows, sir; and it's a half-holiday, sir—"

"A half-holiday is no excuse for hooliganism," rapped out Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins' eye gleamed.

"I don't think we've been guilty of any hooliganism, sir," he said, with spirit. "I think the Head could not object to fellows singing a chorus in their study, if they wanted to."

It was rather an unfortunate remark

of Figgins'. It implied that Mr. Ratcliff was fussy and unreasonable—as he undoubtedly was.

The Housemaster frowned very darkly.

"I don't want any of your impertinence, Figgins!" he said angrily.

"If you please, sir—"

"Silence!"

"But, sir—"

"Hold your tongue, Figgins!"

Figgins bit his lip and was silent.

"You School House boys will leave this House immediately," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You are not under my jurisdiction, or I should punish you. The New House boys here will write out a hundred lines each."

"Oh, sir!"

"And this orgy," said Mr. Ratcliff, dwelling upon the word "orgy," which seemed to please him—"this orgy must not be continued in the other House. The School House boys may act as their Housemaster chooses to permit, but I forbid any New House boys to enter the School House this day. You hear me?"

"Yes, sir," said Figgins.

"That is all. If there is any more noise here I shall cane you all."

And Mr. Ratcliff strode out of the study feeling that he had put an effectual damper upon the spirits of Figgins and his friends—as indeed he had.

The juniors stood in silence as the Housemaster's footsteps died away down the passage.

It was not till he was safely out of hearing that any one of them spoke. Figgins broke the uncomfortable silence.

"I—I'm sorry for this, you fellows," he said awkwardly. "Ratty is a beast!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus sympathetically. "I must say that I do not wegard Watty as playin' the game, you know."

"Rotter!" said Kerr.

"Beast!"

"Worm!"

"Outsider!"

All the fellows had opinions to give, and their opinions were very unflattering to Mr. Ratcliff.

"We'd better buzz," said Tom Merry ruefully.

"It's all right, Figgys; it can't be helped. You could bring the stuff over to the School House, and we could finish the feed in my study, but—"

"But Ratty's up to that," growled Figgins. "That's why he won't let us into the School House to-day. He wants scragging."

"Yaas, wahah!"

"And we're jolly well not going to have the feed spoiled," said Fatty Wynn, in alarm. "We shall have to get round it somehow. And Kerr was going to do some of his impersonations after tea. It's a shame!"

"Rotten!"

"Beastly!"

The School House fellows moved towards the door. Redfern held up his hand.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed.

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"How is it all right?" demanded Figgins. "I think it's all wrong." "I've got an idea," said Redfern. "Look here! We've been stopped here, and we can't have the feed in the School House. Let's go down to Bunn's shop in Rylcombe, and have it there."

"Bai Jove, that's a wipping' ideah!" Figgins brightened up.

"Good egg!" he exclaimed. "You're a giddy genius, Reddy. Will you fellows come down to Bunn's, and we can do as we like?"

"Yes, rather." "Shush!" said Monty Lowther cautiously. "Don't let Ratty suspect, or he'd be after us like a shot!"

"Yaas, wathah!" "Mum's the word!" said Figgins. "You fellows meet us at the gates, and we'll walk down to Rylcombe together. We'll do old Ratty somehow."

"Good egg!" And the prospect of "doing old Ratty" cheered the juniors up wonderfully.

Tom Merry & Co. looked quite cheerful as they went downstairs. But at the sight of Mr. Ratcliff in the Hall, with his sour eye upon them, they became solemn at once, and drew long faces, and walked out of the New House as if they were going to a funeral.

CHAPTER 2.

A Feed at the Bunshop!

"READY?" "We're ready," said Blake; "Gussy isn't. He wants to change his necktie, so we shall have to wait a couple of hours or so."

"Weally, Blake, twenty minutes will be quite enough—"

The Terrible Three chuckled. The School House fellows had gone into their own House, to get ready for the walk to Rylcombe, and also to get out of Mr. Ratcliff's sight, in case he had a suspicious eye upon them.

Tom Merry & Co. had no great preparations to make, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was an exception. He was only prevented by force from rushing up to the dormitory to change his clothes.

Digby, Herries, and Blake stood round in the study, snorting. The Terrible Three looked in at the door, and saw an open box on the floor, and five or six ties of the most striking colours on the table. The swell of St. Jim's was making his selection with a critical eye.

"Figgys will be waiting," Manners remarked.

"I'm waiting," said Kangaroo. "Buck up, Gussy!"

"In the circus, Kangy, it is imposso to buck up. The question is, which of these neckties suits me?"

"Any old thing will do," remarked Blake.

"Any old thin' will not do, deah boy. On an occasion like this, a chap must dweess in somethin' like taste."

"Blessed if I see that a feed is to be dressed for!" said Kangaroo, staring. "You're not going to an evening party, Gussy."

"No; but—"

Monty Lowther burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy is thinking of Miss Bunn."

The juniors yelled, and Arthur Augustus turned very pink.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,435.

wiping away his tears. "You'll be the death of me! Is the pink necktie for Miss Bunn's eyes?"

"Put on your best Sunday topper, Gussy."

"And the tie with spots."

"And don't forget your white spats, old man."

"Miss Bunn is a little particular about the way you do your hair, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, with a heightened colour, turned to the glass again. He evidently disdained to reply to the jesting remarks of the School House fellows. He found a tie that suited him, and made a neat bow. Then he slipped on the elegant Eton jacket, and gave his handsome topper a polish.

"I'm ready!" he said, with dignity.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry. "Oh, Gussy!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Doesn't he look a picture?" said Blake admiringly. "My Aunt Selina fell in love with him when she came down here last time, and if she hadn't been fifty years older than Gussy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to listen to these wibald jokes, Blake!"

"Buck up!" said Reilly. "I can see the New House bounders outside the gates. Sure, they've been waiting long enough while Gussy was changing his tie for Miss Bunn."

"I was not changin' it for Miss Bunn, you ass! A fellow wants to look respectable. I have to keep up appearances for the whole study," said D'Arcy loftily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House party reached the gates. Figgins & Co. and Redfern and his comrades were waiting outside.

"You've been a jolly long time!" said Fatty Wynn, who was extremely anxious to resume the interrupted feed.

"It's Gussy," explained Blake. "He remembered that he hadn't washed his neck this morning, and—"

"Blake, you uttah ass—"

Figgins chuckled.

"Well, better late than never," he said cheerily. "Come on, before old Ratty gets an eye on us! He would be quite capable of following up to Bunn's and ordering us off, if he knew."

"Bai Jove!"

"He's rotten enough for anything," said Kerr. "Blessed if I wouldn't change into the School House, only a fellow naturally wants to belong to the Cock House of the school."

"The what?" demanded the School House juniors, in one breath.

"The Cock House of St. Jim's," said Kerr innocently. "Naturally, we can't join the secondary show, or else we should really give Ratty the sack."

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Duffer!"

"Yaas, wathah, Kerr, I wegard you as a feahful ass! You are perfectly well aware of the fact that the School House is Cock House of St. Jim's, and if I were not Figgins' guest at the pwsent moment, I should give you a feahful thwashin' for your awful cheek, you know."

"If we had a Housemaster like Ratty," said Blake, "we'd boil him. We wouldn't stand it in the School House."

"Oh, rats!"

"Order! Order!" exclaimed Figgins. "Shut up; we don't want a House row when we're going to have a feed. Order!"

"Yaas, wathah! I agree with my fwend Figgins. Ordah!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Shut up, and let's have a race to the village," he suggested.

"Good egg!"

"Pway don't wun, deah boys!" protested Arthur Augustus. "The woad is covahed with dust. I do not wish to get my bags dustay."

"Oh, blow your bags!" said Lowther.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

The juniors broke into a run. But Arthur Augustus allowed himself to drop behind. He was, as Blake expressed it, in his best bib and tucker, and he did not intend to spoil the effect by exerting himself upon a dusty road.

He walked on in an exceedingly stately manner, and reached Mr. Bunn's establishment some time after the rest of the fellows had arrived.

Mr. Bunn's shop was a very handsome establishment. Mr. Bunn was an enterprising confectioner, who was introducing London manners and customs into Rylcombe.

The bunshop, as the St. Jim's juniors called it, was the only place in Rylcombe where there were little tables, and imitation marble walls, and indigestible pastries in variegated colours. Naturally, it was very much patronised by the St. Jim's fellows; and among the attractions must be reckoned Miss Bunn, a very charming young lady, who had sweet smiles for all.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, to whom every member of the gentle sex was a duchess, at least, always treated Miss Bunn with the most profound courtesy, and Miss Bunn was certainly very nice to Arthur Augustus.

Miss Bunn was hovering about the St. Jim's party as D'Arcy entered. Tom Merry & Co. had four little tables ranged together to provide for their wants, and Figgins was giving orders in the most lavish way. It was not very often that Figgins was in great funds; but when he was, he proceeded to make the fur fly. Miss Bunn was much impressed by Figgys' reckless orders; but as soon as the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came down the middle of the shop, Miss Bunn's eyes wandered.

"And two dozen jam tarts," said Figgins.

"I will get another chair," said Miss Bunn.

Figgins stared.

"I don't want another chair," he said.

"I want jam tarts."

"Yes. On this side, please. There is room here!"

"Eh!" ejaculated Figgins.

He turned his head and saw D'Arcy, and understood. He grinned. Miss Bunn brought another chair, and room was made for Arthur Augustus.

"Thank you vewy much, Miss Bunn," said D'Arcy. "You are vewy kind."

And he sat down.

Figgins finished giving his orders, and the tables were soon, as the novelist would say, groaning under the goodly viands.

"Gentlemen!" said Figgins. "I'm sorry that the feed in my study was interrupted; but I think we shall be all right here. Fill up your glasses and drink a toast!"

"Good egg!"

Lemonade and ginger-beer foamed into the tumblers.

"Here's confusion to Ratty, and all his works!" said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

And the toast was drunk with enthusiasm.



"So you are repeating this disgraceful orgy in public," snapped Mr. Ratcliff, "and making enough noise to disgrace the shop and the school you belong to!" "We're not disgracing anything or anybody, sir," said Tom Merry. "Mr. Bunn is satisfied with our conduct."

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Ratcliff in a Rage!

TOM MERRY & CO. were enjoying themselves.

True, they could not venture to make quite so much noise in the bunshop as in a junior study at St. Jim's; but Mr. Bunn himself looked upon such good customers with a very kindly eye, and Miss Bunn was all smiles.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, instead of touching the bell when anything was wanted, had a way of strolling up to the counter near the door, and asking Miss Bunn for it in his most gracious way, and sometimes he remained there many minutes in conversation with Miss Bunn. These little excursions on the part of Arthur Augustus excited a considerable amount of risibility among the comrades. Arthur Augustus was a ladies' man, there was no doubt about that, and he liked to sun himself in the smiles of the gentler sex, though he would never have dreamed of being flirtatious. And it was impossible for the youthful Miss Bunn to avoid liking a junior whose manners were so elegant, and whose courtesy was so unflinching.

"More ginger-beer, waiter!" said Redfern presently.

Arthur Augustus looked at the New House junior.

"Did you address me, Wedfern?" he asked.

Redfern nodded.

"Yes. More ginger-beer!"

"You uttah ass!"

"You've constituted yourself waiter, haven't you?" asked Redfern innocently.

"Weally, Weddy—"

"Well, I'll ring, if you like—"

"Not at all," said D'Arcy hastily. "I will request Miss Bunn to send along some more gingah-beer."

And Arthur Augustus sauntered away elegantly.

He remained in conversation with Miss Bunn for five minutes over the dishes of pastry and bottles of sweets, and then came back to the table.

Redfern looked at him inquiringly.

"Where's the ginger-beer?" he asked.

"Bai Jove! I forgot all about it!"

"Well, you ass!" said Blake. "If you haven't ordered the ginger-beer, what have you been talking to Miss Bunn about?"

"I could tell you," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I don't think you could."

"Two to one I could name the subject."

"Wats!"

"Engagement-rings!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, jammed his monocle into his eye, and took a withering survey of Lowther.

"Montague Lowther!" he said, in an awful voice. "I wegard you as a wotten beast!"

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther.

"And an unspeakable wottah!"

"Good!"

"And if we were not in the pwesence of a lady, I would give you a feahful thwashin' for makin' wibald jokes."

"Good!" said Lowther. "Now pass the cake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What price that ginger-beer?" said Redfern. "I think it's a bit thick for Gussy to leave us beerless, while he talks about engagement-rings."

"You feahful ass! I wasn't talkin' about engagement-wings."

"Well, wedding-rings, then," said Lowther. "I'm not particular."

"You uttah duffah! I was not talkin' about wings at all."

"I suppose Miss Bunn is an angel

without wings," suggested Lowther, imitating Arthur Augustus' beautiful accent, and thereby creating a pun.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, you are a wottah. I decline to continue a widiculous discuss with you."

"Good! Order the ginger-beer," said Redfern, "or I'll order it, if you like. I dare say Miss Bunn would like me to go up to the counter for a change."

"Weally, Weddy—"

"Why, she's gone!" said Redfern, looking round. "Never mind, Mr. Bunn will do. Some more ginger-beer, please, Mr. Bunn."

"Certainly," said Mr. Bunn.

And the ginger-beer was forthcoming.

Arthur Augustus was beginning to put on his gloves. The other fellows watched that proceeding with surprise.

"Not going?" asked Figgins. "You mustn't mind Reddy. He can't help it."

"Sowwy, deah boy; but I have to go, you know," said D'Arcy.

"Miss Bunn's gone already!" murmured Lowther. "Meet me round the bandstand!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus glared at the humorous Lowther.

"I wegard you as a beast. Lowthah. Miss Bunn is goin' to do a little shoppin', and she has kindly accepted my escort as far as the dwapahs."

"Hear, hear!"

Blake shook his finger at his elegant chum. Arthur Augustus was giving his silk hat a little polish with his gloved hand.

"Gussy! Why do you do these things?"

"Blake, you ass—"

"You're not going before the feed's finished?" asked Fatty Wynn, in astonishment. "We haven't had the meringues yet."

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"I do not want any mewings, thank you."

"You've had only one cup of tea."

"That is quite sufficient, thanks."

"Remember us to Miss Bunn's young man, if you meet him," said Lowther, as Arthur Augustus turned away from the table.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's did not deign to reply. He walked down the shop with his aristocratic nose held very high in the air.

The juniors chuckled.

"Blessed if I can make D'Arcy out," said Fatty Wynn. "Fancy going before we've had meringues—and the cake, too. Is he dotty?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors watched the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus disappear through the doorway into the street. Then they resumed the feed without him.

Fatty Wynn had not paused. The fat Fourth Former had no time to waste. The supply of tuck was unlimited, and Fatty Wynn had an appetite to match.

He sat back in his chair with a sigh of contentment.

"That's something like," he remarked.

"Another cake?" asked Lowther, with solicitude.

"No, thanks!"

"Couple of dozen tarts?"

"No, I've had enough."

"One more health before we break up," said Tom Merry. "Here's to the founder of the feast."

"Good old Figgins!"

"Hurrah!"

And the toast was drunk with a stamping of feet and clinking of glasses.

It was unfortunate that just as the juniors were making the most noise, Mr. Ratcliff should walk into Mr. Bunn's establishment.

His sour eyes wandered towards the juniors at once, and he frowned.

Perhaps Mr. Ratcliff had come in for some light refreshments, but if so, he forgot all about it as soon as he caught sight of the merry party.

He strode towards them with knitted brows.

"Ah!" he ejaculated.

Figgins groaned.

"Old Ratty!" he murmured under his breath. "Oh, what luck!"

"So you are repeating this disgraceful orgy in public, and making enough noise in Mr. Bunn's shop to disgrace the shop, and the school you belong to."

"We're not disgracing anything or anybody, sir," said Tom Merry, flushing. "Mr. Bunn is satisfied with our conduct."

"Certainly, sir," said Mr. Bunn, coming forward. "I don't mind the young gentlemen making a little noise, sir. Boys will be boys."

"You may not mind," said Mr. Ratcliff tartly. "But as I happen to be their Housemaster, I do mind—and I object very strongly."

Mr. Bunn discreetly retired.

He did not wish to enter into an argument with the master from St. Jim's.

Mr. Ratcliff's sharp, beady eyes roved over the exasperated juniors.

"Leave this place at once, and return to St. Jim's," he said. "You are detained for the remainder of the afternoon."

Figgins & Co., and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence rose to their feet. They were New House boys, and had to obey Mr. Ratcliff.

But a quick glance passed among the School House fellows, and they sat still.

The New House juniors passed slowly down the shop, enraged but obedient.

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Figgins settled his bill with Mr. Bunn, the Housemaster watching him sourly. Then the New House juniors left the bunshop.

Mr. Ratcliff stared at Tom Merry & Co., still seated at the table.

"Did you hear me?" he said coldly.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry quietly.

"You will leave this place at once!"

"Excuse me, sir," said Tom Merry, very firmly. "You are not our Housemaster, sir. If Mr. Railton tells us we must not come here, we will obey him."

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered.

"Does that mean that you will not obey me, Merry?" he rapped out.

"You have no right to order us back to the school, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff paused.

He was exceeding his authority, and he knew it. Mr. Ratcliff was Housemaster to the New House, and Form-master of the Fifth Form at St. Jim's. But boys in other Forms, who belonged to the School House, were not under his authority. He knew it, and the juniors knew it, but he had not expected resistance.

"Then you refuse to obey me, Merry?" the New House master said at last.

"If you put it like that, yes, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff, between his teeth. "I shall report your conduct to the Head."

"Yes, sir!"

Tom Merry's manner was very respectful, but very determined. The Housemaster was red with anger. Mr. Bunn and several customers in the shop were listening to the altercation with smiles.

The Housemaster had placed himself in a ridiculous position, and only the instant obedience of the juniors could have saved his dignity. But Tom Merry & Co. evidently did not mean to obey. They were standing upon their rights.

Mr. Ratcliff gave them a bitter look and turned and strode out of the shop.

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Done fairly in the eye!" he murmured.

"The cheeky rotter!" growled Blake. "Fancy getting up on his hind legs and giving orders to the School House! Br-r-r!"

And the School House fellows, to make it quite clear that they were victorious, ordered more ginger-beer, and did not leave the bunshop for another ten minutes.

CHAPTER 4.

An Awkward Position!

MR. RATCLIFF left the bunshop and walked down the old High Street of Rylcombe with such an expression of concentrated rage upon his sour face that several passers-by turned to look at him.

The Housemaster did not observe it. He had carried his tyranny and his genius for meddlesome interference too far, and he had been snubbed in the most direct way by junior schoolboys. It was not surprising that Mr. Horace Ratcliff was in a towering rage.

He strode on savagely, and almost ran into the elegant junior outside the draper's shop some distance down the street. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was just raising his silk hat to a young lady who had stepped out of the shop with several parcels.

Mr. Ratcliff paused, and his eyes glinted. He was yearning for some victim upon whom to expend his anger, and it really seemed as if Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy had been specially sent for the purpose.

D'Arcy was too preoccupied to notice the Housemaster.

"Pway allow me to cawwy the parcels, Miss Bunn," he said gallantly.

"D'Arcy!"

Mr. Ratcliff rapped out the word.

Arthur Augustus looked round and raised his hat once more.

"Good-aftahnoon, sir!" he said.

Miss Bunn looked dismayed. She read the anger in Mr. Ratcliff's sour countenance, though she did not know the cause. She was concerned for Arthur Augustus, who was evidently booked for trouble.

"What does this mean, D'Arcy?" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff.

D'Arcy looked puzzled.

"I fail to undahstand you, sir," he answered.

Mr. Ratcliff compressed his thin lips.

"Junior schoolboys are not allowed to go about with young women," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You are perfectly well aware of that, D'Arcy."

D'Arcy turned crimson.

"If you speak of Miss Bunn, sir, I wquest you to allude to that young lady more respectfully," he said.

"Oh dear!" murmured Miss Bunn.

"That is not the way to speak to your master, D'Arcy," said Mr. Ratcliff sourly. "I shall report your conduct to the Head."

"My conduct is all wight, sir," said D'Arcy. "You can wport it if you like; I should not mind the Head knowin' that I had escorted Miss Bunn to do some shoppin'."

"Don't be impertinent, D'Arcy."

"I'm not bein' impertinent, sir. It is you who are bein' impertinent."

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

"What! What!"

"I wgard your intahferences here as most impertinent, Mr. Watcliff," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Your mannah is diswrespectful to Miss Bunn, and impertinent to me. I am vewy sowwy to see such conduct in a mastah of the school I belong to."

Mr. Ratcliff almost choked.

"D'Arcy! You insolent young rascal, You—"

"Weally, Mr. Watcliff—"

"Return to the school at once!" said the Housemaster harshly. "I shall deal with you there."

"I wefuse to weturn to the school, sir."

"What!"

"I wefuse to weturn to the school, sir. I belong to the School House, and you have no wight to ordah me to weturn to the school," said the swell of St. Jim's sternly. "I wgard your intahferecence with me as uttally gwoundless and impertinent."

"Wh-wah!"

"And I must wemark, sir, that your mannahs pwove that you are no gentleman," said Arthur Augustus crushingly.

Mr. Ratcliff stood rooted to the ground.

"Oh, don't make the old gentleman angry!" murmured Miss Bunn. "You had better leave me. I'm sure I did not know I was doing any harm."

"You were not doin' any harm, my deah young lady. Watty is a wathah cwusty old chap, that is all," said D'Arcy.

And he relieved Miss Bunn of her parcels and walked up the street by her side, leaving Mr. Ratcliff staring dazedly after him.

Mr. Ratcliff stood for a full minute apparently rooted to the pavement;

(Continued on page 8.)

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then he strode away towards St. Jim's at a great pace.

Arthur Augustus escorted Miss Bunn back to the bunshop, when Tom Merry & Co. came out.

"Hallo! Here's Gussy!" said Blake. "Finished the shopping, Gussy?"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"Anything gone wrong?" asked Lowther. "You look as if you'd been having a row with the shopman."

"I have just met old Watty."

"Oh! He's been here, and ordered Figgins & Co. home," said Tom Merry. "He's fairly on the warpath this afternoon. I suppose it's his liver."

"I wegard him as an impertinent fellow."

"Hear, hear! I hope you told him so," grinned Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What!" yelled Cornstalk. "You told him so?"

"Certainly! He had the feahful cheek to ordah me to leave Miss Bunn and return to the coll," said Arthur Augustus, frowning. "He was diswespectful towards Miss Bunn."

"The cad!"

"The rotter!"

"Yaas, wathah! Of course, I wasn't goin' to stand that. I was placed in a vewy awkward posish," said D'Arcy. "If any othah fellow had been diswespectful to Miss Bunn while she was undah my escort I should have wegard it as my duty to give him a feahful thwashin'. But it would be bad form to give a Housemastah a feahful thwashin', wouldn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see anythin' to laugh at, deah boys. I wegard it as a most sewious mattah, and a vewy awkward posish for a fellow."

"The posish would be more awkward still if you had punished Ratty," said Blake, with a chuckle. "You had better draw a line at punching a Housemaster."

"But I could not allow him to be wude to Miss Bunn."

"Ahem! Housemasters have the privilege of being rude if they like," said Kangaroo. "It's best to give a Housemaster his head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, I think I ought to speak to him when I get back to St. Jim's, and point out to him that his conduct was most unjustifiable and in the worst of taste," Arthur Augustus remarked thoughtfully.

"I expect he'll speak to you, without waiting for you to speak to him, if you told him he was impertinent!" grinned Manners.

"I have a gweat mind to weport him to the Head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's going to be trouble," said Tom Merry, as the juniors walked back to the school. "We shall find that Ratty has been to the Head by the time we get in."

"Sneaking rotter!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Howevah, I shall not be sowwy to face him, in the pwesence of the Head, in ordah to have an opportunity of sayin' what I think of his conduct."

"Faith, and you'll have the chance, entirely!" said Reilly.

And Arthur Augustus certainly did have the chance as soon as they entered the School House.

"The Ead wants to see Master D'Arcy in his study immedit!" announced Toby, with a commiserating glance at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Vewy well, deah boy!"

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"Is Mr. Ratcliff with the Head?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, Master Merry."

"Mind what you say, Gussy!" urged Blake. "You mustn't slang a Housemaster, you know."

"A fellow must considah his dig, Blake, deah boy."

"Yes; but go easy!"

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's expression as he started for the Head's study did not seem to indicate that he would "go easy," and the chums of the School House waited for him in the passage with considerable anxiety.

CHAPTER 5.

The Cane for Gussy!

D^{R.} HOLMES was frowning as Arthur Augustus entered his study.

Mr. Ratcliff was standing by the Head's desk, and he had evidently taken full advantage of the opportunity of making his statement first.

Dr. Holmes turned a very severe glance upon D'Arcy.

"D'Arcy!" he said, with unusual sternness.

"Yaas, sir?" said Arthur Augustus respectfully.

"I have heard a most serious complaint against you from Mr. Ratcliff."

"Yaas, sir. I have a vewy sewious complaint to make against Mr. Ratcliff, also, sir."

"What!"

"Mr. Watcliff has acted in a most unjustifiable and ungentelemanly way, sir!"

"D'Arcy!"

"He has tweated a most wespectable and estimable young lady with gwoss diswespect, sir, as well as myself!"

"Boy!"

"I wegard it as uttably wotten of Mr. Watcliff, sir, and I wely upon you to wepwmand him!"

Mr. Ratcliff seemed to be on the point of going into a fit.

"Sir!" he gasped. "Dr Holmes! Will you allow this—this unheard-of insolence to pass unpunished?"

"Pray be patient, Mr. Ratcliff. D'Arcy is a most extraordinary boy. I did not send for you, D'Arcy, to hear complaints against Mr. Ratcliff."

"It's only ewicket, sir, to hear both sides, isn't it?"

"Ahem! This is not a contest between the junior schoolboys, D'Arcy, but a report of misconduct by a master!" said the Head sternly.

"The only misconduct has been from Mr. Watcliff, sir!" said D'Arcy firmly.

"Dr. Holmes—"

"Silence, D'Arcy! Mr. Ratcliff informs me that he discovered you in the streets of Rylcombe, acting as gallant towards a young woman—"

"It is false, sir!"

"What!"

"I can only chawactewise Mr. Watcliff's wemarks as untwuthful, sir!" said the swell of St. Jim's fearlessly. "I was actin' as escort to Miss Bunn, a most estimable young lady. I had the honah of cawwyin' her parcels when she went shoppin', sir, that is all."

"I understand from Mr. Ratcliff that you were walking in the company of a female, not a relative," said the Head severely. "You know that such things are not allowed."

"Weally, sir—"

"He was acting in a most disgraceful manner!" said Mr. Ratcliff venomously. "He was keeping company with a young woman!"

D'Arcy's eyes flashed.

"That is not twue, sir."

"D'Arcy!"

"I wefuse to allow Mr. Watcliff to asperse my chawactah, sir! If I acted as he has stated, I should deserve to be punished. But escortin' a young lady to do some shoppin' is not keepin' company. I thwov Mr. Watcliff's accusation back into his teeth, sir!" said D'Arcy, with a dramatic gesture.

"Silence!"

"Yaas, sir. But—"

"I acquit you of having knowingly done wrong, D'Arcy, but there is no doubt that your conduct has been most injudicious."

"Weally, sir—"

"Above all, you refused to leave this young person when Mr. Ratcliff commanded you to do so."

"I could not leave her without bein' guilty of discourtesy, sir."

"You should have obeyed Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Mr. Watcliff should not have intahfered with me, sir. Mr. Wailton is my Housemastah!"

"I cannot allow you to speak in this manner, D'Arcy. You have acted very thoughtlessly, and very foolishly, and you are impertinent to Mr. Ratcliff, in addition."

"Mr. Watcliff was impertinent to me, sir!"

The Head repressed a smile.

"You are a very extraordinary boy, D'Arcy. Mr. Ratcliff has convinced me that he was quite right in commanding you to leave the company of that young person."

"Miss Bunn is a young lady, sir."

"Ahem! Yes, I should not think of speaking disrespectfully of Miss Bunn," said the Head. "I am sure you would not speak to any young woman who was not a perfectly estimable character. But such conduct is extremely injudicious, D'Arcy, and I must forbid the recurrence of anything of the sort."

"I shall obey you, of course," said D'Arcy, his tone very plainly implying that he would not obey Mr. Ratcliff, however.

"You should have left this young lady when Mr. Ratcliff ordered you to do so. Instead of that, you spoke to him disrespectfully, and refused."

"I could not possibly tweat him with respect, sir, when he showed that he was not deservin' of respect!"

Mr. Ratcliff made a gesture of rage.

"You are making matters worse, D'Arcy, by taking this line," said the Head. "I insist upon your immediately apologise to Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Imposs, sir!"

"D'Arcy!"

"An apology is an admission of bein' in the wong, sir. I was not in the wong. Mr. Watcliff was in the wong, sir!"

"Will you apologise to Mr. Ratcliff, or not?"

"I cannot, sir!"

"Then I shall cane you!"

"Vewy well, sir," said D'Arcy, with resignation.

"Come, D'Arcy! I do not wish to punish you," said the Head kindly. "But you must tell Mr. Ratcliff you are sorry, or I must punish you!"

"I am not sowwy for havin' wesisted the impertinent intahfence of Mr. Watcliff, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

"Very well, I shall cane you."

"I am weady, sir."

Dr. Holmes rose from his seat and took up a cane from his desk.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered green.

Arthur Augustus held out his hand, and the cane came down upon it, and he gave a gasp.

"Ow!"

"The other hand, D'Arcy."

Swish!

"Ow!"

The Head laid down the cane.

"That will do," he said. "You may go, D'Arcy. But mind, this injudicious conduct must not be repeated, and if you are impertinent to Mr. Ratcliff again I shall punish you very severely."

Arthur Augustus left the study. He went down the passage with his cheeks burning red and his eyes gleaming. It was not often that the swell of St. Jim's was in a bad temper, but he was in a decidedly bad temper now.

Tom Merry & Co. met him at the end of the passage. The sight of D'Arcy tucking his hands under his arms was a sufficient proof that he had been punished.

"Had it bad?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

Arthur Augustus gritted his teeth.

"One on each hand, and vewy hard," he said. "It is all Watty's fault. He had made the Head take his side before I went in, and, of course, I could not apologise. A fellow must consider his dig."

"The old boulder!" said Blake. "It's rotten. If he had any decency he'd let School House chaps alone. Mr. Railton never interferes with New House fellows."

"Yaas, wathah! He is a feahful wottah! He has wewpented to the Head that I was keepin' company with a young person instead of escortin' a young lady to do shoppin'. That is what annoys me more than anythin' else, his makin' the Head believe that I was actin' the giddy goat, you know, and goin' out mashin'."

The juniors grinned.

"I see nothin' whatevah to gwin at!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard you fellows as a set of asses!"

And the swell of St. Jim's walked away to his own study.

"Ratty is getting his ears up a bit too much," said Blake. "We shall have to take him down a peg or two and show him that he can't bully the School House."

"Yes, rather."

"Here he comes," said Manners.

"Give him a hiss."

Mr. Ratcliff frowned as he passed the group of juniors, who gave him dark looks. As he went towards the door of the School House there was a perceptible hiss.

The New House master swung round furiously.

"Who was that?" he demanded.

The School House juniors did not reply.

"Some of you," said Mr. Ratcliff venomously, "hissed as I passed by. I shall show you that you cannot insult a master with impunity."

He turned to the door of Mr. Railton's study and opened it.

The Housemaster of the School House looked up from his table, where he was writing, and regarded the excited and angry countenance of his colleague with surprise.

"What is the matter, Mr. Ratcliff?" he asked.

"The matter, sir!" stormed Mr. Ratcliff. "The matter is that these juniors have taken advantage, sir, of the want of discipline in this House."

Mr. Railton knitted his brows.

"I do not need your opinion on the discipline of my House, Mr. Ratcliff," he said tartly. "I am quite able to manage my House without your assistance."

"You had better keep these juniors in order, then."

"Have you any complaint to make of them?" asked Mr. Railton, keeping his

temper with more regard for the proprieties than the angry New House master showed. "If you have, I am quite prepared to hear it."

"These boys hissed me as I passed them."

"Indeed! Have you been disrespectful to Mr. Ratcliff?" demanded the School House master, coming to the door of the study and frowning at the group of juniors.

"Well, we hissed, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly. "Mr. Ratcliff has—"

Mr. Railton interrupted him.

"You were very wrong and very impertinent to do anything of the sort. You will take a hundred lines each and stay in immediately to write them."

"Yes, sir."

"They should be caned!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"I have punished them, and the matter is now closed," said Mr. Railton, and he went back into his study and closed the door. His colleague of the New House frequently tried his temper.

Mr. Ratcliff, thus answered, quitted the School House and crossed the quad to his own House. He passed Figgins & Co. as he entered, and paused to speak to them.

Figgins & Co. had the misfortune of belonging to the New House and of being at his mercy.

"You will take two hundred lines each for your conduct to-day," he said, "and you will not leave this House again till you have written them."

And Mr. Ratcliff went into his study feeling satisfied. He had spoiled the half-holiday for a dozen or so of the juniors, and that was a great solace to him.

CHAPTER 6.

Monty Lowther on the Warpath!

THERE was much angry excitement among the juniors of both Houses at St. Jim's that evening.

Lines occupied Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. till most of the afternoon had gone, and the half-holiday was, as Figgins expressed it, hopelessly mucked up.

It was not to be expected that the juniors would bear their injuries with patience. Mr. Ratcliff's captious and interfering temper had made him generally disliked at St. Jim's, as much in the School House as in his own House.

Even the masters found it difficult to get on with Mr. Ratcliff, and Mr. Railton frequently had to concede little disputed points to his colleague in order to avoid unseemly bickering, from which Mr. Ratcliff never shrank.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the most exasperated of all. The usually sunny and equable temper of the swell of St. Jim's had been severely tried. D'Arcy was extremely sensitive upon the subject of his personal dignity. It had leaked out that Arthur Augustus had been caned for taking a young lady for a walk, and the whole House seemed to make it a special business to chip him upon the subject.

Some of the fellows laughed over the story, and some of them jeered. A humorous youth pinned a card upon the door of Study No. 6 bearing a quotation from Shakespeare, "Here dwells Benedict, the married man!"

Even Blake & Co. chuckled over that as Arthur Augustus tore it indignantly down, and jammed it into the study fire.

Arthur Augustus poked the offending

(Continued on the next page.)



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"PITCHING" THE TALE.

Gussy: "I wondah why they call sailahs 'tars, Lowthah, deah boy."

Lowther: "It's because they are used to the 'pitching' of the sea."
Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. McCubbin, 17, Christchurch Avenue, Wembley.

IRISH ICE.

Pat: "Mike, an' it's yourself that can tell me how they make ice-cream?"

Mike: "In truth, I can. Don't they bake 'em in cold ovens, to be sure?"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Allison, 1, Richmond Terrace, Armagh N. Ireland.

CATCHING FISH.

The angler had had hard luck fishing, and on his way home he entered a fish-market and said to a dealer:

"Just stand over there and throw me five of the biggest trout you have."

"Throw 'em?" said the dealer.

"What for?"
"So I can tell my friends I caught them. I may be a poor angler, but I'm no liar!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Hiscock, 3835, Gouin Boulevard West, Montreal, Canada.

NONE THE WISER.

Three sailors were spending leave in the country. Presently two of them got into a heated argument over what kind of an animal a heifer was.

"It's a kind of pig," said one.

"Not on your life!" retorted the other. "It's some sort of sheep."

Finally they asked the opinion of the third sailor.

"To tell you the truth," he replied, "I don't know much about poultry."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Trott, The College, Bradninch, nr. Exeter, Devon.

THE ALSO RAN.

Marathon Runner (an easy last): "Did you take my time?"

Timekeeper: "I didn't have to; you took it yourself!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Morrish, 43, Edward Street, Shepperton, Victoria, Australia.

ADMIRATION.

An old man noticed a schoolboy paying rapt attention to a large oil painting in an art gallery.

"Ah, my little man," he said, smiling, "you're admiring the wonderful work! Tell me what strikes you most about that picture?"

"What a grand jigsaw puzzle it would make!" replied the boy.

Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Fryar, 74, Alexandra Avenue, Rose Park, Adelaide, Australia.

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card into the fire with the poker, and stirred it till all was consumed, and then turned an indignant face upon his grinning chums.

"I do not regard it as a laughing matter!" he exclaimed.

"Certainly not!" said Blake seriously. "Besides, it's not true. You're not a married man yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only engaged!" remarked Monty Lowther, looking in at the door.

And the juniors chuckled.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs in a very warlike way, and advanced towards the humorist of the Shell.

"Pway put up your hands, Lowthah!" he exclaimed.

Monty Lowther elevated his hands above his head.

"I do not mean that, you ass! I'm going to lick you."

"Pax!" said Tom Merry, looking over Lowther's shoulder into the study. "We've come here to back you up, Gussy!"

"Yes, rather," said Manners.

"Oh, vewy well, you may come in," said Arthur Augustus more amicably. "But I wefuse to have any of Lowthah's funny wemarks."

"Order, Lowther!" said Tom Merry severely. "You can keep your funny remarks for the next number of the 'Weekly.' Gentlemen, this is a council of war. We have declared war against Mr. Ratcliff and all his works."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"Yes, here, there, and everywhere else," said Lowther.

"Ass!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "We've got a wheeze. I put it to you that we can't, as properly independent and self-respecting members of the School House, put up with Ratty and his rotten cheek."

"No fear!"

"He has been jolly rough on Figgins & Co., but they can't help themselves, as they're in his House. But we're not going to stand it."

"Rather not!"

"I uttably wefuse to stand it!"

"Therefore, we have declared war," said Tom Merry.

"Have you told Ratty so?" asked Herries.

Tom Merry coughed.

"Well, no. You can't very well say a thing like that to a Housemaster. But he'll jolly soon find out."

"What's the little game?"

"We've got a wheeze—it's really Lowther's wheeze," said Tom Merry. "Go ahead, Monty!"

The juniors all fixed their eyes expectantly upon the humorist of the Shell. There was no doubt that they were all keen enough to join in any wheeze for the discomfiture of Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

"Gentlemen," said Lowther gravely. "Mr. Ratcliff has passed the limit. I think we are all agreed on that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Not only has he interrupted a feed, mucked up a half-holiday, and made himself generally obnoxious, but he has attacked Gussy in the tenderest spot—his reputation," said Lowther solemnly. "He has held up Gussy to ridicule as a flirtatious person."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"He has made the Head believe that Gussy spends his spare time and his spare cash in running after young persons."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse—"

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"I suggest, therefore, that the proper way of punishing Mr. Ratcliff is to fix the same thing on him," said Lowther.

The juniors gasped.

"Ratty! Nobody would believe the crusty old bouncer was flirtatious," ejaculated Blake. "No woman would ever look on him."

"No fear," said Digby. "He was spoons on Glyn's sister, you know, but she wouldn't look at him. No fear!"

"I don't believe the House dame would, even," said Herries.

"Wathah not!"

"My dear chaps, I've thought it out," said Lowther cheerfully. "My idea is to get into the telephone call-office at Rylcombe and ring him up. As I have a specially sweet voice I can talk like a woman—near enough for the telephone, anyway. I'm going to ring Ratty up, and make an appointment with him."

"My hat!"

"When Ratty isn't in his study, one of the New House prefects goes to the telephone to see what's wanted," said Lowther. "I shall pick a moment when he can't be in his study. You know how regular he is in his habits—he always takes a walk round the quad for ten minutes at exactly seven o'clock. If I ring him up at a couple of minutes past seven, he will be well out of the House, and one of the prefects will answer the telephone."

"Bai Jove!"

"And that prefect will make the discovery," grinned Lowther. "Ratty will be shown up as a flirtatious old person."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," said Lowther.

"If you're alludin' to me as a goose, Lowthah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "What a stunning wheeze! Come on! We'll all go."

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"Better not all go," he said. "We don't want to give any room for suspicion. Kildare has asked me to go down to Rylcombe to fetch a parcel for him from the railway station, and he's given me a pass out. I'd better go alone; you fellows can show yourselves in public, and be able to prove an alibi."

"Pewwaps I had bettah go, Lowthah! I should like to wag old Watty on the telephone."

"Your lovely account would give you away," grinned Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I'm off," said Lowther. "If you fellows hang round the New House, you may hear something."

"Ha, ha, ha! We'll go over and see Figgins."

And Monty Lowther departed, and Tom Merry & Co. walked over to the New House to pay Figgins a visit.

CHAPTER 7.

Told on the Telephone!

BURR-BURR! Burr-burr! Burr-burr!

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, yawned. He was in his study in the Sixth Form passage, with Baker of the Sixth, talking cricket.

He could hear the burr of the telephone-bell from Mr. Ratcliff's study, but he was not in a hurry to answer it.

Burr-burr!

"Ratty can't be there," remarked Baker.

Monteith sniffed.

"No; he's taking his trot round the quad. I suppose it's only his giddy chemist in Rylcombe, about his pills or something. They call him up nearly every day about his patent medicines."

Baker grinned. Mr. Ratcliff was the best customer of the local chemist, and the amount of medicine and pills he consumed was really surprising. Perhaps his ill health was partly due to the number of remedies he took for it.

Burr-burr!

"I suppose I'd better go," growled Monteith. "I wish he'd get somebody else to look after his blessed telephone, or else tell them to ring him up when he's there. Come and hear the latest thing in liver pills."

Baker laughed, and accompanied the head prefect to Mr. Ratcliff's study.

The bell was ringing away merrily, and Monteith grunted and took up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that the New House, St. Jim's?"

Monteith started. It was a high-pitched voice, and sounded to Monteith like a feminine one. He could not guess who the lady might be who was ringing up the New House master, and he was curious.

"Yes," he replied, and he motioned Baker to take up the second receiver. Baker did so.

"Mr. Ratcliff?"

"This is Mr. Ratcliff's study."

"My darling Horace!"

Monteith jumped.

"Eh?"

"My sweet Horace."

"Oh!"

"Dearest!"

Baker had his ear to the second receiver, and he blinked at Monteith.

Monteith, after a gasp of astonishment, grinned.

"My only hat!" he murmured.

"Fancy old Ratty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you there, my love?" came the voice over the wire. "Speak, darling!"

"Ahem!"

"Dearest Horace!"

"Excuse me," said Monteith into the telephone. "Mr. Ratcliff isn't here, and I'm taking the call for him. What is wanted?"

"Ah! You are jesting, my dearest Horace! I know your sweet voice."

Baker roared, and dropped his receiver.

"I say, we oughtn't to listen to this," he said. "I never knew that Ratty was such a giddy old goat, but we've no right—"

"Rot!" said Monteith. "He's asked me to see to the telephone whenever he isn't here, hasn't he? I'm doing him a favour."

"Ye-es," said Baker doubtfully, "but—"

"Shut up; she's talking!"

Monteith listened.

"Dearest, dearest Horace! How I long to see you once more! Do you think I am bold for ringing you up in this way? Speak dear Horace."

"Let her know you ain't Ratcliff," said Baker.

"I told her once."

"Tell her again."

"All right. I'm not Mr. Ratcliff," said Monteith. "I'm taking the message for him. Shall I send for Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Ah! You were always a merry boy, Horace. You are having a little joke with your poor little Trixie."

"Trixie!" gasped Monteith. "Old Ratty—and Trixie! By gosh!"

Baker doubled up in the armchair.

"Will you meet me at the Picture Palace in Wayland, ducky?" asked the voice.

"She's calling him ducky!" said Monteith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why do you not speak, Horace? Shall I call for you at the school, darling? Or would you prefer that our sweet friendship should still remain a secret?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"What did you say, Horace?"

"I'm not Horace," said Monteith.

"Shall I send for Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Oh dear! Is he ill?"

"Oh, no!"

"Are you sure my darling Horace is not ill? I know he suffers very much from indigestion, the dear boy."

"She's calling old Ratty a dear boy!" moaned Monteith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a sound outside the open doorway of the study. Figgins & Co. appeared there with a crowd of School House juniors. They were smiling.

"Anything wrong with the telephone?" asked Tom Merry.

"No!" gasped Monteith.

He listened again.

"Tell my darling Horace that I am here."

"What name shall I say, ma'am?"

"Say his little Trixie."

"Groogh! Figgins, run out and look for Mr. Ratcliff, will you? You'll find him in the quad. Somebody wants him on the telephone. She says you're to say it's his little Trixie!" Monteith gasped.

Figgins yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buzz off and find him! Oh dear, I've got a pain in my ribs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors rushed off.

Monteith spoke into the telephone again.

"I've sent for him, ma'am."

"Thank you. You are sure Horace is well?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Please do not mention that I have called him up on the telephone," went on the voice. "His wife might be angry."

Monteith almost fell down.

"His what?" he gasped.

"His wife!"

"I—I say, I'd better ring off!" gasped the prefect. "I'm discovering secrets. Hang on a minute, ma'am, and Mr. Ratcliff will be here."

And he laid down the receiver.

Then he held his sides and roared.

Baker regarded him curiously.

"What did she say?" he asked.

"Did you know Ratty was married?" demanded Monteith.

Baker jumped.

"No! Surely he isn't!"

"He is!" yelled Monteith. "Ha, ha, ha! He's been married secretly. This lady has asked me not to mention that she called him up on the telephone, because his wife wouldn't like it."

Baker yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep it dark," said Monteith.

"My hat! I—"

"Yes, keep it dark," said three or four voices at the door. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith glared at the juniors who were grinning into the study. There was not much chance of keeping it dark.

"Shut up, you kids," said Baker.

"Don't say a word—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better clear off before Mr. Ratcliff comes," said Monteith.

"So we will!" said Redfern, who was among the juniors in the passage.

"So Ratty is married, is he? Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith and Baker left the study. The juniors scuttled away as Mr. Ratcliff came along the passage. Figgins had found him in the quadrangle, and brought him in.

Mr. Ratcliff was looking angry and excited.

"Monteith!" he exclaimed, meeting the prefect in the passage. "Figgins states that you sent him to me with a ridiculous message!"

"I, sir?"

"Yes; that a person called Trixie required me on the telephone!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "Is it possible that you sent such a message?"

"Yes, sir, it's true."

"What!"

"She's still on the telephone, sir, waiting for you."

Mr. Ratcliff gave him a furious stare, and rushed into his study and took up the receiver.

Monteith staggered into his own study and collapsed into hysterics.

CHAPTER 8.

Scandalous!

"HALLO!" breathed Mr. Ratcliff into the receiver. "What is it?"

"Are you Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Yes."

"Darling!"

"What!"

"Love!"

"Eh?"



Mr. Ratcliff paused and his eyes glinted. He was yearning for some victim upon whom to expend his anger, and it looked as if Arthur Augustus would be the one. But D'Arcy was too preoccupied to notice the House-master. "Pway allow me to cawwy your parcels, Miss Bunn," he said.

"I sigh for thee!" went on the voice. "Sleeping and waking, my eyes behold the fair face of my beloved Horace!"

Mr. Ratcliff staggered.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "It must be some lunatic! Has she been talking this nonsense to Monteith? It is enough to create a scandal!"

"Horace, speak to your little girl!"

"Madam," gasped the Housemaster, "how dare you speak to me with this odious familiarity? I am shocked and disgusted!"

"Horry!"

"Madam, unless you are mad—"

"Oh, Horace, who could resist thine eyes?" sighed the voice over the telephone.

Mr. Ratcliff, with a furious gesture, rang off.

He sat down and wiped the perspiration from his brow. He was utterly amazed and alarmed by the scandalous conduct of the lady at the other end of the wire.

"This is—is infamous!" he gasped. "It will cause a scandal! Good heavens! The woman must be mad—perfectly insane! Good gracious!"

He rose to his feet and paced the study in great agitation.

That Monteith would keep such a secret he could hardly hope. It was evident that the prefect believed in the genuineness of the lady's claim.

Mr. Ratcliff left his study to see Monteith before he should have time to disclose the scandalous matter to anybody else. He met Figgins in the passage and boxed his ears.

Figgins had not given offence, but it relieved Mr. Ratcliff's feelings somewhat to box somebody's ears. Figgins staggered against the wall, and Mr. Ratcliff hurried on. Figgins glared after him, rubbing his ear.

"Oh, you rotter!" he murmured.

Mr. Ratcliff rushed into Monteith's study with flaming eyes and rustling gown.

Monteith was leaning back in his armchair, yelling with laughter. Baker was holding on to the table while he roared.

"Monteith! Baker!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "How dare you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" I mean, I'm sorry, sir!" gasped Monteith.

"What is there to laugh at?" yelled the angry Housemaster.

"Nothing, sir! Ha, ha, ha! Sorry, sir!"

"I have been called up on the telephone by a mad woman," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I am utterly unacquainted with any person of the name of Trixie. It is scandalous. The woman ought to be put in prison."

Monteith tried to become serious.

"Yes, sir, it's—it is certainly very unfortunate," he said.

"I cannot account for it. The person knows my Christian name, too!"

"Perhaps you mentioned it to her, sir, when—when—"

"I tell you I do not know the person!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh! Yes, sir! Quite so, sir. Of course!"

"Do you not believe my statement, Monteith?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff, almost beside himself with rage.

"Oh, yes, sir! Of course, I'm bound to believe you, sir," stammered Monteith, his expression showing at the same time that he didn't believe Mr. Ratcliff in the least.

"I am an utter stranger to this scandalous person," said Mr. Ratcliff, wiping his brow. "She is an utter stranger to me."

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"Yet she knows your Christian name, sir."

"It is amazing. However, she may have seen it on some school paper."

Mr. Ratcliff passed his hand over his fevered brow. The fact that the unknown female knew his Christian name showed that she must have some acquaintance with him.

It was useless for Mr. Ratcliff to deny evident facts.

"It is some—some wretched adventure," panted the Housemaster. "I cannot understand why I have been selected as the victim of this wretched trick. The woman is mad."

"Of course, we won't say anything, sir," said Monteith. "I can quite understand that it would distress Mrs. Ratcliff."

The Housemaster glared at him.

"Distress whom, Monteith?"

"Mrs. Ratcliff, sir."

"Are you mad, Monteith? There is no Mrs. Ratcliff!"

"Isn't there, sir?"

"What do you mean? You know perfectly well that there is not," shrieked the New House master, almost in a frenzy.

"But the lady said—"

"What! What did she say?"

"She asked me to keep it dark, sir, in case your wife should know that she had rung you up on the telephone," said the prefect.

Mr. Ratcliff seemed about to suffocate.

"My wife!" he stammered.

"That's what she said, sir."

"She is mad—completely mad! You know perfectly well that I am a single man, Monteith."

"I've always supposed so, sir."

"Supposed so! It is a fact!"

"Yes, sir; I'm sure it is, if you say so, sir."

"You must not mention a word of that ridiculous statement in the House, Monteith; and you, too, Baker. It would be unendurable."

"I—I'm sorry, sir—"

"What do you refuse to obey me?"

"Oh, no, sir; but—but I was so surprised—I spoke of it in the hearing of some of the juniors, and—and—"

"The juniors!" Mr. Ratcliff groaned.

"Then it is all over the House by this time! It will be all over the school! Good heavens!"

"I'm sorry, sir. It would be a good idea to communicate with the police, sir, and ask them to look for this insane person."

Mr. Ratcliff did not reply. He left the study without another word.

Monteith closed the door after him and gazed at Baker. Then the two of them broke into a simultaneous yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's too good!" gasped Monteith.

"I can't understand old Ratty wanting it kept dark. Fancy his being a married man all the time!"

"It mayn't be true," said Baker.

"Oh, it's true enough. Why should a woman ring him up on the telephone, and call him ducky, darling names, if she's a stranger to him? There's no reason. It's jolly certain that Ratty often has a talk with Trixie on the telephone. Lots of times when the bell's rung, and we've thought that he was talking to the chemist about pills and medicines and things, he's been really talking to her," said Monteith, with conviction.

"My hat! It looks like it!" said Baker. "Awfully deep old beggar! I hope, for Ratty's sake, this won't get to the Head. Chap like that isn't fit to be a master at a school."

"I'll bet all St. Jim's knows it by this time," said Monteith.

The prefect was right.

In the quadrangle sounds of laughter could be heard as groups of juniors discussed the amazing news that had spread from the New House.

Some of the fellows were in the secret, and some were not. But all agreed in regarding the matter in a comic light.

The fact that Mr. Ratcliff was married, and had hitherto kept his marriage a secret, amazed all the fellows, and interested them greatly. Many of the St. Jim's fellows averred that the lady must be blind; on no other hypothesis could they account for her having accepted Mr. Ratcliff.

When Monty Lowther returned from Rylcombe with Kildare's parcel from the railway station, he found the whole school in possession of the news.

In the Common-room of the School House it was the one topic of conversation.

"Heard the news?" yelled Gore of the Shell, as Lowther came in.

Monty Lowther looked interested.

"News?" he said. "What news?"

"About Ratty of the New House. He's married!"

"Go hon!" said Lowther.

"It's true!" yelled a dozen voices.

"He's a giddy benedict! Somebody told Monteith, and he let it out before a lot of fellows."

"Great Scott!"

"Ratty—you know, old Ratty! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Lowther joined heartily in the laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 9.

Rough on Figgins—and Ratty!

THE next day Mr. Ratcliff appeared in the Fifth Form Room with a deep frown upon his brow.

The Fifth met their Form-master with suppressed smiles.

But they soon had reason not to smile. Mr. Ratcliff's temper was never good. But this morning it was vile.

He knew that he was an object of ridicule. Everybody believed, or pretended to believe the absurd rumour about him. Mr. Ratcliff was so excessively unpopular, in his Form and out of it, that all the fellows were glad to believe anything against him. Had it been Mr. Railton the absurd story would have been pooh-poohed. But the fellows were willing to believe anything of Horace Ratcliff. He had never taken the trouble to conciliate their good opinion. And now that he needed it, it was not to be had.

All the fellows who had smarted under his bad temper were overjoyed to have a handle against him.

Mr. Ratcliff was keenly sensitive to ridicule. He had a great idea of his own dignity, and he often suspected disrespect when none was meant, and took offence on the slightest grounds.

Now he had reason to imagine that the most respectful manner concealed mockery and derision. He suspected the other masters of smiling; he suspected the boys; he suspected everybody. And that morning the Fifth Form felt the full weight of his rabid temper.

Lines fell as thick as the leaves in Vallombrosa upon the unfortunate Fifth.

The Fifth, as seniors, were not supposed to be caned. But Mr. Ratcliff broke through the rule that morning, and caned Lefevre, and slanged the rest

of the Form right and left. By the time morning lessons were over the Fifth Form were almost in a state of mutiny.

Mr. Ratcliff left the Form-room with a frowning brow.

In the crowded Form-room passage he passed swarms of juniors, the Shell and the Fourth and the Third all being out.

Some of the juniors were laughing and talking; and to Mr. Ratcliff it seemed that all the laughter and all the talk must inevitably be upon the subject of himself.

He strode across the quadrangle to his own House, consumed with rage. He longed for a victim upon whom to wreak the anger that burned within his breast, and the New House fellows, guessing his amiable thoughts, gave him a wide berth as long as they could.

But at the hour of dinner all the New House had to meet in the dining-room, and Mr. Ratcliff came in with a brow like thunder.

New House fellows were very much on their guard. Even Figgins & Co. were exceedingly and amazingly circumspect, determined not to give their Housemaster an opportunity of selecting them as victims. But with Mr. Ratcliff determined to find faults, faults could be found.

Mr. Ratcliff knew perfectly well that Figgins & Co. were inwardly chuckling over his discomfiture, though their outward demeanour was solemnity itself.

And upon Figgins & Co. the vials of his wrath were poured out.

"Figgins!" he rapped out, suddenly looking across to the Fourth Form table.

"Ye-es, sir?" said Figgins meekly. "I will not allow chattering at the table!"

"I was not chattering, sir," said Figgins, who had not opened his mouth, excepting to put his dinner into it.

"Don't contradict me, Figgins!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "You are the worst boy in the House! Leave your dinner, and go to my study, and wait for me there!"

Figgins gritted his teeth.

"Very well, sir!" he said quietly. And he left his dinner unfinished.

A quarter of an hour later Mr. Ratcliff strode into his study. Figgins was sitting in the armchair, waiting for him, and he rose as the Housemaster came in.

Mr. Ratcliff fixed him with glittering eyes.

"How dare you sit in my armchair, Figgins?" he demanded. "Have you no manners, sir?"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Figgins.

"I shall teach you respect!" said Mr. Ratcliff, taking up the cane. "Hold out your hand!"

Figgins held out his hand, and then the other, in turn, and Mr. Ratcliff caned him severely.

Figgins received six cuts on each hand, laid on very hard, and he had to shut his teeth tight to keep back a cry of pain. But he did not utter a sound, though his face was very white.

Mr. Ratcliff tossed the cane upon the table.

"There!" he said. "I trust that lesson may restrain your impertinence in the future, Figgins! Go!"

Figgins went without a word.

His chums met him in the Hall, with sympathetic looks. Figgins showed them his hands without speaking.

"The rotten cad!" said Kerr, between his teeth.

"Poor old Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn.

The utterly uncalled-for punishment of Figgins made the Co. furious. The caning had been so severe that Figgy's

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! When D'Arcy says he will be ready on time, his promise carries a lot of "wait"! Do you want to make your money go farther? Take a walk before spending it. "You can always get rid of unwelcome callers if you approach them in the right way," says Mr. Lathom. From the rear? Of course, it was young Jameson of the Third who thought "sic transit" meant riding in an ambulance. "Dancers are a friendly crowd," writes a reader. Yes, quite "palais"! Skimpole has just looked in to say he is keeping some earthworms which can produce musical sounds. Soon we'll see the worm doing its well-known "turn"! "My hens won't pay," complains a poultry farmer. Sue them. A Wayland centenarian died two days after seeing his first motor-car. Looks as though he didn't see it in time! "Most people have been taught to drive a car nowadays," said Mr. Railton. But how many of them can do it? What's that? Gore says his fountain-pen leaks! Why not fill it with invisible ink? A local champion boxer is to rest for five years.

palms were swollen, and the pain they gave him was intense. When he took his place in the Fourth Form Room that afternoon, Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, glanced at him, noticing how white he looked.

"Are you ill, Figgins?" asked the kindly little Form-master, peering at the junior over his spectacles.

"No, sir," said Figgins.

"You do not look well."

"I'm all right, sir."

But when Figgins had to write an exercise that afternoon he could hardly hold the pen.

Mr. Lathom came over to his desk.

"What is the matter with your hands, Figgins?" he asked quietly.

"They're a bit swollen, sir," said Figgins.

"Show them to me."

Figgins showed his swollen hands. Mr. Lathom's brows darkened as he looked at them. He could see at a glance that the junior had been caned very cruelly.

"You have been caned, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir."

"By a prefect?"

"No, sir; by my Housemaster."

"Oh!" said Mr. Lathom. "Very well."

And he dropped the subject. The juniors knew what was in his mind. If Figgins had been caned in such a manner by a prefect, Mr. Lathom would have taken the matter before the Head. But he did not feel that he could interfere with Figgins' own Housemaster. In such a case, interference would have made matters only worse.

Mr. Lathom passed over Figgins for the remainder of the afternoon, giving him a rest from lessons.

When the Fourth were dismissed, Blake & Co. gathered round Figgins in the passage.

The Shell had just come out, and the Terrible Three joined them.

And then retire? A queer insect spends much of its life in pepper. Too "hot" for us! A cricketer scored a century while suffering from concussion. We know some teams that might consider coming on the field ready stunned! Cutts of the Fifth says his pater never criticises his expenditure. He makes ample "allowance"! "Why do you keep flitting from one subject to another?" asks a reader. Oh, I lead a "butterfly" existence! What's that? Gore says he thinks it must be the sediment in the Wayland Post Office ink-well that has ruined his fountain-pen. He's had his "fill" of woe! Redfern says he understands it's rather difficult to become a journalist. Well, it's an "inky" future! Then there was the Scot who staggered up to the boarding-house with a bed on his shoulders, and asked: "What do you charge for breakfast?" How's this: "Haven't they sent my sleeping draught yet?" "No, sir!" "Well, I hope they won't be long—I can hardly keep awake!" From the Third Form Room: "And why have you spelt the word 'Bank' in the middle of a sentence with a capital 'B,' Jameson?" asked Mr. Selby. "My pater says a bank is no good unless it has a big capital," responded Jameson. Tom Merry, presiding at a junior meeting, threw a book at an interrupter. Merry's "casting" vote! "I have a lot of rubbish," writes a reader; "how can I get rid of it?" A "burning" question! As young Gibson said to the dentist: "Please take out my sweet tooth—I'm saving up to buy a bike!" Excuse me, fellows—somebody ringing!

"What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry.

"Look at Figgy's paws!" said Blake.

"My hat!"

"Ratty, I suppose?" said Manners.

Figgins nodded.

"The awful cad!" said Monty Lowther. "Poor old Figgins! You're getting what he'd like to give the whole giddy school!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Watty as an awful beast."

"The rotten outsider!" said Kerr.

"Figgy didn't do anything, either. Ratty said he was talking at dinner-time, but he wasn't. And even if he had been, fancy caning a chap like that for talking!"

"The cad!"

"The brute!"

"It would serve him right if Figgy went up to the Head about it!" said Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins shook his head.

"I wouldn't do that!" he said. "But I'll make Ratty sit up for it somehow. The rotter! He's done this because he was japed on the telephone. He doesn't know it was a jape, and I didn't have anything to do with it, anyway. But he's picked on me. We've got to make him 'wriggle for it, somehow.'"

Tom Merry whistled.

"It's safer to let him alone, Figgy, if he goes for you like that whenever we twist his mane!" he remarked.

Figgins' eyes gleamed.

"I don't care; I can stand it. Besides, letting him alone wouldn't do any good. He's just as much a beast whether he's let alone or not."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He ought to be ragged bald-headed," said Blake. "If Figgy's willing to run the risk of making him ratty, I think we ought to put our heads together over it."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "I'm willing," said Figgins. "I'd do anything to make the brute sorry he lathered me like this! We've got to comb his hair for him somehow."

"I've got an idea," said Kerr quietly. "I was thinking it out this morning. Lowther's bisney on the telephone put it into my head."

"Come up into the study," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah; it's safah to talk there, deah boy."

"Safer than in the New House, too," said Fatty Wynn. "Ratty's got awfully long ears, and he isn't above listening at the door."

The juniors went up to Study No. 6. It was agreed on all hands that Ratty was to be punished, and it only remained to decide on the form of punishment. And the juniors gathered round Kerr very eagerly to hear what his idea was. Kerr never spoke without having thought first, and his opinion was very much respected. Although Figgins was the leader of the Co., and of the New House juniors generally, it was well known that Kerr's active brain was the real directing power in their warfare against the School House fellows.

House rows were forgotten now, however, in the general desire to punish Ratty. Kerr was acknowledged to be the cleverest fellow in the Fourth. He knew Latin and Greek as if they were his native tongue, almost; he was the cleverest actor in the Junior Dramatic Society, and could impersonate almost anybody with perfect success; he could play the violin, and he was a great man at chess. Indeed, as Figgins sometimes said admiringly, it was rather difficult to name anything that Kerr could not do.

"Now, then, what's the wheeze?" demanded Tom Merry.

Kerr coughed.
 "Of course, I don't know for certain that it will work," he said. "But I shall take all the risk, anyway."

"Wats! We'll all take the wisk togethah."

"Hear, hear!"

Kerr shook his head.

"No; only one fellow's wanted for the bisney," he said, "and I'm that fellow. You chaps think I can act a bit, don't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, certainly!" said Tom Merry, puzzled. "But—"

"You've seen me impersonate people?"

The juniors grinned. Kerr's impersonations were marvellous, and he had made himself up as D'Arcy, and as Skimpole of the Shell, and even as Mr Lathom, the master of the Fourth, in such a way as to deceive completely those who knew him best.

"Well," said Kerr, "I don't know that I should care to impersonate anybody that Ratty knew, because he's so jolly sharp. But I think I could impersonate somebody he doesn't know."

"Whom?" demanded Blake.

"Mrs. Ratcliff!"

"What?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Mrs Ratcliff!" yelled Tom Merry.

"But there isn't any Mrs. Ratcliff! That was only a little joke of Lowther's on the telephone."

Kerr chuckled

"I know there isn't any Mrs. Ratcliff," he replied. "That's why I should be able to impersonate her all right."

"Great Scott!"

"I think I can do it," said Kerr confidently. "Anyway, I'm willing to take

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the risk, and to face the music if it's a frost. What do you think Ratty will feel like if an indignant female arrives at St. Jim's and claims him as her husband?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! That would be awfully funny!"

"The fellows would be quite prepared for a Mrs. Ratcliff to appear," grinned Kerr. "Half the school believes already that Ratty is really a married man."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And so, if he denies her before the school, that will be supposed to be more of his meanness."

"If his wife arrives and claims him, the whole school will back her up, I should think. Ratty's already known to have deserted her—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors shrieked.

"We've got all the necessary things among our dramatic props," said Kerr. "I'll guarantee to take the school in, as Mrs. Ratcliff. Of course, Ratty himself won't believe that I'm the genuine article—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But the rest of St. Jim's will," said Kerr. "What do you think of the wheeze?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "It's something like a wheeze, if you've got the nerve—"

"Oh, I've got the nerve!" said Kerr.

"Then it's a go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And so the plot was plotted.

CHAPTER 10.

A Little Transformation!

SATURDAY afternoon, the next half-holiday, was fixed for the carrying out of the great plot.

In the meantime, there were several rehearsals in Tom Merry's study with the door locked.

The chums of St. Jim's kept the secret well. Fellows who heard explosions of laughter from Tom Merry's study guessed that something was going on, but they did not know what it was.

The plot was a daring one, and in case of discovery the consequences might have been very serious for Kerr; and it was necessary to keep it very dark.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ratcliff seemed to be growing more obnoxious than ever. His temper, never very good, had become much worse—and the Fifth Form had the chief benefit of it. But all the fellows in the New House growled among themselves. Even the prefects did not escape.

Monteith himself, the head prefect of the House, discovered the keenest edge of Mr. Ratcliff's tongue. But for Monteith's indiscretion, the strange story of the telephone would not have been spread over the school, and Mr. Ratcliff, who was always suspicious, suspected that Monteith had done it deliberately. He was extremely rough on the prefect, and he seemed to take an unpleasant pleasure in setting him down before the juniors.

As Monteith's own temper was by no means sweet, he became almost as intolerable as Mr. Ratcliff himself. As he

could not retort upon Mr. Ratcliff, he visited his wrath upon the juniors of the New House. As Figgins remarked to Tom Merry, it was growing altogether too thick, and it was high time Ratty was taken down.

The youthful plotters looked forward with eagerness to Saturday, and the daring rag had planned for the obnoxious Form-master.

After dinner on Saturday, a numerous party of juniors left the school, some of them carrying bags. Tom Merry & Co. had deserted the playing fields for



As Tom Merry booted the ball Wally, with great presence of mind, and Mr. Ratcliff came past the porter's lodge.

once. They had something more important on for that afternoon.

They walked sedately down the lane as far as the stile, and then entered Rylcombe Woods, and did not stop till they had reached a secluded glade.

That was where the transformation scene was to take place.

The bags were set down in the grass, and a couple of the juniors posted themselves to keep a look-out in case of interruption.

Then Kerr set to work.

It had been arranged for the station taxi from Rylcombe to wait in the lane at half-past two, to pick up a fare, the driver only being informed that he was to take a lady to the school. Of the identity of the lady he knew nothing.

The bags were opened, and the

"props" unpacked. Kerr removed his jacket and vest, and started. A looking-glass was set up on a tree-trunk, and the junior began making up his face before the glass. The juniors stood round watching him, with grinning faces.

Kerr was a past-master in the art of making-up. He had a fresh, fair complexion, and delicate features, which formed a good ground work. He added a bloom to his cheeks, and darkened his eyebrows and lashes, and reddened his lips with a skilful hand, and then carefully fastened on a wig. His

you put on the hat," he said. "You'll never get this over your head now."

"Wathah not."

Kerr sniffed.

"Bosh! I'm going to jump into it."

"Will it go on from that end?" asked

Manners, doubtfully.

"Of course it will."

Kerr rolled his trousers above his knees, and donned a pair of silk stockings. Then he insinuated his lower limbs into the skirt, and fastened it round his waist.

The juniors shrieked at the peculiar sight he presented.

"You want something more

than that," said Figgins.

"Look here! You oughtn't to have started at the ends, Kerr. How are you going to get the blouse on? It won't go on over the skirt, and it certainly can't be shoved over the hat."

Kerr gave him a pitying look.

"You're an ass, Figgy. You don't understand these things. The blouse fastens up in the front."

"Oh, I see!"

Kerr took up the blouse, put his arms through the sleeves, and fastened up the fancy buttons in front.

Then the juniors stood round and admired.

The figure before them bore not the slightest resemblance to Kerr, nor to a boy at all. Kerr had transformed himself into a young lady who looked about twenty-five. Perhaps his figure was a little robust for a lady, and his feet a size large. But those were only details.

"My only Aunt Maria!" said Figgins. "It's ripping! I—I say, are you really Kerr, you know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Certainly not!" said Kerr in a high-pitched voice. "I am Mrs. Ratcliff!"

There was not a trace of Kerr's own tones in that voice.

The juniors yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where is Horace?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've come to see my dear husband," said Kerr plaintively. "Where is my dear Horace?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I say, you look a lot too young and good-looking to be Mrs. Ratty," said Fatty Wynn. "If old Ratty were married, he wouldn't make such a match as that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That will make the fellows all the more sympathetic," said Kerr, with a grin. "They will be shocked at Ratty having deserted such a nice girl."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The old bounder won't be able to hold his head up again after this!" said Figgins grimly. "He'll have to take a holiday, at least, to give the school time to get over it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I think I'm ready now," said Kerr. "You fellows had better get back to the school, to be on the scene ready. Mind you have a good audience."

"What-ho!"

"Good-bye, my dear children. I'm off!"

Kerr took a parcel under his arm and tripped away down the footpath.

The juniors leaned against the trees and roared.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry at last, wiping his eyes. "There never was such a jape! I only hope Kerr won't lose his nerve and give it away."

"Oh, he won't do that!" grinned Figgins. "I only want to see how Ratty takes it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" said Blake. "We've got to be at the school first!"

The bags were concealed in the thicket, and the juniors started for St. Jim's at a run. But they had to leave off running several times in order to laugh.

CHAPTER 11.

More Trouble for Ratty!

"LOOK out!"

"Goal, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Biff!

A crowd of Third Form fags were punting a footer about inside the school gates when Tom Merry & Co. arrived there.

Wally D'Arcy of the Third had just delivered a kick, and the footer came sailing through the air, and landed upon Tom Merry's chest.

The captain of the Shell sat down.

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

"Bai Jove, Wally, you young wascal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as D'Arcy minor ran up to recover the ball. "That ball might have stwuck me! Pway be more careful!"

"You young ass!" roared Tom Merry.

"Oh, accidents will happen, when there are clumsy asses about!" said Wally cheerfully.

Tom Merry jumped up.

He kicked the ball just before Wally reached it, and Wally, with great presence of mind, ducked his head just in time, and the footer flew over him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a gasp of consternation the next moment. Mr. Ratcliff, who was always to be relied upon to turn up where he was least expected and least wanted, came past the corner of the porter's lodge just in time to stop the ball—with his head.

Thud!

Mr. Ratcliff received the dirty ball on his ear, and gave an alfrighted gasp.

"Oh, what is that? Oh dear!"

He reeled, and almost fell. He put his hand up to his ear, and brought it away daubed with dirt.

The juniors stood rooted to the ground. It was rather rough on Mr. Ratcliff, but it was a pure accident, and a good-tempered master would have passed the matter over with a rebuke. Not so Mr. Ratcliff. He swung round towards the juniors, his face inflamed with rage.

"Who kicked that ball at me?" he shouted.

No one replied.

"I demand to know which of you young ruffians kicked that ball at me!"

"I kicked it, sir," faltered Tom Merry. "I did not kick it at you, sir. I did not know you were there."

"That is false, Merry!"

Tom Merry flushed crimson.

"It is not false," he exclaimed, "and you have no right to say so!"

"Hear, hear!" growled Monty Lowther.

Mr. Ratcliff clenched his hands.

"Come with me, Merry!" he said.

"Come with me to the Head at once!"

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...nd, ducked his head quickly. The footer flew over him just in time to stop the ball—with his ear!

own dark hair disappeared under the flaxen curls. He did his hair very fashionably, and added the hat—a special purchase that had been made at the milliner's in Wayland.

The juniors burst into a roar at the sight of a feminine face and hair and hat surmounting the body of a schoolboy in his shirtsleeves.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I must say you look wathah we-markable, Kerr."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a giddy rag on Ratty!" exclaimed Blake.

"Well Ratty him!" said Kerr. "Hand me the skirt."

Tom Merry handed out the skirt.

"You ought to have put this on before

"Very well, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff marched off with long strides towards the School House, and Tom Merry reluctantly followed in his footsteps.

"Oh crumbs!" said Blake disconsolately. "Troubles will never cease! It's all your fault, you blessed fag!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally. "I like that! We didn't know the rotter was there! He's always turning up in the wrong place!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry followed Mr. Ratcliff into the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes gazed in surprise at the dirt upon the side of Mr. Ratcliff's head.

"Good gracious! What ever has happened?" he exclaimed.

"This boy has kicked a football at me, sir!" said Mr. Ratcliff, in a suffocating voice. Mr. Raiton was in the Head's study, and for his benefit the New House master went on: "I bring him before you, sir, because I cannot depend upon Mr. Raiton to keep his juniors from insulting me!"

"Mr. Ratcliff!" exclaimed the School House master.

Dr. Holmes raised his head.

"Pray be more guarded in your language, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head. "This is a matter that should have been placed before Merry's Housemaster, and I leave it in his hands."

Mr. Ratcliff almost choked. He fully deserved the snub, but he did not like it any the better because he deserved it.

"Very well," he said. "I must bow to your decision, Dr. Holmes. But I should like to know what punishment Mr. Raiton thinks of inflicting for an outrage like this."

"I must first be satisfied that it is an outrage, and not an accident," said the School House master tartly. "Merry is very unlikely to do such a thing on purpose."

"It was a deliberate assault, sir."

"What have you to say, Merry?"

"It was quite an accident, sir," said Tom Merry. "I kicked the ball towards D'Arcy minor, and—and he dodged it, and just then Mr. Ratcliff came round the corner."

"Did you see him before you kicked the ball?"

"No, sir."

"Did you know he was there?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Then it was an accident?"

"Entirely, sir."

"As I thought," said Mr. Raiton. "Merry should not have been kicking the football about in the quadrangle, but at most he was only guilty of carelessness."

"I say that it was done deliberately!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I cannot doubt Merry's word—and surely he must know his own motives, sir."

"He would say anything to avoid punishment—"

"I would not tell an untruth, sir!" said Tom Merry hotly.

"I believe you, Merry," said Mr. Raiton quietly. "I think that a hundred lines for such a careless action will be sufficient punishment, and you will tell Mr. Ratcliff you are sorry."

"I am very sorry it happened, sir. I had no idea—"

"I do not believe you, Merry!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

And he left the study. But for the presence of the Head he would have said very much more.

"You may go!" said Mr. Raiton.

"You will do a hundred lines, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

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Tom Merry left the study. It had been a fortunate circumstance for him that his Housemaster was present. But he had not escaped yet.

At the end of the passage Mr. Ratcliff was waiting, his face pale with rage. He made a gesture to Tom Merry to stop as he came by.

The Shell fellow halted.

"You have assaulted me, and you have escaped punishment, Merry!" said Mr. Ratcliff, in a grinding voice. "By the favouritism of your Housemaster you—"

"Nothing of the kind, sir," said Tom Merry indignantly. "Mr. Raiton's just, and if he thought I had done that on purpose he would have caned me. It was an accident."

"I do not believe you. This is in accordance with your usual conduct, Merry. But you shall not insult a Housemaster with impunity."

And Mr. Ratcliff stepped suddenly towards the junior, and before Tom Merry could guess what he intended he dealt him a sounding blow with his open hand.

Tom Merry reeled under the blow.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"There!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Let that teach you!"

He drew back his hand as if to strike again.

Tom Merry did not recede. He faced the Housemaster with blazing eyes, and his fists clenched.

"Don't touch me again, sir!" he said.

"You will regret it if you do!"

Mr. Ratcliff gave him a glare. But he did not venture to carry the matter further. If Mr. Raiton had come out and found him boxing the ears of a School House boy there would have been serious trouble. Mr. Raiton's patience was not inexhaustible. Indeed, Tom Merry had only to complain to his Housemaster to make matters very uncomfortable for Mr. Ratcliff. He did not think of doing that; he had no desire to make trouble between two masters. But his looks showed that he would not stand any more, and Mr. Ratcliff, with a savage look at him, strode away.

Tom Merry left the House more slowly, his ear burning, and his face still red with anger and indignation.

"I shan't be able to stand much more of Ratty," he said, as he rejoined his chums. "He has just biffed me on the head," after Raiton had given me lines."

"Bai Jove! The cheeky wottah!"

Monty Lowther, who had remained near the school gates, came up breathlessly, at a run.

"The taxi's in sight!" he exclaimed.

And the juniors chuckled. Even Tom Merry forgot his indignation and grinned.

The punishment of the tyrannical Housemaster was at hand.

CHAPTER 12.

Mrs. Ratcliff!

THE station taxicab stopped at the gates of St. Jim's.

A feminine face looked out of the window.

There were half a dozen St. Jim's fellows at the gates, and they looked with interest at the visitor.

"Is this St. Jim's?" asked a soft voice.

"Yes, ma'am," said D'Arcy minor, raising his cap.

"Thank you so much! Will you show the man where Mr. Ratcliff's House is?"

"Certainly, ma'am!" said Wally, wondering what such a charming lady

could want with the crusty master of the New House.

The lady smiled.

"Perhaps you are one of Mr. Ratcliff's boys?" she said sweetly.

"No fear!" answered Wally promptly. "I'm in the School House. Jameson, here, is one of the New House boundaries—ahem!—boys."

Jameson of the Third pulled off his cap sheepishly.

"Ah! You are one of my husband's boys?" asked the lady, looking at him from the window of the cab with a sweet smile.

Jameson almost fell down.

"Oh!" he stuttered. "Eh? Which?"

"I am Mrs. Ratcliff, my dear children," said the lady. "Please let the man drive to Mr. Ratcliff's House."

Wally staggered.

"Mrs. Ratcliff!" he murmured.

"Yes, my dear child."

"Oh! My only Aunt Jane!"

The lady looked surprised.

"Pray excuse us, ma'am," said Wally, gaspingly. "We—we didn't know that Ratty—I mean Mr. Ratcliff—was—was married."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Ratcliff.

"This way, driver!" exclaimed Wally. "Drive to the New House."

"Yessir," said the driver.

The taxi turned in at the gates.

The group of juniors stood there astonished.

Wally was the first to find his voice.

"Mrs. Ratcliff! My only respected Aunt Jane! Mrs. Ratty!"

"Then it's true!" exclaimed Mellish of the Fourth. "Ratty is married! And his wife's come home!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's rough on Rats!" said Jameson.

"What a giddy surprise for Ratty!" chuckled Wally. "I say, we must let the fellows know this. Come on!"

The fags rushed across the quadrangle.

"Tom Merry! Blake! Figgy!" yelled Wally.

"Hallo! What's the row?"

"She's come!"

"Eh?"

"Who's come?"

"Mrs. Ratty!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, stopping as he heard Wally's excited yell. "Don't be an ass, D'Arcy minor."

"It's true!"

"Nonsense!"

"She's in that giddy taxi!" yelled Wally, pointing excitedly towards the station cab, which had turned into the gravel path towards the New House.

Kildare gasped.

"Then it's true! He's a married man!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Must have deserted his wife, and she's found him out!" said Gore of the Shell. "Oh, what a surprise for Ratty!"

"Glorious!" yelled Bishop of the Fourth. "I say, you chaps, Ratty's wife's come home!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And there goes Ratty!" gasped Tom Merry. "He'll meet him—I mean her! Here, I say, come on! We're on in this scene!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You bet!" grinned Blake. "We're going to back up beauty in distress! We're going to see her righted!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's see what Ratty says!"

"Oh, he can't have the cheek to deny it, when she's here, face to face with him!" said Lefevre of the Fifth.

(Continued on page 13.)



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

HALLO, chums! Well, now you know the ripping free gifts in store for you, what do you think of them? Aren't they a pleasant surprise? These superb picture cards, in full colours, are just the thing every boy will want to collect, for they depict subjects that all boys are most keen on—flying and motor-racing. They will look grand in your picture-card album, and will give it a new interest. For three weeks these picture cards will be presented in the GEM, so that every reader will get nine in all. But make sure that there is no risk of missing them. Let me remind you that there is bound to be a rush on the GEM, and I don't want any of my regular readers to be disappointed. If your newsagent hasn't a standing order for you, it would be safer to place one as soon as convenient. Your pals, too, will be interested in these Free Gifts, so give them the word, and tell them my advice.

In addition to the superb picture cards, I have got together some extra-special, extra-long St. Jim's stories for future numbers. And then there's that smashing new St. Frank's yarn, which starts next Wednesday, and which, I anticipate, will be a record sensation. Believe me,

"THE BLACK HAND AT ST. FRANK'S!"

is the school-story thriller of the year, for Mr Brooks has spared no effort to make it his best story. From the opening lines, when the boys of St. Frank's are plunged into an adventure as mysterious and thrilling as they have ever encountered, the story grips the interest as few yarns could ever do. When you have read the powerful opening chapters you will be as eager as I was to get going on the next instalment.

Well, this super new serial story is

Treat No. 2 for next week's bumper issue, and the third is

"CHUMS ON PATROL!"

our next extra-long yarn of the ever-popular Tom Merry & Co. You will like the longer St. Jim's story in this number. Requests for these extra-long school yarns have poured in upon me, and I knew this one will be received with great enthusiasm, particularly as it is the first grand story of a series of extra good ones which even Martin Clifford could seldom have bettered. "Chums on Patrol!" is a refreshing story, telling of the humorous and exciting adventures of the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's, and the amazing events that followed on a startling discovery in the vaults of the ruined castle on Wayland Moor. Look out for this great yarn, chums. With another column of readers' prize-winning jokes and more mirth from Monty Lowther, it sets the seal on a record Free Gift number.

FOR SPEEDBOAT ENTHUSIASTS!

We all know that horrible feeling when we see another fellow's model speedboat ploughing merrily along and our own lagging behind. Well, here is a tip to put you right on top! Send to Meccano, Ltd. (Dept. BC), Binns Road, Liverpool, 13, for their full-range price list of Hornby Speed Boats and Racing Boats. Hornby Racing Boats, with their excellent turn of maintained speed, good steering, and steadiness in the water, will give you untold pleasure and satisfaction.

THE LAST TEST.

On Saturday the fifth Test match starts at Kennington Oval, and it will

**PEN PALS COUPON
17-8-35**

be a game of great interest for cricket enthusiasts in England and South Africa. Our visitors are naturally full of fight for the remaining Test match. That they were the first Springbok side to win a Test on English soil has given them every confidence. Their successful tour should do a great deal towards furthering cricket interest in South Africa.

The Springboks have shown that they are great sportsmen, on and off the field. Everywhere they have played, this cheery band of cricketers have left happy memories of enjoyable games played in the right spirit, and impressed everyone with their charming personality. The South Africans have proved that the time has come when they are fitted to be ranked as opponents equal in skill to the Australians, and that four-day matches should be allotted to them in future Tests.

COINCIDENCES FROM THE SEA.

Stories of strange coincidences are always cropping up. A little while ago I told you about an army officer who lost one of his war medals in the sea when leaning overboard from a ship off Malta. Thirteen years later, when the same ship weighed anchor, the medal came up in the mud stuck to the flukes!

Well, here's the story of another coincidence from the sea. During the War the skipper of a Fleetwood fishing trawler had his ship sunk by Germans off the Irish coast. A week or two ago he was fishing off the same coast when his nets caught in some wreckage beneath the sea. And it so happened that it was the charted spot where his own ship had been sunk many years earlier!

BEWARE OF BEAR!

There is a bear in New York which, I should imagine, everyone will be glad to give a wide berth to. It is not a ferocious animal. On the contrary, it is a tame bear. But it contains something that is highly dangerous. The bear escaped from its den, and in its wanderings came to a dynamite store. It was ravenously hungry—so hungry, in fact, that it broke into the store and started on the dynamite! When the bear was discovered it was found that it had eaten thirteen sticks of explosive. I'm not superstitious, but I'd prefer that bear's room to its company!

TAILPIECE.

Teacher: "Yes, Tommy, the tail of a comet is three million miles long."

Tommy: "Crikey! There wouldn't be any fun tying a can on the end o' that!"

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.

Miss Muriel Thomasson, 62, West Street, Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia; girl correspondents; age 16-18; stamps, swimming.

Evelyn Halse, 1517, Cate St. Luc Road, Montreal, Province Quebec, Canada; girl correspondents; age 16-20.

Jack Lewis, 62, New Street, Brighton Beach, S.E. Melbourne, Australia; age 13-16; stamps, match brands, cricket, tennis.

Miss Liselotte Weissenbach, 33, Herrlig Street, Zurich, 9,

Switzerland; girl correspondents; England, British Empire, America; sports, stamps, films.

Billie Lloyd, Albemarle Hotel, Brighton, wants correspondents; age 13-16.

Michael John Rouse, 60, Pollards Hill North, Norbury, London, S.W.16; stamps; overseas; age 10-12.

David Redfern, 25, Park Road, Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs; age 11-14; sports, reading; Germany, France, Canada.

John Pearce, 43, Shingring Road, Nelson, near Treharris, Glam. South Wales; age 12-15; stamps, papers, cigarette cards.

Anthony Mitarachi, 1, Amasis Street, Mazarita, Alexandria, Egypt; England; age 14-15.

San Kheng Hong, 377, Bridge Street, Penang, Straits Settlements; England, France; stamps, magazines.

Lim Hock Sim, 230, Burmah Road, Penang, Straits Settlements; age 14-16; stamps, sports, books.

(Continued on page 28)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,455.

"That's what I say! Anyway, we'll stand by her in case he should cut up rusty. He's rotter enough for anything!"

Quite a crowd rushed after the taxi. The news had spread like wildfire.

Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. were well to the front, but fellows of all Forms and both Houses followed them fast.

The vague rumour—due to the telephone story—that Mr. Ratcliff was really a married gentleman, and had a wife somewhere, was confirmed now with a vengeance! No proof could be more convincing than the arrival of the lady!

Mr. Ratcliff, all unconscious of the storm that was about to burst upon him, was crossing to the New House, somewhat solaced in his mind by the sweet satisfaction of having boxed Tom Merry's ears in the School House.

He caught sight of the taxi and of a woman's hat within it, and wondered who the visitor might be. He did not guess.

The lady leaned out of the window as she caught sight of the Housemaster. "Stop!" she called to the driver.

"Yes, ma'am!"

The taxi halted on the drive, just as Mr. Ratcliff was passing it. The door was thrown open, and the lady stepped out.

"Horace!"

Mr. Ratcliff jumped.

He had been surprised by a lady, a perfect stranger to him, alighting from the taxi for the evident purpose of greeting him. He fancied for a moment that it was some female relative of one of the boys. But her greeting him by his Christian name took his breath away.

"Madam!" he ejaculated.

"Horace!"

"Madam!"

The lady advanced towards him and put her outstretched arms round his neck.

"Dear Horace! Aren't you glad to see me?" she exclaimed, in a voice as soft as the cooing of a dove.

"Madam!" gasped the Housemaster, forcibly releasing himself from the embrace.

"My dear Horace!"

The Housemaster backed away and avoided the eager arms of the lady. He wondered for a moment whether he was dreaming.

"Madam!" he panted. "I—I—I am amazed! How can you act in this scandalous manner? I do not know who you are, but I insist that you shall not address me by my Christian name! I—I—"

"Horace!"

"Madam!"

"Dearest Horace! Are you angry with me?" The lady produced a handkerchief and dabbed her eyes. "Oh, Horace! Are you sorry to see your poor wife?"

"Wh-what!"

"My dear husband—"

"What?"

"Horace!"

"Madam!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Either you are mad, or I am! What do you mean by this conduct? How dare you address me as your husband?"

"Horace!" The lady sobbed softly. "Horace! After all these years! Have I reproached you for deserting me, Horace?"

"Madam!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, Horace!"

Mrs. Ratcliff made a sudden rush, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,435.

and before the Housemaster could dodge her, she threw her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Horace, haven't you a kind word for your poor little wife?" she sobbed.

The Housemaster struggled furiously to release himself.

"Madam! Let me go! You are mad, or—or else intoxicated! You are not my wife! I am not a married man! Release me instantly."

"Horace!"

"Woman!"

Mrs. Ratcliff sobbed bitterly, still clinging to the Housemaster. There was a murmur of compassion and indignation from the gathering crowd. Half St. Jim's had gathered already on the spot, and the other half seemed to be coming. Fellows were staring from the playing fields, and deserting their game to run towards the New House. Masters were looking out of their study windows.

Mr. Ratcliff was almost fainting with horror.

"Release me!" he panted. "Woman, I command you to release me!"

But she only sobbed.

The murmur of the sympathetic crowd became a shout.

"Shame!"

Mr. Ratcliff glared round helplessly. "It's not true!" he exclaimed wildly.

"I do not know this woman! She is a complete stranger to me! She must be mad!"

"Shame!"

"His own wife!"

"Poor Mrs. Ratcliff!"

The Housemaster, with a terrific effort, wrenched himself away from the lady's embrace. He gazed round him wildly at the accusing faces of the crowd.

"It is false!" he stammered thickly.

"I am not married! This woman is a mad woman, or an adventuress! I swear—"

"Shame!"

"Horace!" shrieked the lady.

She made another rush at the unhappy Housemaster. Mr. Ratcliff dodged round the cab, and then fairly took to his heels and bolted into the New House.

CHAPTER 13.

A Heartless Husband!

MRS. RATCLIFF sobbed bitterly. Some of the juniors were laughing. But the majority of the fellows looked sympathetic and concerned. To doubt the word of such a charming lady was impossible. Besides, why should a perfect stranger come to St. Jim's claiming to be Mr. Ratcliff's better half if there was no foundation for the claim.

It was only too clear. And the soft sobbing of the injured lady went straight to the simple hearts of the St. Jim's fellows.

"Oh, Horace!" sobbed the lady. "My husband! He repudiates his own Amelia! Oh!"

"Poor thing!"

"She looks as if she's going to faint," said Glyn of the Shell. "What an awful rotter Ratty must be!"

The lady was, indeed, swaying as if about to fall. Kildare ran forward to give her his arm. Kildare's red face was very much full of indignation. He had never thought much of Mr. Ratcliff, but he had never expected even Ratty to act like this.

"Please take my arm, ma'am," said Kildare respectfully.

"Thank you, my dear boy!" sobbed Mrs. Ratcliff. "Oh, to be treated so by my husband! Oh dear! Horace!"

"I—I suppose there isn't any mistake, ma'am?" said Monteith doubtfully.

"Are you quite sure that Mr. Ratcliff is your husband?"

"As if I should not know my own Horace!" sobbed the lady.

"Of course she knows him!" said Gore of the Shell. "I suppose a woman wouldn't be likely to get her husband mixed up with somebody else?"

"Wathah not!"

"Besides, we all know Ratty's married," said Levison. "Didn't the woman on the telephone say so the other day?"

"Yes, rather!"

"It's true enough."

"And he's disowned his own wife!" said Lefevre. "It's shameful! That's what I say—shameful!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Shame!"

"He ought to be forced to look after her!" exclaimed Figgins. "It's his duty."

"I dare say he's a wife-beater," said Mellish.

"I shouldn't wonder!"

"But are you sure, ma'am?" asked Monteith. "Mr. Ratcliff has always been supposed to be an unmarried man here. Perhaps there is another Mr. Ratcliff."

"Yes, perhaps there is a mistake," said the bewildered Kildare. "But it's odd that both of them should be named Horace."

"Oh, it's the same man," said Gore.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He ought to be made to do her justice!"

"Take her to the Head!"

"Make Ratty come out!"

"Shame!"

"You are quite sure that you have found the right man, ma'am?" asked Monteith.

"He has a scar on his left arm," said Mrs. Ratcliff faintly. "A scar above the elbow."

There was a general exclamation from the crowd.

"That settles it!"

"We all know Ratty's got a scar on his arm!" exclaimed Redfern. "I've seen it!"

"Yes, rather! So have I!"

The St. Jim's fellows were convinced—if they needed convincing. Mr. Ratcliff sometimes took charge of the young boys bathing in the Rhyl, and the scar on his left arm was perfectly well known to dozens of them.

The lady could have produced no more convincing evidence.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Monteith. "That settles it, Kildare!"

The St. Jim's captain nodded.

"You're right," he said. "This is an awful thing for Ratty to do! I never thought much of him, but deserting a wife—that's too thick!"

"And denying her when she comes home to him!" said Kangaroo.

"Shame!"

The lady sobbed.

"Take me to Horace!" she moaned.

"I forgive him! I love him, in spite of all! Take me to Horace!"

"Poor thing!"

"She's too good for him!"

"Take her into the New House, Kildare," said Tom Merry. "A wife has a right to be wherever her husband is. Take her in!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Make Ratty own up!"

"Take me to Horace!" sobbed Mrs. Ratcliff.

"I—I suppose we'd better," said Kildare, with a bewildered look at

Monteith. "It's no business of ours to help a man dodge his own wife."

"No fear!" said Monteith. "Come in, ma'am. This way!"

And the two prefects supported the sobbing lady into the New House.

They left the crowd in a buzz in the quadrangle.

Mr. Raiton came striding across the quad, and he came up just as Mrs. Ratcliff disappeared into the New House.

"What is the disturbance?" he exclaimed. "Who is that lady?"

Mr. Ratcliff's wife, sir."

"What!"

"It's Mrs. Ratcliff, sir."

"What do you mean? What—"

"It's true enough, sir," said Baker of the Sixth. "Mr. Ratcliff has deserted her, and she's come here to find him. She knows him."

The School House master looked utterly astounded.

"Does Mr. Ratcliff admit her claim?" he demanded.

"Oh, no, sir; you can't expect him to as he deserted her!" said Baker.

"The Head wishes to know what is the matter," said the School House master coldly. "It appears that this lady claims to be your wife."

"It is false—false! An impudent concoction, sir!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "I am not a married man! All my acquaintances know that I am not a married man! It is infamous!"

"It seems that the lady knows your name, at least, and has stated that she knows that you have a scar on your left arm above the elbow."

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

"This is—extraordinary!" he gasped. "I—I do not know how she can possibly be aware of that circumstance when she is a total stranger to me."

"Certainly it is very odd if she is a total stranger to you, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master coldly.

"Do you doubt my word, Mr. Raiton? Do you dare—"

"I pass no opinion whatever on the subject, sir," said Mr. Raiton icily. "The Head has asked me to ascertain

wild accusation when you are calmer," he said. "But I shall certainly not stay here to listen to such words."

And he strode from the study.

A picture hat and flaxen curls and a woe-stricken face were framed in the doorway the next moment.

"Horace!"

Mr. Ratcliff shrieked.

"Woman! Go!"

But the woman did not go; she came into the study with outstretched arms.

"Horace! My husband! I forgive everything!"

"Oh, this is too much! Go, go, go! I will send for the police. Madam, if you dare to touch me I shall strike you! I will not be embraced. I will not be touched. You are making an absurd mistake. I am not your husband!"

"Horace!"

"Go!"

"Horace darling!"

"Woman!"

Mr. Ratcliff dodged round the study table and fled from the study. Mrs. Ratcliff sat down in the armchair and wept bitterly.

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"But it's true enough. She knows he's got a scar on his arm, above the elbow."

"Dear me!"

"It's all right, sir; she's genuine enough," said Baker. "Besides, why should she come and claim him if it isn't true? He would easily be able to prove whether it was true or not, and then she would have to go."

"Yes, that—that certainly seems so," ejaculated Mr. Raiton. "This is most extraordinary. I think I had better see Mr. Ratcliff about it. The Head is very much disturbed by what he has seen from his window."

And Mr. Raiton strode into the New House.

Kildare and Monteith had just arrived at Mr. Ratcliff's study door with the lady, who was leaning heavily upon their arms. Mr. Ratcliff was in his study. He had retreated there, in dismay and amazement, hardly knowing whether he was upon his head or his heels. As he heard footsteps in the passage he sprang to his study door to lock it, but to his utter dismay he found that the key was gone.

Figgins had taken care of that. He slammed the door, and as he slammed it there came a knock on the outside.

"Go away!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "I refuse to see you! You are an impostor! You are an adventuress! You—"

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Oh! Is that you, Mr. Raiton? Pray come in!" The School House master entered with a grim brow. "Mr. Raiton, I am being persecuted—persecuted, sir, by an unknown female—"

what the matter is. Am I to tell him that an unknown lady has come here claiming to be your deserted wife, and that you deny it?"

"Yes, yes! I certainly do deny it! Good heavens, man, I suppose I ought to know whether I am married or not!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

"I will tell the Head what you say, then."

"But you—you believe me—"

"What I believe is of no moment, as the matter is no business of mine," said the master of the School House.

"It is a plot!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "It is a plot to disgrace me! Someone has hired this impudent and scandalous female to come here to ruin me!"

"That would be very extraordinary. The lady looks perfectly respectable, and is evidently in a state of great grief," said Mr. Raiton. "If there is no foundation for her claim, it is a mistake—a very extraordinary mistake."

"If—if! I tell you there is no foundation for it. I am a bachelor, sir. I have never been married in my life. It is infamous! It is a plot! I suspect you, sir, of having a hand in this disgraceful scheme!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff. The School House master started.

"I! What do you mean?"

"Yes, sir, you!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "I am not blind to your secret dislike and rivalry towards me, Mr. Raiton! You have contrived this plot to bring me into disgrace!"

Mr. Raiton flushed.

"I think you will be sorry for such a

CHAPTER 14.

A Hot Chase!

SYMPATHETIC faces looked into the study. Mrs. Ratcliff's sobs could be heard the length of the passage, and the New House fellows were deeply touched. Comment upon Mr. Ratcliff's conduct was passed freely.

It is probable that the New House fellows, while they really sympathised with the afflicted lady, also felt a very considerable satisfaction in being able to back up against Mr. Ratcliff in so good a cause. The tyranny and harsh temper of the Housemaster, exercised without limit for the past two days, was to be avenged now.

The New House rose as one man to back up the cause of the injured lady.

"Please don't cry, ma'am," said Baker quite softly. "It's a shame. It's a beastly shame! But he'll have to give in."

"Certainly," said Monteith. "There's the law, ma'am!"

Mrs. Ratcliff sobbed.

"His own Amelia!" she murmured.

"We're all very sorry, ma'am," said Thompson of the Shell.

"Where is he?" asked Amelia, rising to her feet. "I shall go. I will not remain where my husband does not want me. I will fling back his wedding-ring and go!"

"No, don't do that, ma'am!" exclaimed Redfern. "Stick to him!"

"Yes, stick to him, Mrs. Ratcliff!"

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cried a dozen voices from the passage. "The Head will make him do what is right."

"Take him before the Head, ma'am!" "You can rely on the Head. He's an old sport."

"Take me to my husband," said the lady faintly. "You are very, very kind. But I cannot remain if he disowns me. I must go. I must tell him that I will not be a burden upon him. Take me to him."

"Certainly, ma'am!" said Monteith, alarmed at symptoms of hysterics. "Certainly! I'll take you to him with pleasure, ma'am."

There was no doubt about that. All who had suffered from Mr. Ratcliff's harsh temper—and their name was legion—were deriving considerable pleasure from the blow which had so unexpectedly fallen upon the Housemaster.

Monteith gave the lady his arm and led her from the study. The fellows gathered round, eager to escort beauty in distress. Some of them hurried on in advance to scout, and find out where Mr. Ratcliff was. As Figgins remarked, he was not going to escape; there was no rest for the wicked.

In the quadrangle there were surging, excited crowds.

All St. Jim's were gathered now, at the astounding news that Mr. Ratcliff's deserted wife had come to claim him and had been repudiated by the hard-hearted Housemaster.

The playing fields, the gym, the studies—all were deserted. Fellows had come from far and near to assist in the scene.

"Where is he?"

"Where's Ratty?"

"Where's he hiding?"

"This way!" shouted Blake. "He's gone to the School House!"

"Come on, ma'am."

"We'll see you righted!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A surging crowd gathered round the weeping lady and escorted her across the quadrangle towards the School House.

Amelia had allowed her veil to fall—to hide her tears, perhaps—but she was still sobbing softly.

"It's a rotten shame!" said Kildare wrathfully. "She's quite a nice girl, too. Wonder what she could have seen in old Ratty?"

"I wonder if he beats her?" said Darrell indignantly. "The poor thing seems to forgive him all his bad conduct."

"What will the Head say?" murmured Rushden.

"He'll make Ratty do the right thing!"

"There he is!" shouted Redfern.

Mr. Ratcliff was seen looking out of the doorway of the School House. He had a hunted look upon his face, which was not surprising, in the circumstances.

He glared at the lady, and disappeared into the House. Some of the juniors ran towards the House to see whither he went.

"Buck up, ma'am!" yelled Gore.

"Chase me!" murmured Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't laugh, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is a vewy sewious mattah—for Ratty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mrs. Ratcliff was escorted into the School House. A swarming crowd followed her, filling the Hall and the passages.

"Where is my husband?"

"Where's Ratty?"

Mr. Railton came out of his study, looking flushed and worried. The un-

happy master of the New House had taken refuge there, throwing himself upon the mercy of the School House master. Mr. Railton did not know what to believe, but his sympathies were with the afflicted lady. Mr. Ratcliff was never frank, or anything but secretive, and he did not inspire confidence. If the matter was due to a mistake, it was a most extraordinary mistake, and it was far more probable that Horace Ratcliff had acted badly.

"Pray, madam," said Mr. Railton. "Pray—er—pause for a moment! I—I beg you to be calm! Mr. Ratcliff declares that you are labouring under a misapprehension." Sob! "He desires me to explain to you—"

Sob!

"He does not wish to see you—"

Sob!

"He—he—"

Sob!

Mr. Railton felt like a brute. The fellows were all looking indignant. They respected Mr. Railton, but who was he to stand between a wife and her husband?

"She wants to see her husband, sir," said Monteith.

"But—but—" stammered Mr. Railton.

"They can settle it together, sir. Surely Mr. Ratcliff ought to be willing to face his own wife."

"Yes. But—but he declares—"

Mrs. Ratcliff moved forward, and the School House master had either to give way, or to stop her by force. The latter was not to be thought of. Quite bewildered and undecided, Mr. Railton stepped aside, and Monteith opened the study door.

Amelia passed in.

There was a shriek of dismay and rage from the unfortunate Mr. Ratcliff. He backed away to the window, holding up his hands as if to ward off the unfortunate female.

"Go away!" he shrieked. "I will not be persecuted. Woman, you are mistaken! I am not your husband—nothing of the kind!"

"Horace!"

"Go away! Take her away! Send for the police!"

"Horace!"

Amelia made an affectionate rush at the Housemaster.

Mr. Ratcliff ran round the table and made for the doorway. But an innumerable crowd blocked up the way of escape, and nobody budged. The fellows were not inclined to facilitate the escape of the master.

Mr. Ratcliff had to stop, and he backed away from the lady, and dodged round the table again.

There was a chuckle from the crowded passage.

"Here we go round the mulberry-bush!" yelled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Madam—"

"Horace!"

"Woman!"

"Horry!"

Mr. Ratcliff was cornered at the window. The window was open, and it was an easy drop into the quadrangle, though at any other time Mr. Ratcliff, who was not given to gymnastic performances, would not have left the study that way. But on this occasion he had no choice. It was either that, or the embraces of an objectionable female, and he twisted his thin and lanky form out of the window, and dropped into the quad.

He lost his footing, and rolled over there, and yelled.

The afflicted lady looked out of the window after him.

"Horace!"

"Ow!"

"My hat!" yelled Lefevre. "She's going after him! Holy smoke!"

It was true!

Amelia placed her hand upon the window-sill, and vaulted out after the Housemaster, alighting much more actively than Mr. Ratcliff had done. The Housemaster had just time to spring up and take to his heels.

The fellows crowded into the study, and looked out of the window after them, and yelled:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 15.

Face to Face!

DR. HOLMES, the revered Head of St. Jim's, was in his study, listening to the yells from the quadrangle in great distress, in a very disturbed frame of mind.

He had learned that a lady, claiming to be Mr. Ratcliff's deserted wife, had arrived at the school, and that the New House master repudiated her, and was seeking to escape from her.

Such an occurrence shocked the Head terribly. Such a scene outraged all his ideas of propriety. Whether to interfere or not, he hardly knew, and he remained in his study in a state of considerable agitation, hoping that the dreadful happening would end somehow.

His study door was suddenly thrown open, and a hatless fugitive rushed in.

It was Mr. Ratcliff.

Dr. Holmes jumped up in alarm.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" he exclaimed.

"Save me!" gasped the affrighted New House master. "A fearful woman is pursuing me! She will not leave me! Keep her off!"

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

Mr. Ratcliff sank exhausted into a chair.

Dr. Holmes eyed him sternly.

"Is this woman your wife, Mr. Ratcliff?" he demanded.

Mr. Ratcliff yelled:

"No!"

"Then it is very extraordinary—"

"It is some fearful, some ghastly mistake! Or else she is an adventuress, and has been hired to persecute me in this way!" wailed the unhappy Housemaster.

"That is nonsense!" said the Head decidedly. "If the claim is unfounded it is a mistake. Certainly her conduct is most unbecoming in pursuing you in this way. But if she is your wife—"

"She is not!" screamed the maddened Housemaster. "Do you doubt my word, Dr. Holmes? I tell you I have never been married. You know I have not!"

"I know you have been supposed to be a single man, certainly," said Dr. Holmes. "But if you have, in a thoughtless moment, contracted an ill-advised marriage, Mr. Ratcliff—"

"I tell you—"

"In such a case, it would be better to face the consequences, and not wrong your wife by a denial, sir."

"Will you believe me, sir? I have never seen the woman before!" raged Mr. Ratcliff, beating the air with his hands. "Oh, this is enough to drive a man crazy! I have never seen this awful woman! We are perfect strangers!"

"I have been told that she knows your Christian name, and the fact that you have a certain scar upon your arm."

"Yes; it is very—very extraordinary!"

"Most extraordinary!" said the Head dryly.

"Sir, I tell you—"

"Once more, Mr. Ratcliff, if there is any truth in this astounding claim, I urge you to admit it to me, and—"

"There is no truth in it!" screamed Mr. Ratcliff. "None whatever! The woman is a stranger to me."

"She cannot be a stranger to you since she knows of the scar on your arm," said the Head. "You must see that that is impossible."

"I cannot account for that!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "It is extraordinary. But I repeat, I swear, that I do not know her. I've never seen her before!"

There was a trampling of feet and a buzz of voices in the passage outside the Head's study. The claimant was coming, evidently, and most of the school seemed to be coming with her.

"She—she is here!" said the Head apprehensively. "This is a most unpleasant scene you have brought upon me, Mr. Ratcliff."

"It is not my fault; I do not know the woman. It is a plot—it is a conspiracy! I will not face the woman! Keep her away!"

"Have you any papers to prove your claim, madam?" said the Head.

"She has not!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "She cannot have! How can she prove her claim when it is false? I tell you it—"

"Please leave me to deal with this matter, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head sharply. "Mere denial is not sufficient."

"Sir! I tell you—I repeat—"

"Enough! Leave it to me. Now, madam, what proof can you offer that you have a claim upon Mr. Ratcliff?" asked the Head, handing the lady a chair. "Pray sit down and be calm."

"Thank you, sir," said the lady faintly.

"That's fair enough!" said Monteith.

"Dear me!" said the Head. "That—that certainly does sound quite fair. What do you say to that, Mr. Ratcliff?"

Mr. Ratcliff looked as if he were on the verge of an attack of apoplexy. So convincing was the woman's manner that for one dizzy moment Mr. Ratcliff wondered whether he was really married or not.

"There are no papers—no proofs!" he gurgled. "It is an impudent claim. The woman is an impostor!"

"Oh, Horace!"

"Please moderate your language, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head sharply. "The lady may be mistaken. But I am sure it is nothing worse than that. Madam,



Mrs. Ratcliff placed her hand on the window-sill and vaulted out into the quadrangle far more actively than Mr. Ratcliff had done. The New House master, with Amelia giving chase, took to his heels and dashed frantically across the quad.

"It seems impossible to keep her away. And the matter must be settled," said the Head severely.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

The door opened, and the lady appeared with Monteith and a crowd of fellows.

The Head faced the newcomers, and Mr. Ratcliff dodged behind the Head's desk, his last rampart.

"Monteith—" began the Head.

"Please, sir, it is Mrs. Ratcliff," said the New House prefect. "She wants to see her husband, sir!"

"It is not Mrs. Ratcliff!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff. "There is no Mrs. Ratcliff! She is an impostor—a wicked adventurer!"

Amelia sobbed.

"My dear lady," said the Head gently, "pray calm yourself. I am sure that this is a terrible mistake."

Sob!

"Mr. Ratcliff assures me that it is a mistake!"

Sob!

"Now, pray be calm, and—and we shall get this matter settled quite satisfactorily," said the Head. "In the first place, have you any—any marriage certificate?"

"I did not bring a marriage certificate with me, sir!" sobbed the lady. "How was I to guess that such a thing would be wanted?"

"Quite right!" said Monteith.

"Ladies don't generally take their marriage certificates about in their pockets, sir."

"No, I—I suppose not!" said the Head. "But—but since Mr. Ratcliff has not acknowledged you, madam, you must have been prepared for denial on his part. It would, therefore, have been more judicious to bring proof with you."

"I suppose I know my own husband," sobbed the lady. "I could not foresee that he would be so cruel. But if you care to send to my hotel in Wayland, sir, they will give you a packet containing all the proofs. I will wait here while you send."

you are quite sure that you can identify this gentleman?"

"He has a scar on his left arm, above the elbow," sobbed Amelia.

"Yes. Can you describe the scar?"

"About an inch long, sir. It was made by Mr. Ratcliff cutting his arm on broken glass," said the lady. "It happened to him last year when a window was broken in his House."

"Quite true," said Monteith. "I remember it happening."

"That—that is true!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "But someone must have told her. I tell you this is a plot—it is a conspiracy!"

"It is certainly amazing," said the Head, passing his hand over his brow. "It is very extraordinary if there are two Mr. Ratcliffs with the same scar on the same arm. Do you declare that your husband was a Housemaster at this school, madam?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Dear me! Then it is certainly not THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,435.

a case of mistaken identity," said the Head, bewildered. "Is anyone else at this school acquainted with you, madam?"

"Yes, sir; the witness of our marriage—a master here."

"What! That should settle the matter. What is the name of the master?" asked the Head eagerly. And Mr. Ratcliff looked simply dazed.

If a master at St. Jim's was produced as a witness against him, he would have had no alternative but to believe that he had really got married in a moment of mental aberration, and forgotten all about it afterwards.

"Mr. Kidd, sir; the other House-master here."

The Head looked disappointed.

"Mr. Kidd! Ah! I am sorry to say that Mr. Kidd is no longer here," he said. "Mr. Railton is now Housemaster of the School House. I can, however, communicate with Mr. Kidd by telegram. Are you willing that I should do so?"

"Yes, Dr. Holmes, more than willing."

"Then I will send the telegram at once."

"Please do so, sir."

Dr. Holmes wrote out a telegram and handed it to Monteith.

"Please send that at once, Monteith," he said.

"Yes, sir."

The prefect hurried away with the telegram.

Mrs. Ratcliff sat in the chair, sobbing. She did not display the slightest nervousness as to the result of the telegraphic inquiry, though, as a matter of fact, some of the juniors in the passage looked rather alarmed.

But their looks were not noticed at such a time.

"I shall receive a reply in an hour," said the Head. "Mr. Ratcliff, if Mr. Kidd's reply bears out this lady's statement, I shall have no alternative but to believe that she really is what she claims to be. In that case, sir, your conduct has been such that I shall request you immediately to leave the school."

Mr. Ratcliff passed his hand over his perspiring brow.

"In that case, sir, I should certainly leave this school and enter a lunatic asylum," he said dazedly. "I cannot understand this woman. If I am married to her, I am not in my right senses!"

"Horace!"

"Perhaps—perhaps you will retire to another apartment, madam," said the Head gently. "And in the meantime I will also send to your hotel for the papers you mention. Pray give me the name of the hotel?"

"The Railway Hotel, sir."

"And the name—"

"Mrs. Ratcliff. I will write a note, sir."

"Here are pen and paper."

Amelia calmed herself sufficiently to write the note in a delicate feminine handwriting. It was placed in an envelope and sealed.

"Send the page with that, please, Baker."

"Yes, sir."

Mrs. Ratcliff rose.

"Horace!" she said softly.

"Madam—woman—"

"Will you not speak to me, Horace? Can you any longer deny the truth, when in a short time the truth will be in the hands of Dr. Holmes? Oh, Horace, how can you treat me so?"

"I deny—I assert—I—I—"

"Horace! I will not ask you again to take me to your heart!" said the sobbing lady. "If you repudiate your wife, she has too much pride to force herself upon you. Horace, I ask you for the last time, will you take back your own Amelia?"

"No!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "I will not! I do not know you! I refuse to admit anything of the sort! I—I—"

"Then take back your ring, you wicked man!" cried Amelia, tearing the wedding-ring from her finger and flinging it at the feet of Mr. Ratcliff. "Take it back! I will never look upon your face again!"

"Madam!" said the Head soothingly.

Mrs. Ratcliff held out her hands

blindly, evidently on the verge of hysterics.

Kildare sprang forward to support her.

"Take me away!" said the lady faintly. "Take me away—anywhere away from that wicked, heartless man!"

And Kildare led her sobbing from the Head's study.

CHAPTER 18.

Exit Mrs. Ratcliff!

A CROWD of sympathetic fellows followed Mrs. Ratcliff from the School House.

Mr. Ratcliff remained in a dazed condition in the Head's study. The sobbing lady clung to Kildare's strong arm, and the captain of St. Jim's did his best to comfort her.

"Take me away!" sobbed Amelia. "I will never see him again! The proofs that I am his lawful wife shall be shown, but I will never see him again! Take me to the cab!"

Kildare placed the lady in the taxi. She was sobbing violently behind her handkerchief, and Kildare felt a lump in his own throat from sheer sympathy. "Go on, driver!" called out Tom Merry.

The driver set the taxi in motion. A sympathetic crowd followed it to the gates of St. Jim's and watched it disappear down the road towards Rylcombe.

"It's a shame!" said Kildare.

"What an awful bounder Ratty is!"

"A rotten outsider, treating his wife like that!"

"Poor thing! She seemed quite heartbroken!"

"Ratty will get the sack, anyway," said Bishop. "The Head won't stand him when it's proved she's really his wife."

"Blessed if I'd have let him off if I'd been she," said Levison. "She should have stuck to him, whether he liked it or not. He's bound to keep her."

"Well, it's a proper pride not to stay with him if he doesn't want her," remarked Bernard Glyn. "Perhaps she never expected him to own her, but just wanted to show him up to punish him for deserting her."

"Well, she's gone!"

The St. Jim's fellows turned back into the quadrangle, excitedly discussing the strange incidents of the afternoon. When Mr. Ratcliff, looking very white and dazed, came out of the School House, he was greeted with loud groans and hisses. But he did not take any notice of them. He crossed over to the New House with an unsteady step, and withdrew to the seclusion of his study. He was strangely subdued. Even his violent temper seemed to have been broken by what he had gone through that afternoon.

It was half an hour later that Kerr came in at the school gates with a cheery smile on his face.

He was greeted with the surprising news.

"You've missed all the fun!" exclaimed Thompson, as Kerr came in. "Ratty's wife has been here!"

"Not really!" said Kerr.

"Yes, rather! She hasn't been gone more than half an hour. Ratty wouldn't have anything to say to her. He disowned her, the cad!"

"What a rotten thing to do!" said Kerr blandly. "I wish I'd been here. Did you see her, Figgins?"

Figgins went off into a yell.

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

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"So did I," said Fatty Wynn. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Thompson stared at them. "I don't think it's anything to laugh at," he said. "She was awfully cut up. As for Ratty, it's simply put the extinguisher on him."

"Well, that's a good thing, at any rate," said Kerr, laughing.

And Kerr linked arms with Figgins and Fatty Wynn, and walked away with them, all three of the famous Co. laughing heartily.

They met Tom Merry, Blake, and the rest outside the School House. Blake fell upon Kerr's neck and hugged him.

"Oh, you bouncer! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was ripping!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! I began to believe it was weally Mrs. Watchliff myself, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!" said Tom Merry. "Not a word! Not a syllable! If it were to get out—"

"I fancy I should have to get out, too!" said Kerr, grinning. "It's all serene; mum's the word! I left the taxi in the lane, and took the footpath, and the things are packed in the bags, ready to be fetched back some time. The driver was very sympathetic when I left him, and said it was a shame."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How's Ratty?"

"Squashed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "Here comes the telegraph boy! It's the answer from Mr. Kidd."

"And here comes Toby back from Wayland," said Tom Merry. "The Head will have the proofs now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The telegraph boy and Toby arrived together at the Head's study. Five minutes later, Toby was seen dashing across to the New House, evidently to fetch Mr. Ratcliff. Mr. Ratcliff soon appeared, and raced over to the School House, followed by a storm of yells, groans and hisses from the fellows in the quadrangle.

The Head was looking amazed and excited when Mr. Ratcliff entered his study.

"Mr. Ratcliff! I must apologise for having doubted you!" he exclaimed. "I have some very welcome information for you. The woman was undoubtedly an impostor. It seems that she was utterly unknown at the Railway Hotel at Wayland; and Mr. Kidd replies to me that he knows nothing about her, and certainly knows nothing of your supposed marriage. The whole story was a fabrication."

Mr. Ratcliff drew a deep breath of relief.

"Thank Heaven!" he gasped. "I—I was almost beginning to doubt my own senses, sir. Will you make this known to the school, sir? I have been placed in a very unpleasant position by the conduct of that—that extraordinary female."

"At once, Mr. Ratcliff. The whole thing is very extraordinary. Perhaps the woman was mad—I think that very probable. At all events, I am very glad that the matter has been satisfactorily cleared up."

The news was made known to the school.

St. Jim's heard it with amazement and doubt, but the Head's word was enough, and the telegram from Mr. Kidd was shown. It was evident that the claim of the sobbing lady had no

foundation; that the whole thing was a stupendous jape upon Mr. Ratcliff.

When St. Jim's realised that, the comic side of the matter struck them, and they roared.

Mr. Ratcliff retired to his own quarters, but even there he was followed by the incessant sound of laughter.

St. Jim's, New House and School House, seniors and juniors, roared over it.

It was likely to be a very long time before Mr. Horace Ratcliff was allowed to forget the pursuit of the affectionate Amelia.

As to who the importunate female was, that was not discovered. Mr. Ratcliff, feeling very vengeful, tried to discover, in the hope of getting the impostor traced. But she seemed to have vanished without leaving a clue behind her.

The driver of the taxi gave the information that she had left his vehicle in the lane, and had gone by the footpath through Rylcombe Wood towards Wayland.

But that was the last that human eyes saw of her; she had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up.

There were some fellows at St. Jim's who could have explained the mystery. But they took excellent care not to do so.

When the opportunity offered Kerr and Figgins slipped out of St. Jim's to fetch the bags hidden in the thicket in Rylcombe Wood. It wasn't safe to leave them there too long, in case they were discovered. Fortunately the two juniors succeeded in getting the bags into St. Jim's again without being questioned, and all trace of the juniors' rag on Ratty disappeared.

And Mr. Ratcliff, though he was cleared of the suspicion of being a heartless husband, found himself in a hardly less painful position, as the object of the laughter and jests of the whole school; and it was not surprising that he requested permission of the Head to retire from St. Jim's for a time upon a holiday.

The Head very gladly afforded permission; and Mr. Ratcliff took his departure at once, and his ears burned as he heard the yells of laughter that followed him as he started for the station.

In Tom Merry's study that evening a merry party was gathered. All the Co.'s were there to celebrate their victory over the obnoxious Ratty, and to congratulate one another upon his departure.

"We are victorious!" grinned Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! It was wuff on Watty, but he deserved it—and isn't it wippin' for him to have cleared out for a bit! It will give us a west."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurray!"

Tom Merry filled his glass.

"Gentlemen, a bumper! Here's to Mrs. Ratcliff, the gentle Amelia!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

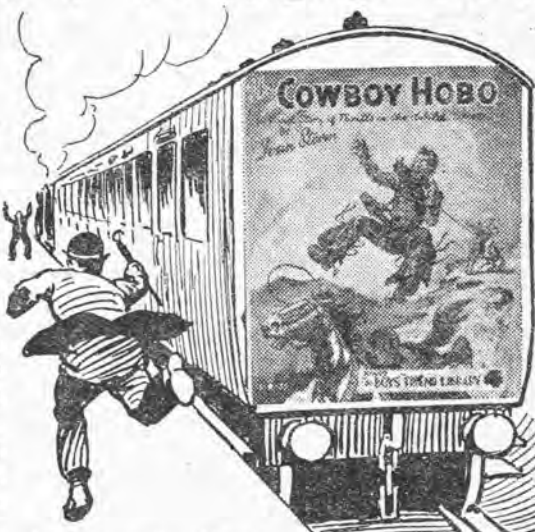
And the toast was drunk, with cheers for Kerr.

It was a merry evening for the chums of St. Jim's, and they rejoiced at the success of their rag on Ratcliff.

(In next Wednesday's grand Free Gift Number: "CHUMS ON PATROL!"—a special extra-long story of the humorous and exciting adventures of the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's.)

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MYSTERY MILL!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

The Secret Out!

THE discovery that the River Stowe, near St. Frank's, is poisoned, leads Nipper & Co. to make some secret investigations. They find out that the water is only polluted below a derelict old water-mill. It is obvious to the St. Frank's juniors, therefore, that the mill must have something to do with it. They make a search, but nothing is discovered.

As the juniors are leaving, Willy Handforth, who is walking in the rear, suddenly feels something squirted in his face. He staggers out of the mill, and then falls unconscious. Nipper & Co. bring him round, but he is able to tell them little. They return to St. Frank's, and, arriving at the boathouse, learn that two juniors have been nearly drowned when swimming in the river. It is the effects of the poisoned water.

At this point, before Nipper or any of the other Removites could explain anything, a familiar figure appeared, approaching from the direction of the school. It was the figure of Mr. Nelson Lee.

"What has been happening here, boys?" he asked sharply. "I have been informed that two members of the Fourth Form were nearly drowned—"

"Oh, I say, sir, that was an exaggeration!" protested Boots. "Yorke and Talmadge are the chaps, and they're all right now. They're dressing, sir."

And Boots briefly explained the details. Nelson Lee was looking relieved when he had heard the full story.

"I am glad to find out that the tale was grossly exaggerated," he said. "Thank you, Boots. I will have a word with these two boys as soon as they come out."

He turned to Nipper and Handforth and the others.

"Why were you boys not at your places during dinner?" he asked pointedly.

"We went up the river, sir—just for a row," said Handforth, in a careless voice.

"And is it usual for you to go up the river—just for a row—and miss your meals?" asked Lee. "Come, Nipper! I require a better explanation than that. In ordinary circumstances, I would not ask for any explanation, as you know. But I have a suspicion that there is something unusual afoot."

"How's Lemon, sir?" put in Chubby Heath eagerly.

Nelson Lee looked at Chubby keenly. "Oh, so there is some connection between Lemon and the river, eh?" he said. "Thank you, Heath, for the clue. Two Fourth Form boys are feeling ill, because they have been bathing. Do you know if Lemon bathed this morning?"

"He didn't, sir," replied Willy promptly.

"Did he fall into the river?"

There was no getting round a question of that sort.

"Look here, guv'nor, we'd better tell you the whole yarn," said Nipper, coming to a sudden decision. "Young

Lemon did fall into the river this morning, and he was nearly drowned, too. He swallowed about a gallon of water, but most of it was brought up. Willy will tell you—"

"Just one moment!" interrupted Nelson Lee, and, seizing hold of Willy by the shoulder, turned him half round. "Handforth minor, what have you been doing?"

"Doing, sir?"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, staring. "I'm blessed if Willy isn't going the same as Juicy! Look at his face! He's turning yellow!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"That—that gas!" shouted Church excitedly. "That's what's done it!"

And so, of course, the whole story came tumbling out. Everybody wanted to tell it at once, but Nelson Lee silenced them all except Nipper, and Nipper, very concisely and clearly, explained the full details.

"You should have told me this before, you young rascals," said Lee at length. "Lemon might have been very seriously affected. As it is, he is rapidly recovering, and the yellowness is going."

"Oh, that's good hearing, sir," said Willy, with relief.

"Without question, the river is dangerous," went on Nelson Lee. "Or, if not dangerous, it is decidedly a place to avoid. From this minute, boys, the river is out of bounds."

"There you are," said Willy, turning to the others. "What did I tell you? The very first thing they do is to put the river out of bounds!"

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled.

"So that was the reason you kept the thing to yourselves, eh?" he said dryly. "But it's no good, boys. You can't keep a thing like that secret for long."

"We didn't mean to, sir," said Nipper. "Only we wanted to go up the river and explore for ourselves. We've done it, too—and we've located the cause of the trouble in the old water-mill."

Nelson Lee heard all about the investigations in the mill, and he was thoughtful afterwards.

Indeed, that afternoon he made a point of visiting the mill himself, and he went all over it. But nothing happened. He saw nothing suspicious, and in the end he was obliged to come away baffled.

He made many researches in the river, too. He took samples of the water; he took several of the dead fish. And later, in the laboratory, he made elaborate tests. But still with the same result. He could arrive at no satisfactory explanation.

In the meantime, consternation reigned at St. Frank's.

The story had got abroad by now, of course—and everybody was indignant and dismayed when they learned that the river was completely out of bounds—until further notice. That meant, of course, that it would probably remain out of bounds for days—weeks. And it was just that period of the year when the river was urgently needed.

"We're not going to stand it, of course!" remarked Reggie Pitt of the

West House, as soon as afternoon lessons were over. "It's all rot! Why should we be barred from the river? It's just the height of the season."

"Dear old fellow, it's no good kicking up a fuss," remarked Vivian Travers. "The powers that be have decided the thing, and who are we to jib? Besides, you don't want to be yellow, do you?"

"It seems to me that it's a job for the sanitary authorities," said Castleton. "If the river's polluted, the council people ought to get busy."

"But we've never had anything like it before," said Reggie Pitt, frowning. "I don't see how the river can be polluted—not by anything natural, anyhow. Why didn't those Ancient House bounders tell us about this affair? Oh, well! I suppose we can only await developments now."

And so the school had to wait. As it happened, this period of waiting would not be so very long, after all!

A Significant Report!

"ANYTHING fresh?" asked Nelson Lee at tea-time, when Dr. Brett came into his study in the Ancient House.

"No, nothing," said the doctor. "Lemon is progressing satisfactorily. The yellowness is disappearing very quickly, and I think he will be able to leave the sanatorium by to-morrow."

"That's good hearing," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "Sit down, Brett. Care to have a cup of tea?"

"Thanks!" said the doctor.

"Have you had a look at young Handforth?" went on Lee, as he poured out the tea.

"Yes; but there's nothing much wrong with him," said Brett. "He is only very slightly affected in comparison to Lemon. As for those Fourth Form boys, there is nothing the matter with them at all. By the way, here's an early edition of the evening paper, if you'd care to look at it."

He laid it on the table, and sipped his tea.

"I'm mystified about the whole business," he went on, frowning. "So it's something to do with the river, is it? What do you make of it, Mr. Lee? Have you any theory?"

"None—except that this strange pollution is some kind of poison," replied Nelson Lee. "It is not ordinary poison, either. Its effects are not deadly, as Lemon's case proves."

"The Head's in a rare way about it," said the doctor. "I was having a word with him about half an hour ago, and he's talking about making a report to the governors, and writing to the sanitary authorities, and doing all sorts of things."

"I went to that old water-mill this afternoon, Brett," said Lee thoughtfully. "Although nothing actually happened, I'm very suspicious. I don't believe this pollution is natural. There's something going on at that mill—or it has been going on, at all events. This poison stuff is obviously a chemical. But how can there be chemicals in an ordinary way in an old, disused mill?"



Before the gangsters could get out of the beam of light, policemen came dashing up from all sides. In a moment there was a desperate struggle going on. "Come on!" exclaimed Handforth to the other juniors. "We're in this!"

"It's no good asking me a poser like that," said Brett.

"I was particularly struck by the fact that there were tracks of a motor-car along the little lane which leads into the Bannington main road," continued Nelson Lee. "Recent tracks, Brett, which did not go past the mill. That proves, quite conclusively, that a motor-car has been in the habit of coming to this place quite frequently of late. For these tracks were beaten down, one on top of the other."

"And that's all you discovered?"

"That's all—for the time being, at all events," replied the schoolmaster-detective. "Going, Brett?" he added, as the doctor rose to his feet. "Well, if you see the Head, tell him not to worry too much. I have already rung up the police, and Inspector Jameson will be here within the hour."

Dr. Brett, who was turning towards the door, stared.

"The police?" he repeated. "Good heavens! What on earth have the police to do with it?"

"I'm not quite sure," replied Lee. "But I think it is advisable to station one or two constables in the mill this evening. These precautions may be unnecessary, but—"

"Well, I'm hanged!" broke out Dr. Brett abruptly.

He seized the newspaper that he had put upon the desk, and now he was staring at it with eager eyes.

"Listen to this, Lee!" he exclaimed. "I hadn't looked at the paper before—at least, I'd only looked at the latest scores of the Test match at the Oval. But, listen to this! 'Extraordinary Yellowness of Victims! There was a big raid this morning—'"

"Let me see it!" interrupted Lee keenly.

"In the early hours of this morning there was one of the most daring motor

bandit raids ever known!" read Dr. Brett, as he scanned the newspaper. "Apparently it happened on the outskirts of London—at a bank. No, it wasn't in the early hours—but just after the bank opened."

He continued to read, very excited.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated. "It seems that the manager and his assistants were all rendered unconscious by some kind of poison gas, which the bandits released as soon as ever they entered the bank. The bandits themselves were wearing gas masks, so they weren't affected. They got away with an enormous amount of money."

Nelson Lee took the paper at last, and read that sensational report.

"H'm! Very remarkable!" he said at length.

"Do you think there is any connection?" asked Dr. Brett, bending over the table.

"My dear man, there's no question about it whatever," replied Nelson Lee. "It is far too obvious to be a coincidence."

"Yes, but I cannot possibly understand—"

"The manager of the bank and his assistants were all rendered unconscious by some form of poisonous gas, discharged from weapons that looked like ordinary pistols," said Lee. "And later, the victims turned vividly yellow. My dear Brett, there's the very same thing here, at St. Frank's. This river is polluted by some chemical or other. A Third Form boy swallows a good deal of it, after being nearly drowned, and he turns a vivid yellow. Young Willy Handforth gets a dose of that gas, and he goes yellow, too. And the source of it is that old mill up the river. I am very glad, indeed, that I telephoned to Inspector Jameson."

"If there's going to be any excitement, I want to be in it!" said the

doctor promptly. "Promise me, Lee, that you'll give me the tip. What do you actually suspect? Do you think that this gang of motor bandits has had its headquarters at the old mill?"

Lee was looking very keen.

"I think I told you, Brett, of the motor-car tracks along that little-used lane?" he said slowly.

"By Jove, you did!" ejaculated the doctor. "That's significant, isn't it? Why, man, you might have been murdered when you went there this afternoon!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I fancy that I am capable of taking care of myself, old man," he replied. "In any case, there wasn't the slightest danger, because the mill was deserted. Whether it will remain deserted is another question. I fancy not. I am convinced, at all events, that somebody was there when the boys went over the mill."

"They were lucky to get away safely, then."

"Very lucky," agreed Lee. "Possibly there was only one man there, so he dared not make an open attack, since he would certainly get the worst of it. But as soon as the boys had gone he probably went into Bannington and used the telephone. That was why I found the place empty."

"If these fellows have got the alarm, it is most unlikely that they will abandon the place as it stands. It is far more probable that they will return this evening. You must remember that only schoolboys, to their knowledge, have invaded their headquarters. They know nothing of Lemon's mishap, and of the clue it has given us."

And when Dr. Brett left Nelson Lee's study a minute or so later, he had a feeling that that evening would provide some unusual excitement.

Getting Ready for the Fray!

THE door of Study C in the Ancient House passage burst open violently, and Handy came barging in.

"Don't knock!" said Nipper politely.

He and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were having tea, and they had been busily discussing the events of the river. For Nipper's chums were now, of course, in the know.

"Look at this!" roared Handforth, slapping a newspaper down on the table in the midst of the bread-and-butter and cakes.

"Well, hang it, don't get so excited!" protested Watson. "Look what you've done with the jam, you silly ass! You've tipped it into the sardine dish, and—"

"Never mind about the giddy sardine dish!" shouted Handforth. "Look at this report, Nipper! What do you make of it? I'll bet these rotten motor bandits are the chaps who have been poisoning the river! They're a crowd of crooks, and it's up to us to—"

"Steady!" said Nipper. "Let's have a look! It seems to be something fairly unusual, anyhow."

He read the report—the very same report that Nelson Lee had been reading only a short time earlier. And Nipper was looking very keen when he rose from the table a minute afterwards.

"By Jove!" he said breathlessly. "Handy, old man, you're right!"

"Of course I'm right!" roared Handforth. "What are we going to do about it?"

"Really, dear old boy, this is frightfully puzzlin'—it is, really," said Sir Montie, in a protesting voice. "Begad! You come dashin' into the study like a cyclone, and you upset the jam and the sardines, and then you talk about doin' somethin'!"

"For once Handy is excused," said Nipper. "Read this, Montie, and then you'll understand."

But before Tregellis-West could start reading, a number of other juniors came crowding in, led by Church and McClure, who had evidently gone to fetch them. They were Willy Handforth, Chubby Heath, Vivian Travers, Reggie Pitt, and one or two others.

"Well, well!" said Travers genially. "Sorry to barge in like this, dear old fellows, but we've been told that it's important."

"And so it is," said Nipper. "But there's no reason why we should tell anybody else in the House. We'll keep this to ourselves as much as we can. There aren't likely to be many newspapers in the school, anyhow."

"I got this one for old Sunny!" said Chubby Heath excitedly. "He wanted to see the scores of the Test match. Anyhow, he gave the paper to me, and Willy spotted that bit about the bank raid."

"And then my major came up, and grabbed the paper," grinned Willy. "Well, Nipper, what about it? Pretty clear, isn't it?"

"I'm going straight to the guv'nor," said Nipper promptly.

"Hold on!" said Reggie Pitt. "You might let us know what it's all about. We came here to hear something, and we've heard nothing except a lot of jabber."

Nipper quickly explained, and all the other juniors were impressed.

"You see, two and two always make four," said Nipper. "Here are these

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motor bandits, in London, robbing a bank—and they made their victims helpless by gassing them. And these people have all turned yellow."

"I see!" said Travers. "And young Handforth turned yellow this morning, after sampling the gas? You mean to say that it's the same chemical?"

"Well, isn't it obvious?"

"Not absolutely obvious," said Vivian Travers. "It might be only a coincidence. There's no direct evidence."

"Rot!" said Handforth.

"There's certainly no direct evidence," said Nipper. "But this is so startling that we can't help thinking there's a connection. It would be pretty good, wouldn't it, if we collared those motor bandits—including all their booty—on the same day as the robbery?"

"By George!" said Handforth breathlessly. "What a thought! But look here, why tell Mr. Lee anything about it? Why shouldn't we do it on our own? Let's get off to the mill, and make a thorough attack upon it."

"We can't do that, old man," said Nipper, shaking his head. "My guv'nor has got the case in hand now, and it's up to us to tell him everything we know. Besides, it's too risky."

"Well, I'm not afraid!" retorted Handforth.

"Don't be an ass," said Nipper. "Nobody's afraid. But you seem to forget that these bandits are armed—they're desperate criminals. What chance should we have—a party of schoolboys—against them? We should probably mess the whole thing up, and then they would escape. Fine chumps we should look afterwards, shouldn't we?"

And, without any more ado, Nipper hurried off to Nelson Lee's study. As he went, he thought of the strange chance that had led to this direct connection between the motor bandits and the deserted old mill.

But for the seeping of that chemical into the River Stowe, nobody in the district would have had the slightest cause to suspect the old mill. Nobody could have imagined that the motor bandits were closely associated with this neighbourhood. And so there would have been no inquiries, no investigation.

Nipper arrived in Nelson Lee's study full of tense excitement, and he was relieved to find his guv'nor alone. He placed the newspaper into Lee's hands.

"Read that, sir!" he said tensely.

"I've read it!" replied Nelson Lee, with a smile.

"Oh!" said Nipper, his face dropping. "I might have expected it, though! So you know all about it, guv'nor?"

"Yes, Nipper, I know all about it," said Lee. "And I am rather alarmed to find that you all know about it, too. I suppose it means that a good many of the other juniors also know?"

"Yes, sir—Handforth and Pitt and Travers and one or two others."

"And, of course, they'll all want to be in this adventure," said Nelson Lee. "I'm sorry, Nipper, but it can't be done."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because the police wouldn't allow it—for one thing," said Nelson Lee. "Even if I were inclined to waive a point, the police wouldn't be. You see, Inspector Jameson, of Bannington, is due almost at any minute, and he has the whole thing in hand. I am very much afraid that he won't want the co-operation of schoolboys."

Nipper grunted. "Then Inspector Jameson doesn't know when he's well off!" he said tartly.

Not to be Outdone!

NELSON LEE could not help smiling as he noticed Nipper's crestfallen expression.

"Cheer up, young 'un!" he chuckled. "I don't suppose you'll be missing so very much. It will be a weary job, watching the mill—and the excitement won't be particularly spectacular, even at the climax. There's no guarantee that the bandits will come anywhere near the place."

"I suppose you're satisfied, sir, that the mill has been used as a kind of rendezvous by these bandits?"

"Yes, Nipper, I am quite satisfied on that score—although, of course, there is no direct evidence," replied Nelson Lee. "But I think we can, for once, take one or two things for granted. These motor bandits have been traced out of London, and they are known to have entered Sussex. But since being seen a few miles this side of Tunbridge Wells, all trace of them has been lost."

"You think they are hiding somewhere, sir?"

"That seems to be fairly obvious," replied Lee. "They are lying low—perhaps in a wood. So if they come to this mill at all they will come later on in the evening—presumably after dark."

Nipper went back to the others, and reported the unwelcome tidings.

"I say, what a frost!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt disappointedly.

"I call it a lot of rot!" said Handforth, aghast. "Do you mean to say that we're not allowed to help?"

"It's a bitter pill to swallow, Handy, old man, but there's the truth of it," said Nipper. "The police have the matter in hand, so, of course, the guv'nor hasn't got a free hand."

Handforth glared.

"Well, they're not going to keep me out of it!" he said grimly. "Not likely!"

The others thought that it was merely some of his usual "gas." But Church and McClure were feeling rather alarmed—they knew their volcanic leader's moods, and they wondered how they were going to keep him in check.

Soon afterwards an order went round the school to the effect that everybody—seniors included—was confined to gates. There were certain police activities afoot, and no St. Frank's fellows were allowed abroad. This effectually put an end to all hopes of joining in the fray.

It also led to a good deal of talk. There was a regular sensation in the Lower School. All sorts of rumours were floating about, the majority of them entirely without any foundation.

But it couldn't be denied that the situation was dramatic. It was very seldom indeed that the school was confined to gates in this way. Fellows hung about in the Triangle in groups, and when Nelson Lee emerged from the Ancient House, accompanied by Inspector Jameson, soon after eight o'clock, in the gathering dusk, there were further wild conjectures.

But Nipper went boldly up to Lee and caught his arm.

"Any fresh news, guv'nor?" he asked.

"I can only tell you, Nipper, that the mill is under constant observation," replied Nelson Lee. "Needless to say, the observers are all hidden. A man who was approaching the mill at about five-thirty was arrested, and we have every reason to believe that this man was in the mill when you boys went over it."

"Then that balk of timber was deliberately thrown at us, sir," said Nipper grimly.

"Possibly, my lad," put in Inspector

Jameson. "We have reason to believe that the arrested man is well known to Scotland Yard."

This piece of news was all to the good. The man who had been arrested had apparently been left in charge of the rendezvous. But now he was well out of the way, and the police were watching in secret. Nelson Lee and the inspector, it seemed, were now going to the scene in order to take up their own positions.

"If these rotten bandits are collared, old Juicy ought to feel pleased with himself," remarked Willy Handforth to Chubby Heath. "If Juicy hadn't fallen in the river and swallowed all that water the secret of the old mill might never have been discovered."

"Yes," said Chubby. "It's rummy how these things happen by chance."

The dusk grew into darkness, and still no more news came. The greater proportion of the school went indoors, and things quietened down.

But one junior, at least, was not to be outdone. And that junior, needless to say, was Edward Oswald Handforth. In Study D he was preparing to make a move.

"I don't care what you fellows say," he said, glancing at Church and McClure. "I'm going!"

"But you'll get the sack if you're collared," urged Church.

"I'm willing to risk it!" said Handforth. "I'm not going to be left out of this bit of excitement. It's dark now, and the coast's clear. We'll nip across the playing fields, and then creep over the meadows towards the mill. We needn't go right up—we can watch from the high ground just above. Then, if there's anything doing, we can join in at the critical moment."

It was useless to argue. Handforth had made up his mind. Even when Nipper and Willy came in, shortly afterwards, he was just as obdurate.

"Well, there's only one thing to be done, of course," said McClure at last. "We shall have to hold him here by force!"

"Just what I was going to say!" exclaimed Church.

Nipper grinned. "But why?" he asked. "I'm all in favour of Handy's scheme."

"What?" gasped McClure. "Good man!" grinned Willy. "What say we all go?"

"Exactly what I was going to suggest!" said Nipper calmly. "Why should we be left out in the cold?"

Handforth stared blankly. "I say, are you trying to pull my leg?" he asked.

"No, of course not," said Nipper. "We're game to back you up, Handy. We'll all creep out, now that it's dark, and we'll have a look at the activities. If you went alone, you might get the sack—but the Head would hardly sack half a dozen of us. It'll only mean a swishing, at the worst, and it's worth it."

"Good man!" said Handforth heartily, clapping Nipper on the back. "By George! That's the style! There's no interest in life unless a chap takes a risk now and again!"

The Capture!

NIGHT had fallen upon the River Stowe, and upon the neighbouring meadows and spinneys.

Low in the sky, just over Bellton Wood, the moon was rising, shedding a soft, silvery light over the landscape. But, as yet, the moonlight was weak and feeble. It only served to

change the darkness into a dim, mysterious radiance.

On the bank of the river stood the ruined old water-mill. Nothing moved near it, and not a light was showing anywhere. Faintly and indistinctly from the distance came the low hum of a motor-car.

"I wonder!" murmured Nipper.

He shifted his position slightly, in order to get some ease. For he and the others had been crouching in the shadow of the hedge for nearly an hour, and they were cramped. Below them they could see the river, with the indistinct outlines of the mill.

"You mean that car?" whispered Willy. "Of course, it may be only a car going along the Bannington road."

"We've heard other cars going along the Bannington road," said Nipper. "And they were more distant, more indistinct. Listen! This one seems to be getting nearer all the time."

And it certainly was. Somewhere down there in the Stowe valley a motor-car was travelling. It was approaching.

"Can't see any lights, though," came a whisper from Handforth. "By George! There's just a chance—"

"Not so loud, you ass!" warned Church.

They all remained still, intently listening. The sounds of the motor-car grew

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more and more pronounced, until at length there could be no further doubt. The car was just crossing the bridge near the mill and was slowing down—was in second gear.

"It may be only the police," murmured Church.

"The police wouldn't come up openly like that," argued Nipper. "No, it seems too good to be true, but I believe those rotten bandits have come. They haven't the faintest idea that their secret is known, and that—"

"Look!" gasped Handforth suddenly.

A blazing searchlight had suddenly snapped out into the darkness. It was immediately followed by two others. They were apparently headlamps from motor-cars, and they were suddenly focused upon an angle of the old mill, just where a big saloon motor-car had suddenly come to a stop. The very fact that the car was now in full view proved that it had come up without showing any lights.

"There they go!" said Willy eagerly. "My hat! What a scrap!"

Policemen could be seen running up into the focused light, and figures were pouring out of the motor-car, attempting to escape. But before they could run out of the light they were seized.

Men were struggling, and shouts were filling the air.

"Come on!" yelled Handforth. "We're in this!"

He was on his feet in a flash, tearing towards the mill.

"That's done it!" said Nipper. "It's no good hanging back now. We've got to support Handy all along the line, so we might as well all go!"

"Hurrah!"

They went rushing down, and any chance of being severely punished for the disregard of orders was obviated by an incident which almost immediately took place. For as the juniors were nearing their objective Nipper caught sight of a fleeing figure over towards his left. One of the bandits had escaped from the cordon and was getting away.

"Here, you fellows!" yelled Nipper.

With one accord the juniors tore into the fray. A few seconds later the juniors had piled on the fugitive, and were holding him down. He was helpless in so many hands.

The man was hauled to his feet, and triumphantly the juniors frog-marched him up to the mill. And there they found three well-dressed men, handcuffed, dishevelled, and savage-looking. The fourth prisoner was added to the bag.

"We thought we'd come along to give a hand, sir," said Nipper, as Nelson Lee came striding up. "And you can't say anything to us, either, because we captured this man as he was getting away."

Nelson Lee smiled slightly.

"You young rascals!" he said. "I'm not sure that you will escape punishment. We shall have to see what the headmaster has to say about this. Jameson, here's your other prisoner. Rather a lucky thing that these boys were near by."

"Yes," admitted the inspector grudgingly. "How on earth the fellow managed to slip away I can't understand. But I'm glad that he's been roped in."

Of course, the juniors received no punishment. The Head was inclined to be very severe about it all, but in the circumstances he pardoned the juniors. And there was a good deal of general satisfaction when it was learned that the bandits had been captured with every penny of the money that had been stolen from the bank in the morning.

As for the mill, a thorough examination revealed a hidden cellar. It was proved that this place had been used for the manufacture of a special poison-gas—harmless in its ultimate effects, but drastic in its immediate effects.

The man who had first been captured proved to be a clever chemist, one who had for years been associated with criminals, and that gas was his own invention. But never had he guessed that the waste matter from his chemical processes, flowing into the River Stowe, would lead to the capture of himself and his associates. The river had only been poisoned in a very confined area, and even in this section the pollution had only affected the main current along one bank. But it had been sufficient to cause the temporary illness of Juicy Lemon, and the apprehension of the crooks.

They had come to this old mill because they had felt that it was safe, but it had proved their undoing.

THE END.

(Next week: "THE BLACK HAND AT ST. FRANK'S!" Don't miss the first powerful instalment of this wonderful new yarn, chums. You'll revel in the thrills, mystery, and adventure it contains.)

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PEN PALS

(Continued from page 17.)

John Goldfinch, 3, Cambridge Street, East London, Cape Province, South Africa, has started a South African chapter of the British & Dominion Film Club. Write to him or to F. S. Burton, 8, Cordelia Street, South Grove, Mile End, London, E.3, for particulars.

Miss Violet Payne, 215, Commercial Road, Peckham, London, S.E.15; girl correspondents in America; age 18-24.

Peter Harvey, Redbourn, Maidstone Road, Chatham, Kent; Great Britain; hobby, chess; is willing to play games by communication; age 13-14.

Cyril M. Wood, 6, Rude Road, Dewsbury Park, Leeds, 11, Yorks; age 11-16; aeroplanes, books.

Jack Powell, 50, Lalecomb Road, Whiteley, Reading; Canada or Australia; boxing, football.

Miss Edna Wood, 15, Mere Road, Blackpool, Lancs, wants girl correspondents; age 16-19; overseas preferred; sports, travel, photography, postcard views.

Miss Cynthia Alexander, 7, Lower Elietson Road, Kingston, Jamaica; girl correspondents in the British Empire.

Miss Hilda Carter, Bagmore Lane, Herriard, near Basingstoke, Hants; girl correspondents; age 13-14; reading, painting.

Eric C. Moore, 72, Bedford Street, Moss Side, Manchester; age 13-14; stamps, photographs, cycling, cricket, football.

Victor Haynes, 270, Holloway Road, London, N.7; age 17-18.

Miss Agnes Bannister, 22, Wyndham Street, Casterton, Wairarapa, New Zealand; girl correspondents in Canada, Mexico, and Japan; outdoor sports.

Colin J. Taylor, 83, Herbert Gardens, Harlesden, London, N.W.17; overseas; stamps, coins.

Jim Lavin, 18, Yaarama Crescent, Wellington, C.2, New Zealand; stamps; Jamaica; age 12-13.

Harold Davies, 68, Downhills Park Road, Tottenham, London, N.17; America, Wales, Palestine, Canada and Egypt; age 9-18.

Fred Bishop, 192, Chillingham Road, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne 6; U.S.A., Los Angeles especially; aeroplanes, films, books.

Ernest Tyson, 64, Priestfield Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E.23; Australia; age 11-13; old gems, railways.

Charles T. Eades, 193, Anderton Road, Birmingham 11; age 12-14; England, U.S.A.; films, sports, pets.

Lionel G. Baylis, Whitehall, Alcester, Warwickshire; stamps; overseas; exchange of Jubilee stamps.

Ronald Maree, 13, Verwey Street, Troyeville, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa; England, Australia; athletics, coin collecting.

Miss Daphne Halsall, 9, Pontoon Road, East London, Cape Province, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 17-20; physics, short story writing, snapshots, films, etc.

Kenneth A. Ward, 557, Bromford Lane, Ward End, Birmingham 8; philatelic club.

Miss Isabel Knox, 665, Old Shettleston Road, Glasgow, E.2; girl correspondents outside Scotland; age 15-19; reading, dancing, sports, films.

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P. S. Mewes, 144, Malpas Road, Brockley, London, S.E.4; stamps; exchange club.

Miss Edna M. Lister, c/o the Ixopo Girls' Hostel, Ixopo, Natal, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 16-17; fishing, swimming, tennis, shooting.

Miss Joyce D. Lister, c/o the Ixopo Girls' Hostel, Natal, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 13-15; tennis, country life.

Cedric Humphreys, 6, Lampeter Road, Anfield, Liverpool, 6; age 18 up.

Colin Reid, 11a, Robertson Road, Centennial Park, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia; age 10-12; Gibraltar, British Isles, Africa; stamps.

Bill Taylor, 44, Birkinville Avenue, Stonebroom, near Alfreton, Derbyshire; stamps.

Harry Rogers, 136, Hensman Road, Subiaco, Western Australia; age 14-17; stamps, magazines, papers; Northern Africa, Pacific Isles, India.

Mervyn Cecil, 151, Hensman Road, Subiaco, Western Australia; age 14-16; stamps, sports; Canada, Africa, Malacca, New Guinea, Europe.

Alex S. Green, 31, Collins Street, Hamilton, Victoria, Australia; stamps; also members for the Universal Stamp & Exchange Club.

John Watson, 11, Bolton Avenue, Hampton, S.7, Victoria, Australia; outside Australia; age 15-16; stamps, sports.

Miss May Allen, 132, Franklin Road, Gillingham, Kent; girl correspondents; age 15-16.

Reginald Armsworth, 40, Earl's Court Square, London, S.W.5, wants members for the Union of British Youth.

Joshua Shenger, Jaffa Road, near Zion Hall, Jerusalem, Palestine.

Miss Dorothy McCrum, 18, Main Street, Greenacres, Belfast; Girl Guides in U.S.A.; age 14-16; films, books.

Miss Iris Haigh, 22, Heslington Street, Moss Side, Manchester 14; girl correspondents; age 14-16; films, picture postcards; Hong Kong, India, West Indies.

Miss Edna Wood, 15, Mere Road, Blackpool, Lancs; girl correspondents; China, Japan, U.S.A., Straits Settlements.

Jack Mole, 23, King Street, Oxford; age 18-21; India, Arizona, Australia, Gibraltar.

Lawrence Sutton, 45, Hill Street, Peckham, London, S.E.15; football, Lumley stories in the Gem.

Charles Weissenbach, Jun., 33, Herrlig Street, Zurich, 9, Switzerland; stamps, sports, etc.

Miss Rena Cheater, 309, Albert Bridge Road, Belfast; girl correspondents; age 12-15; overseas; books, sports, animals, films.

Eric G. Moore, 72, Bedford Street, Moss Side, Manchester; overseas; age 13-14; stamps, cycling, football, cricket.

David Stocks, Abu Klea Street, Wilston, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia; age 14-17; sports, stamps, etc.

Arthur Friedman, 865, Stuart Avenue, Montreal, Canada; stamps, postcards.

Miss Betty McCormick, 71, Seventh Avenue, Ville St. Pierre, Montreal, Province Quebec, Canada; girl correspondents; age 18-20.

William Smith, 145b, Kelawei Road, Penang, Straits Settlements; age 13-16; stamps, gardening, photography.

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