

TOM MERRY & CO. ARE ON THE WARPATH!

The **GEM** **2^D**





Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him c/o The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Blunt himself! But keep your letter **SHORT**, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No photos can be returned.

C. K., of Loughborough, Leicestershire, writes:

I enclose a list of tunes I think apply to some well-known St. Jim's characters. What do you think of them? Be frank! Cutts—"The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo." Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—"On the Sentimental Side." Knox—"In the Still of the Night." Grundy—"Did You Ever See a Dream Walking?" Buck Finn—"Cowboy." Taggles—"He's Dead, but He Won't Lie Down!" Trimble—"It's a Sin to Tell a Lie." Lowther—"Look Up and Laugh." Herries—"Me and My Dog." Mr. Ratcliff—"He Never Smiled Again." All the best!

ANSWER: *Jeepers creepers, but you've cleaned some windows! I suggest you serenade each of your victims in turn, and see how they like their signature tune. Some of them may not consider your choice "the sweetest song in the world," of course; so, if I were you, when you do your serenading I'd become an "umbrella man"—nothing like a gamp to keep off the "showers" that may descend on your innocent head! Tell you one you missed out—Kildare calling "Lights Out!" What about "Our Sergeant-Major"?*

"A Canadian Inquirer," of St. Catharines, Ontario, writes:

As you're so bright, tell me the number of players in a lacrosse team, and name the different positions.

ANSWER: *Thanks for your "bright" note on pink notepaper. Hope you're "in the pink." Lacrosse, you said? Twelve a side, and the positions are: No. 1, goal; No. 2, point; No. 3, cover-point; No. 4, third man; Nos. 5 and 6, defence fields; No. 7, centre; Nos. 8 and 9, attack fields; No. 10, third home; No. 11, around home; No. 12, first home. Mean to say you live in Canada, where they play lacrosse a lot more than we do, and you have to ask me?*

"Chikko," of Peabody Estate, Clapham Junction, S.W.11, writes:

Names of the Fifth and Sixth, both School House and New House, please. Also, please ask Martin Clifford to put in photos, because I cut out the boys and stick them in a book; then I know who's who. Can we have a story about Durrance? P.S.—I like Crooke!

ANSWER: *Lists of Kildare's and Lejeune's men may appear when space permits. I can just "picture" you engaged in your pastime, with all*
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our bright young faces "stuck" in an album? I'll see; but I doubt if enough photos are available. Story request passed to proper quarter. P.S.—No accounting for tastes, is there?

Jack Henderson, of South Shields, writes:

The GEM has been my favourite periodical for more than three years now, and I play twenty-four cricket matches between St. Jim's and Greyfriars each season. Can you tell me:

1. Is George Herries the St. Jim's wicket-keeper?
2. Who is the captain of Claremont?
3. Names of any Redclyffe or St. Jude's boys?
4. Name of the Greyfriars wicket-keeper?
5. Rugger XV for Lower School at St. Jim's?

Best of luck with your cricket this season!

ANSWER:

1. Herries "keeps"; but Kerr often "keeps," too.
2. Teddy Baxter.
3. Fane skippers Redclyffe; Lunn, St. Jude's.
4. Bulstrode.
5. We don't play Rugger.

You didn't say who usually wins the 24-match tournament. I'm dying to know.

"A Girl Reader," of Winnersh, Berks, writes:

Please let me know if Kerr is in the St. Jim's footer eleven? Also, what day in the year do the Third Form take their annual bath? Tell Gussy I wish I could borrow him to sing my schoolmistress one of his tenor solos.

ANSWER: *Kerr plays at left-back. Your second question has already made me the most unpopular figure among the Third. The merest hint that I wanted to know how often they washed brought such a storm of books, papers, pens, paper darts, old caps, satchels, files, and various articles that I retreated from the vicinity of the Third Form Room with more haste than decorum. I'd do anything for a lady, but don't ask me to put such a searching question to the Third at St. Jim's again. It simply won't "wash"! I see you have a grudge against your schoolmistress. I take it that is your only reason for wanting to inflict one of Gussy's solos on her? Or maybe she's deaf? Gussy looks quite benign while he's singing. It's only the sound that hurts!*

HE WHO LAUGHS LAST LAUGHS LOUDEST! THAT'S WHAT TOM MERRY & CO.
OF ST. JIM'S SAY AFTER—



ON THE CARPET!

RATTY IS RATTY!

"RATTY, the old ass!" said Monty Lowther. Mr. Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's, gave quite a jump.

It was morning break at St. Jim's, and Mr. Ratcliff was coming away from the Fifth Form Room. The Form-room being in the School House, Ratcliff naturally passed plenty of School House fellows on his way to his own House. Among others, he passed Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell.

And as he passed, Monty Lowther made that remark.

It was enough to make him jump.

Mr. Ratcliff knew that he was not popular in the School House. He was not, in fact, popular in his own House. He was not popular at all. And he knew that—among themselves—juniors referred to him as "Ratty." It was a name that, in the opinion of the Lower School, seemed to suit him. No nickname could have been more accurately descriptive of his temper.

But, suitable as that nickname was, Mr. Rat-

cliff did not like it. Probably he did not himself discern its suitability. And even if he had liked Ratty as a nickname, he could hardly have liked "old ass." The sweetest-tempered schoolmaster that ever was could not have liked that.

Mr. Ratcliff came to a halt, and fixed a deadly eye on the Terrible Three of the Shell.

He was deeply incensed, but he was as much surprised as angry. Really, it required an uncommon nerve for any fellow to say "Ratty, the old ass!" for him to hear as he passed. A Housemaster's caning, if not a Head's flogging, was the only possible sequel.

The three Shell fellows were not looking towards Mr. Ratcliff. They did not seem to see him. They were looking towards the gates, where old

Taggles, the porter, could be seen outside the lodge. Old Taggles had a deep frown on his face as if something had annoyed him. Often something did. Playful little attentions from light-hearted juniors did not amuse Taggles; they exasperated him.

But Mr. Ratcliff did not glance towards Taggles in the distance. He was not thinking of Taggles. He was thinking of those three young rascals, and

Spanking New St. Jim's School Yarn

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

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the amazing impudence of one of them in saying, "Ratty, the old ass!" out quite loud as he passed. "The silly old ass—" went on Lowther.

He got no further, Ratcliff swooped.

Monty Lowther, in his turn, jumped as a rather bony hand gripped the back of his collar. He spun round, staring.

"What the thump—" he ejaculated.

"What the dickens—" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"What—" exclaimed Manners.

"Impudent young rascal!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Come with me! Come with me at once! I shall take you to your Housemaster! Come!"

"Leggo my collar!" howled Monty Lowther. "What do you mean?"

"Come!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" asked Tom Merry blankly.

"Come, also, Merry, and you, Manners! You are all involved in this unexampled impudence!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall take all three of you to Mr. Railton, and demand the most exemplary punishment. Come!"

Mr. Ratcliff started back to the School House, jerking Monty Lowther along by his collar.

Monty went—he had to go! Ratty's grip was like a vice. And Monty could hardly punch a Housemaster, or hack his shins. And there was no other way to make Ratty let go.

Tom Merry and Manners followed.

The sight of a School House junior being marched along by the collar by the New House master drew quite a lot of attention. Dozens of fellows crowded up.

"What's the wow, deah boys?" inquired Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form.

"Goodness knows!" answered Tom Merry.

"What's Lowther done?" asked Jack Blake.

"Nothing that I know of."

Mr. Ratcliff glared round.

"Merry, how dare you! I heard what Lowther said! It was said intentionally for me to hear! How dare you say you do not know what he has done! I have never heard of such insolence! Come, Lowther! If you lag behind me, I will box your ears!"

"What the dickens have I done?" howled Lowther.

"Silence! Come!"

Mr. Ratcliff marched Lowther into the House. Tom Merry and Manners followed at his heels, and a whole army of School House fellows followed behind them. It was quite a spot of excitement in morning break.

"Ratty's ratty about something," murmured Herries, not for Mr. Ratcliff to hear.

"That ass, Lowther—" remarked Digby.

"But what has he done?" asked Talbot of the Shell.

"Nobody seems to know."

Mr. Ratcliff arrived at the study of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House. With his disengaged hand he banged on that door, and opened it.

He marched Monty Lowther in by the collar.

Mr. Railton stared and jumped to his feet.

"Mr. Ratcliff, what does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Kindly release that boy's collar at once!"

"I have brought this boy to you!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff.

"I will not have a boy of my House taken by the collar, sir!" exclaimed the School House master. "The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,640."

master. "Before you say a word more, release that junior!"

The bony hand relaxed its grip on Monty Lowther's collar. Lowther, with a crimson face, proceeded to set his collar and tie straight.

"Now, sir, what has this junior done?" asked Mr. Railton.

"I will tell you what he has done, sir!" answered Mr. Ratcliff, in a voice that could be heard by two or three dozen fellows outside the study. "I will tell you, sir, the unexampled insolence of which this boy has been guilty! If he belonged to my House, sir, I should take him to Dr. Holmes, and request that he should be expelled from the school!"

"Bai Jove! What on earth has that duffah Lowthah done?" floated in at the open door.

"Silence there, please!" rapped Mr. Railton. "I am waiting, Mr. Ratcliff, to hear what Lowther has done."

"I desire to know, sir, whether a School House boy is allowed to insult a member of Dr. Holmes' staff?" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "I desire to know, sir, whether a School House boy is allowed to allude to your colleague, sir, by an insulting and opprobrious nickname?"

"Certainly not!"

"And whether, sir, he is allowed to describe a master in this school by an insulting epithet?"

"Most assuredly not! Lowther, if you have insulted Mr. Ratcliff—"

"I haven't, sir!" gasped Monty.

"Do you dare to deny your own words, spoken to these two boys in my hearing?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Lowther, tell me at once what you said of Mr. Ratcliff!" exclaimed the School House master.

"Nothing, sir!"

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Such untruthfulness, such barefaced effrontery! He uttered the words to these two boys. I heard every word!"

"Merry, what did Lowther say concerning Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Nothing, sir!" answered Tom. "He never spoke to him at all."

"We never knew Mr. Ratcliff was there till he suddenly grabbed Lowther by the collar, sir!" said Manners. "Nobody said a single word about him that I know of."

Mr. Ratcliff's face grew purple. Mr. Railton's was quite perplexed.

"Such barefaced falsehoods—" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"I hope you will take our word, sir, if Mr. Ratcliff does not!" said Tom Merry. "None of us said a word about him. We never knew he was there. I can't understand how he's making such a mistake!"

Mr. Ratcliff gurgled with wrath.

"This is extraordinary!" said Mr. Railton. "Mr. Ratcliff, will you kindly tell me what you heard this boy Lowther say?"

"I do not care, sir, to repeat his disrespectful insolence—"

"Unless I know what the boy has done, sir, I can hardly judge the matter," said the School House master. "It appears to me that there must be some mistake—"

"Mistake, sir?" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "There is no mistake, sir! I will tell you, sir, if you insist, what this disrespectful young rascal said as I was passing him, sir! He alluded to me, sir, by a disrespectful nickname—a foolish and

impudent corruption of my surname—the word 'Ratty,' sir!"

"Oh!" gasped Lowther.

"He further described me, sir, as an old ass!" bawled Mr. Ratcliff. "Those were his words, sir! You have forced me to repeat his insolence! I hope now, sir, that you are satisfied!"

"Oh crikey!" stuttered Lowther.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Tom Merry.

Manners grinned.

"Lowther!" Mr. Railton picked up his cane. "I can hardly credit that you were guilty of such disrespect—such insolence—but Mr. Ratcliff's statement leaves no doubt on the subject. I shall—"

"Oh gum!" gasped Monty Lowther. "It's a mistake, sir—Ha, ha—"

"Are you laughing, Lowther?" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Oh! No, sir! I—I mean, I—I never said—I mean, I didn't know Mr. Ratcliff was there! I wasn't speaking of Mr. Ratcliff!" gasped Monty Lowther. "I said, 'Ratty, the old ass'—I know that; but—"

"He admits it!" barked Mr. Ratcliff.

"But I wasn't speaking of Mr. Ratcliff, sir!" gasped Lowther. "I was speaking of old Taggles!"

"Taggles?" repeated Mr. Railton. "The school porter?"

"Yes, sir! Taggles is shirty—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, waxy—"

"You mean what?"

"I mean ratty, sir—I mean, in a bad temper!" gasped Monty. "Somebody asked him whether he was ninety, or only eighty-nine, and he got cross. He yapped at me—I mean, he yapped at the fellow who asked him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" floated in from the passage.

"And Tom asked me what was up with Taggles, and I said, 'Ratty, the old ass!' That was all, sir. I wasn't speaking of Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from outside.

"Bai Jove, you fellows, that's feahfully funnay, isn't it? Fancy Mr. Watchliff thinkin'—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you be silent?" called out Mr. Railton.

"Go away—leave the passage at once! Upon my word!" Mr. Railton's face was twitching.

The crowd outside moved off, howling with laughter. It was not easy for Mr. Railton to avoid joining in the laugh. Ratty's mistake was so utterly ludicrous.

Mr. Ratcliff's face was a study!

It was true that "Ratty" was his nickname. Nevertheless, it was an adjective in quite common use. Monty Lowther had not been saying "Ratty, the old ass!" because he was passing. He had been saying "Ratty, the old ass!" because Taggles was wrathful about that little joke on his venerable age! Mr. Ratcliff's face had been red with wrath. Now it was positively scarlet.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Railton. "I—I thought that there must be some mistake in this matter. Evidently there has been a mistake!" He suppressed a laugh which he found as difficult to suppress as a sneeze. "Lowther was not alluding to a—a—a nickname—Dear me! He was making quite an ordinary remark, Mr. Ratcliff. A misapprehension on your part—"

Mr. Ratcliff looked at him. He looked at the Terrible Three—all three grinning. He looked at Mr. Railton again. Then, without a word,

Ratty revolved on his axis and swept out of the study!

He had nothing more to say. Really, there was nothing to be said. He had, with his usual readiness to take offence, made a ridiculous mistake, and he was only anxious to get off the scene and hide his blushes.

He departed for his House at an unusual speed, followed by howls of laughter from crowds of School House fellows.

In Mr. Railton's study, the Terrible Three waited for dismissal.

Mr. Railton opened his lips twice—but shut them again without speaking. He knew that he would laugh if he spoke. Finally, he made a gesture of dismissal, and the three Shell fellows, grinning, left the study. The door had hardly closed on them when Railton could hold it no longer.

"Ha, ha, ha!" they heard from the study as they went down the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Tom Merry & Co. as they went.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" yelled Arthur Augustus, as they came out of the House. "Fancy old Watty—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was quite a merry break that morning at St. Jim's. The School House fellows were still chuckling and chortling when the bell rang for third school.

BAGGY WANTS TO KNOW!

"A FTAH tea!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"We shall have to be jolly careful!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "The old towah is out of bounds, and it won't do to be spotted goin' there."

"Better go one at a time," said Herries.

"That's the idea!" agreed Digby.

"Yaas, we can twiddle in one at a time and gathah in the cwypt, and then—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" said Jack Blake hastily.

"Weally, Blake—"

"There's Trimble listening, with his ears a yard long, fathead!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth gave Jack Blake a glare. At the warning that the long-eared Baggy was in the offing the four chums of Study No. 6 shut up immediately, like oysters.

It was fearfully exasperating to Baggy.

There was some secret on!

Baggy knew that.

What the secret was, Baggy Trimble did not know. As it was no business of his, he wanted to know. He was, in fact, burning with curiosity. Seven fellows were in the secret. Baggy knew that much. Three Shell fellows and four of the Fourth.

There was some topic among Tom Merry & Co. which they discussed among themselves, and which they ceased to discuss if any other fellows drew near.

Baggy had caught a word here and there which whetted his curiosity. He had heard Tom Merry say to Manners and Lowther, in break, "Not a word about it to a soul!"

Baggy wondered what there was not to be a word about.

When the juniors went in to third school he

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had heard Blake say to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy: "Mind you don't let it out before those New House rotters!"

After third school the seven had gathered in a group in the quad, and Baggy, lingering in the offing, had heard Arthur Augustus remark: "I trust you Shell chaps have not let it out!"

Now, after dinner, Study No. 6 were talking again in a group, and Baggy Trimble drifted near, with his large ears pricked up to hear; and this time he caught several sentences before Blake spotted him, and there was silence.

The four Fourth Formers shut up on the spot, much to Baggy's wrath and disappointment, and walked away.

It was quite puzzling, and fearfully interesting, to Baggy Trimble. The Paul Pry of the School House always wanted to know; and now he wanted to know more than ever.

What that secret might be, he could not guess; but evidently, from what Study No. 6 had been saying, it had something to do with the old tower and the crypt under it—a spot which was strictly out of bounds for all St. Jim's fellows, being in a ruinous and more or less dangerous state.

Baggy, when he wanted to know, was not easily beaten. Study No. 6 having walked out of range of his long ears, he looked for the Terrible Three. He spotted those three cheery youths sitting in a row on one of the old benches under the ancient elms.

From a distance, Baggy could see that they were deep in talk. He had no doubt that they were discussing this mysterious secret, whatever it was.

Evidently, to Baggy, these fellows were up to something. It must be, Baggy thought, something pretty bad, as they were so fearfully secret about it.

The crypt under the old ruined tower was a remote and secluded spot. Besides being out of bounds, it was dark, damp, dismal, and rather dangerous; not the sort of place to attract any fellow. There had been a row once, Baggy remembered, concerned with that very spot, some black sheep having gathered there to play cards and smoke cigarettes, far from the ken of masters and prefects. Baggy wondered if it was something of this kind that was on.

Certainly, Tom Merry & Co. were hardly to be suspected of following in the footsteps of Racke and Crooke and Mellish and the other black sheep of the House. But if it wasn't that, what was it? Besides, Baggy thought it probable that those fellows weren't so jolly "pi" as they made out. Baggy had a way of judging others by himself, and so he naturally hadn't a very high opinion of anybody.

Anyhow, Baggy was going to know!

He did not approach the Terrible Three as they sat in talk. He circled round and got behind the big old elm against which the bench backed.

A fellow could stop and lean on a tree-trunk if he liked, and if fellows were talking on the other side of that tree it was their own look-out!

Leaning his podgy back on that elm, which he reached without a sound, Baggy heard a voice round the massive trunk—that of Tom Merry:

"Mustn't forget to take a torch."

"No; it will be black as a hat in the crypt," said Manners.

Baggy's little fishy eyes gleamed.

It was the crypt again. Evidently the Terrible Three were discussing that mysterious secret.

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"And we'd better not be spotted going there," said Monty Lowther. "It would mean a row. We could hardly tell Railton what we are going for!"

"Ha, ha! No! Hardly!"

If that did not refer to smokes and cards, Baggy Trimble did not know what it could refer to. Obviously—to Baggy—fellows could not be going secretly to that dim old crypt for law-abiding purposes.

"It was a spot of real luck that we got on to this," Tom Merry was going on. "Last night we—"

"Shush—here come those New House rotters!" said Manners.

And Tom Merry "shushed" promptly as Figgins & Co. of the New House strolled up.

Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn were grinning.

"You fellows talking about anything private?" inquired Figgins affably. "If you are, you might like to know that there's a fat slug sticking on the other side of that tree!"

"What!" ejaculated all three Shell fellows together.

"Oh jiminy!" came a startled exclamation from the other side of the elm, and a podgy figure shot into sudden flight.

"Trimble!" ejaculated the Terrible Three together.

"That fat swab—listening as usual!" exclaimed Manners. "Boot him!"

Three Shell fellows rushed after Trimble.

Figgins & Co. were left grinning. They were rivals and deadly foes of the School House, but, having spotted Baggy at his eavesdropping game, they had given that friendly warning.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were glad of it—Baggy Trimble was not. Baggy shot across the quad at breathless speed.

But three pursuers were close behind.

Thud, thud, thud!

Three boots landed, one after another. Three successive fearful yells pealed from Baggy Trimble.

"Give him some more!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Boot him right round the quad!" panted Lowther.

"Yaroooh!" roared Baggy. He put on a desperate spurt, and careered wildly round the corner of the gym.

Baggy, of course, could not see round corners, and he had no idea that Cutts and St. Leger of the Fifth were lounging there till he got round the corner. Then it was too late.

Baggy crashed into Gerald Cutts' waistcoat. Cutts of the Fifth went over backwards as if a ten-ton lorry had hit him. He landed on his back—and Baggy Trimble sprawled over his legs, roaring.

"Good gad!" ejaculated St. Leger, staring down at them.

"What—who—" spluttered Cutts.

He struggled up, grabbing Trimble.

The next second, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came whooping round the corner. They were going too fast to stop. There was another crash, and Cutts, Trimble, and St. Leger went down together.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom.

"Cut!" gurgled Lowther.

They cut—promptly.

Cutts scrambled up again, frantic with rage. The Terrible Three had vanished like ghosts at cockcrow. Fortunately—for Cutts, not for Trimble—Baggy was still in his grasp. Cutts

proceeded to deal with Baggy—promptly, and efficiently, and drastically.

By the time Baggy escaped, he had forgotten even the secret that had interested him so deeply.

TROUBLE FOR TWO!

MR. RATCLIFF frowned. Frowns always came more easily than smiles to Ratty. And this afternoon Ratty was in a particularly bitter and acid mood.

The Fifth Form had not enjoyed that afternoon, Mr. Ratcliff being their Form-master.

Ratty had not yet recovered from the episode of the morning. He had made a ludicrous mistake—he had made himself look a prize ass—he had caused a perfect hurricane of laughter—he strongly suspected that even the School House master had laughed after he was gone. He had seen fellows in his own House laughing—and had no doubt that they had heard the story, and were amused thereby.

He had been very unpleasant in Form. The Fifth, who were always more or less fed up with Ratty, had been more fed than ever.

He had given St. Leger a hundred lines for yawning. He had given Cutts a detention for not keeping still—which was rather hard on Cutts, who had collected a variety of aches and pains in his collision with Baggy Trimble. He had given Gilmore lines for talking to Prye, and Prye lines for being talked to by Gilmore. He had even jawed Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth.

Altogether, the St. Jim's Fifth had been glad that afternoon when they were done with Ratty.

Now Mr. Ratcliff was jerking along to the gate of the Head's garden, in which he intended to take a walk after class—which was very agreeable on a hot July afternoon. That was how he came in sight of Trimble and Mellish of the Fourth, at the sight of whom he frowned.

The gate of the Head's garden was at no great distance from a little gate in the corner of the quad that gave access to the courtyard surrounding the old ruined tower.

That old gate was always kept locked, beyond it being "out of bounds."

So Mr. Ratcliff naturally took notice at the sight of two School House juniors at that gate—one of them bunking the other over it.

Mr. Ratcliff, as New House master, was not concerned with the doings, or misdoings, of School House boys. As Fifth Form master, he was not concerned with Lathom's Form, the Fourth. But he was an interfering gentleman, and in a bad temper.

Railton had laughed—he was sure that Railton had laughed—over that absurd affair of Lowther of the Shell that morning. It would annoy Railton to catch a couple of his House in a delinquency.

So Ratcliff did not enter the gate of the Head's garden. He transferred his attention to the other gate, at the same time moving a little, so that a tree would screen him, if those two young rascals looked round. Ratty was a little stealthy in his ways.

A call would have stopped them on the safe side of the gate. Ratty uttered no call. He was not going to interfere till they were out of bounds—as they would be the moment they dropped over that gate. It was manners and

customs of this kind that made Ratcliff unpopular.

Baggy Trimble gasped for breath as Percy Mellish bunked him up. Baggy was no climber, and he was some weight.

But he clambered over at last, and dropped, gasping, on the inner side.

Mellish followed him over much more quickly.

Then, and not till then, did Mr. Ratcliff whisk across to the gate of the old courtyard. They were out of bounds now—and fair game!

"Oooooogh!" He heard Baggy Trimble gasp. "Oogh! I'm out of breath! Oooh!"

"Well, come on!" said Mellish.

"Wait a bit till I get my breath! Lots of time—they won't be here yet!"

Mr. Ratcliff had almost reached the gate when he heard that. He stopped. The two parties were invisible to one another. Obviously, the two young rascals did not know that there was a beak at hand.

Ratty was the only master at St. Jim's who would have listened to words not intended for his ears.

"Tons of time!" went on Baggy. "I heard D'Arcy say after tea!"

"Oh, all right!" Mellish leaned on the inner side of the gate, while Baggy got his breath—of which he was always short.

"We'll catch them at it all right!" said Baggy, with a fat chuckle. "The whole lot of them! And jolly well show them up, too!"

"You think they're all coming?" asked Mellish.

"Yes, the whole crowd, from what I heard—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, and those four in Study No. 6."

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glinted.

The name of Monty Lowther just then had on Ratty rather the effect of a red rag on a bull.

So Lowther was going out of bounds, was he? Mr. Ratcliff was very glad that he had got on to this. If he caught Monty Lowther out of bounds, the impudent young rascal would not be able to explain to Railton that it was a mistake.

Baggy chuckled again. Baggy was on the track of that secret. He had let Mellish into it, and Mellish was equally keen.

Baggy had not prospered in his eavesdropping. He was still feeling the effects of lunging boots, and of Cutts' angry smites. But Baggy had thought of a safer and surer way of discovering what he wanted to know.

They were coming to the crypt under the old tower after tea. So Baggy was going down into the crypt before tea. Baggy and his pal were going to be on the spot—out of sight, of course—when the party came. Then they would see what they would see.

Baggy had no doubt that it was a smoke-and-card party. What else could it be in that remote and hidden spot? A black-sheep party, like the one there had been a row about last term when Racke had been flogged.

And, having seen the nefarious seven at it, Baggy was going to tell the world, with Mellish as a witness! He was going to show up those humbugs! He was going to reveal them to the whole House in their true colours! He was jolly well going to let everybody know that those swabs were no better than fellows they pretended to turn up their noses at!

Such was Baggy's programme, and he chuckled a fat and unmusical chuckle at the happy prospect.

"I've got a torch," went on Baggy. "I borrowed it from Blake's study. Lots of time before they come. That's all right. I say, it will make the fellows jump when we tell them! Fancy Tom Merry, you know!"

"Sure you've got it right?" Mellish seemed to have a spot of doubt.

"Well, what are they going down into the crypt for—seven of them in a party?" asked Baggy. "I suppose they ain't fond of damp, and they ain't going to study spiders and things!"

"They're up to something, all right," agreed Mellish. "Never heard of a man going down into that crypt except for a smoke."

"They wouldn't take all that trouble just to smoke a fag," said Baggy sagely. "Bet you it's banker! You remember Racke; he was flogged last term for getting a banker party down there. Same game, of course! What on earth else could it be?"

"Nothing else," agreed Mellish. "If they're really going, the thing speaks for itself. But are they?"

"I tell you I heard them."

"Well, we'll jolly well show them up!" said Mellish. "I don't like hypocrites myself."

"Spoofing rotters, you know!" said Baggy. "We'll show them up all right!"

"Come on, then, if you're coming!" said Mellish.

Baggy heaved his weight away from the gate as Mellish moved on. They moved on towards the doorway of the old dismantled tower.

But they did not move very far. That interesting conversation having ceased, Mr. Ratcliff looked over the gate.

"Trimble!" he rapped. "Mellish!"

"Oh jiminy!"

"Oh crumbs!"

The two juniors spun round. They stared at the bony, frowning face looking over the gate. They gazed at it in consternation.

"You are out of bounds!" said Mr. Ratcliff acidly. "Come back at once, and I shall take you to your Housemaster!"

Baggy and his pal exchanged a look. Then, in glum silence, they clambered back over the gate.

There was going to be no detective work for Baggy that afternoon, after all.

"Follow me!" rapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, what rotten luck!" mumbled Baggy, as they followed him.

"You fat idiot!" hissed Mellish. "You've landed me in this!"

"Look here, you know——"

"I'll jolly well punch you if Railton licks me!"

Ten minutes later Mellish was punching Baggy!

BACKING GRUNDY!

"OH!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

Seven juniors had arrived for tea at Study No. 10 in the Shell. They had passed Grundy of the Shell in the passage, and noticed, without much interest, that Grundy was grinning. They came into Study No. 10 in a cheery crowd.

Then they all ejaculated at once.

A sheet of paper had been pinned, by some unknown hand, on the wall, catching their eyes as they entered. On that paper large capital letters were scrawled by a brush dipped in ink.

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Four of the seven chuckled as they saw it. They were the Fourth Form four. The three Shell fellows glared. They were not amused.

"That idiot Grundy!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

The notice pinned on the wall ran:

"RESINE!

WHO LETTS THE NEW HOUSE RADE
THIS HOUSE WHENNEVER THEY JOLLY
WELL LIKE?

TOM MERRY!

TOM MERRY IS A DUDD AND A PHOOL!
RESINE!"

That evidently was the opinion held by George Alfred Grundy of Tom Merry, the junior captain of the House.

George Alfred, as a matter of fact, was not the only fellow in the School House who found fault with Tom Merry these days.

Plenty of fellows asked him every day when he was going to wake up and put paid to Figgins & Co. of the New House.

Figgins & Co. for weeks past had been having matters altogether too much their own way.

Two or three nights every week the New House enemy raided the School House and ragged at their own sweet will.

Everybody agreed that it was getting too thick.

Tom Merry had pointed out that he did not know, any more than any other fellow did, how the New House rotters got into the House after lock-up, when all law-abiding fellows were asleep in bed.

That was a deep secret.

Watch had been kept more than once. Study No. 6, one night, had bagged Cutts of the Fifth getting in after breaking bounds. The Terrible Three, another night, had been squirted by the enemy while keeping watch and ward. On yet another occasion, Grundy had smothered Kildare of the Sixth with paint, in the happy belief that he was Figgins of the New House, in the dark. Exploits like these did not mend matters.

But——

Figgins & Co.'s secret had been discovered at last.

By sheer luck, Tom Merry & Co. had got on to it. They had not let Figgins & Co. know that they were wise to it. They had said no word, even in their own House, about that great discovery. It was going to be a deep, dark secret—until the New House raiders came again, and were caught. That, if Baggy Trimble had only known it, was the deep secret the seven were keeping.

They knew now that there was a secret passage from the crypt, under the old tower, leading into the School House. After tea they were going to visit the old crypt and explore that secret passage.

So far they only knew that it was there, and had not seen it. They were very keen to explore the mysterious way by which Figgins & Co. had come and gone in their many raids on the rival House.

"Cheeky ass!" said Tom Merry, taking down Grundy's notice from the wall. "Lot of luck Grundy had in handling the New House rotters! Anybody could get the wrong man in the dark with a can of paint."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we're jolly well going to put paid to



"I advise you to tell me the truth, Trimble," said Mr. Ratcliff, swishing the cane.

them next time they come!" said Jack Blake. "It was a stroke of luck that tramp skulking in the old crypt and seeing them at it, and a bigger stroke of luck us getting hold of him and getting it out of him. Wait till they come again!"

"From what the man told us, the tunnel leads right into this House, and one of the oak panels in the Fourth Form passage opens like a door," said Digby. "Can't find it from this end. I've looked."

"We'll find it all right from the other end, and know exactly where to wait for Figgins & Co.," said Tom.

"Bai Jove! It will be wathah a surpwise for those boundahs when they come again!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

The seven sat down to tea. Grundy's notice, torn in four, lay on the study carpet, disregarded. Grundy and other critics and carpers would be silenced when Figgins & Co. came on their next raid. But it was necessary to keep the discovery of the secret passage a dead secret. Figgins & Co. certainly would not have raided again had they suspected what awaited them at the School House end of the secret passage.

Bang!

Tea was in cheerful progress when there was a bang at the study door, and it flew open.

Grundy's bulky figure blocked the doorway. "Oh, you've seen it!" he said, as he spotted the four sections of his notice on the carpet.

"Yes, ass! Travel!" said Tom briefly.

"I want to know whether you're going to resign!" jeered Grundy. "You're no good, Tom Merry! You ain't up to the weight of Figgins &

Co.! They walk all over you just as they like! Somebody's needed to keep our end up. My advice to you is to resign and let a man take on the job who can do it! I'd do it fast enough if I had some backing!"

"You want some backing?" asked Monty Lowther.

"That's it!" said Grundy. "I wash my hands of it so long as that dud Tom Merry takes the lead! He's no good, as I've said often—"

"Too often," agreed Tom.

"But if the fellows back me I'd jolly well soon make those New House blighters sing a different tune! Take that from me!" said Grundy.

"Well, that's good enough!" said Monty Lowther, glancing round the tea-party in Study No. 10. "If all Grundy wants is some backing, I don't see why we shouldn't give it to him."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "Gwunday is a sillay ass!"

"You shut up, D'Arcy!" roared Grundy. "Lowther is talking sense, for once! It's not often he does—I'm glad to hear it for once. Don't you butt in!"

"Weally, Gwunday—"

"I said shut up!"

"Bai Jove! You cheekay ass—"

"Catch me backing Grundy!" grunted Herries.

"I'll watch it!" said Dig.

"My dear chaps," said Monty Lowther, "Grundy's asked us to back him! I don't see why he shouldn't have what he asks us! Will you help me back him, Tom?"

Tom Merry chuckled. He caught the japing gleam in Monty's eye.

"Certainly!" he answered.

"You, too, Manners?"

"Like a bird!" said Manners.

"Weally, you fellows, I wegard this as uttably widiculous!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Gwunday is a howlin' ass! What is the good of backin' Gwunday?"

"Well, he's asked us!" said Monty. "I'm jolly well going to back him! Come on, you men—and back Grundy!"

The Terrible Three rose from the table together. Then, like one man, they jumped at George Alfred Grundy and grasped him. Having grasped him, they backed him through the doorway into the passage.

Grundy spluttered in surprise and wrath. He struggled. But it was not much use struggling in three pairs of hands!

"You silly owls!" he roared. "What do you fancy you're up to? Leggo! What's this game, I'd like to know!"

"Didn't you ask us to back you?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Eh? Yes—what—"

"Well, we're backing you, ain't we?"

"You blithering idiot!" shrieked Grundy. "Think I meant you to back me like a horse? I didn't mean anything of the kind—"

"I did," answered Monty cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Terrible Three, gripping George Alfred Grundy in grips of iron, continued to back him! They backed him across the passage till he bumped hard on the opposite wall. Then they whirled him round and backed him down the passage towards his own study.

Grundy struggled! He roared! He bellowed! But he backed and backed, like an unwilling horse, going down the Shell passage backwards.

Study doors opened all along the passage. Fellows stared out, drawn by Grundy's voice on its top note.

"What on earth's that game?" asked Talbot from Study No. 9.

"Backing Grundy!" explained Monty Lowther. "He asked us to back him—and we're doing it!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you leggo?" raved Grundy. "Will you chuck it? I'll spifficate the lot of you! Leave off! Leggo!"

"Blessed if I understand the chap!" said Lowther. "He doesn't seem to know his own mind for two minutes together! First he asks us to back him, and then he wants us to leggo! Anyhow, we're backing him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Grundy was backed, and backed, and backed, till he reached his own study down the passage.

At the doorway of that study stood Wilkins and Gunn, staring and grinning.

"Clear the way, unless you want us to back this donkey into you!" called out Monty Lowther.

Wilkins and Gunn promptly cleared the way. Grundy, vainly resisting, was backed into his study doorway! Struggling and spluttering, he was backed into his study, and backed into his study table, with a bump that sent it spinning.

The table flew over on the floor. Grundy flew over on the table. The roar that came from Grundy woke all the echoes.

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"There!" gasped Monty Lowther. "That's that! If you want any more backing, Grundy, come along to our study! Lots more if you want it! Rely on us to give you all the backing you want!"

And the Terrible Three, rather breathless after their exertions in backing Grundy, returned to Study No. 10 and tea.

Tea in Study No. 10 finished without any more visits from Grundy!

Grundy seemed satisfied with the backing he had received in that study, and did not return for more!

SPOTTED!

"OH!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff. His eyes glinted green.

Tom Merry did not see Ratty! But Ratty saw Tom Merry!

Ratty was on the watch!

It was half an hour since he had walked Trimble and Mellish into Mr. Railton's study in the School House, to take what was due to them for breaking bounds in the precincts of the ruined tower.

What they had received had made Baggy and Mellish feel quite fed-up with their enterprise. They had had two whops each. Percy Mellish was still wriggling from his two whops; Baggy was wriggling from two whops, and three or four punches from Mellish over and above. They had no idea of going anywhere near the old tower again.

But Ratty had!

Ratty had not forgotten a word that he had heard over the gate.

According to what he had heard, seven School House juniors were breaking bounds in that spot after tea, and not merely breaking bounds, but planning to break rules right and left, with smokes and banker in that hidden spot.

Ratty was on this!

Among the seven was that young rascal Lowther, who had made him look such a complete fool in Railton's study that morning. Ratty was fearfully anxious to catch that young rascal Lowther in circumstances that would lead to at least a flogging, if not expulsion.

Ratty was not in sight. Had he been in sight, the seven young rascals would not, of course, made the venture. Ratty was inside the Head's garden, looking over the wall. There was a wooden lattice covered with climbing roses on that wall, through which Ratty was able to watch, unseen.

And his eyes glinted at the sight of the captain of the Shell.

Tom Merry strolled in a casual sort of way to the gate leading to the old tower, glanced round him quickly when he reached it, and then swiftly whipped over the gate and disappeared.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled sourly, and continued to watch.

Five minutes later Jack Blake of the Fourth appeared in sight, strolling in the same casual sort of way. Like Tom Merry, he cast a final glance round to make sure that the coast was clear, and then whipped over the gate and vanished.

Ratty quite understood. They were coming one at a time for that nefarious gathering in the crypt. Seven fellows approaching the spot all at

once could hardly have hoped to escape observation. One at a time, it was easy to do so. It was all clear to Ratty.

A few minutes elapsed, and then Manners of the Shell appeared in his turn, and in his turn vanished over the gate into the courtyard beyond. A few minutes more, and George Herries followed suit.

There were now four of the shady young scoundrels out of bounds. But Mr. Ratcliff still watched patiently. He was not going to make a move till the number was complete; he was going to snaffle a full bag.

Robert Arthur Digby came next, whipping nimbly over the gate. Then there was an interval of a good five minutes, after which an elegant figure strolled on the scene, and an eyeglass surveyed the vicinity before Arthur Augustus D'Arcy clambered over the gate. Gussy did not whip over like the other fellows; he was more careful of his trousers. He negotiated the gate in a much more leisurely manner. But he disappeared over it at last.

There was only one more of the seven to come.

Ratty's eyes gleamed from his cover as Monty Lowther appeared in the offing.

Lowther was last, but not least; he was the man Ratty specially wanted to bag. And here he was, swinging over the gate and disappearing into forbidden precincts.

The bag was full now!

Mr. Ratcliff, with an acid smile, left his cover, and left the Head's garden, and quietly approached the gate over which the seven school-boys had disappeared in turn.

He looked over that gate.

Nothing was to be seen of any of the juniors. They had gone at once into the old tower, and were out of sight. By that time, no doubt, they had descended into the ancient crypt. Soon, if not already, they would be busy with banker and smokes—if Mr. Ratcliff's information was well founded, and he had not the slightest doubt that it was.

On that point Ratty's opinion was the same as Baggy Trimble's. For what imaginable reason could seven fellows collect after tea in that dismal old hidden crypt—unless some shady game was to be carried on, out of sight of the eyes of authority? Ratty had no doubt whatever that cigarettes were already going, and cards being shuffled and dealt. Racke and his friends had been caught at that very game in that very spot last term. Obviously—to Ratty, as to Baggy—history was repeating itself!

Mr. Ratcliff did not often take a happy view of life! He had a morose and pessimistic nature. But, for once, Horace Ratcliff was feeling quite bucked.

Seven young rascals were going to be caught in the very act! Not one of them belonged to his House—all of them belonged to Railton's House. This would be a "facer" for Railton!

Ratty did not like Railton! He did not, in fact, like anybody! And the more healthy, open, frank, and unsuspicious a man was, the less Ratty liked him. It was going to be a sheer pleasure to Ratty to open Railton's unsuspicious eyes to the true character of those seven young iniquitous rascals!

He could imagine the shock that the news would give the younger Housemaster! He could almost hear Railton stating his indignant disbelief in anything of the kind! And he smiled! The more angry and indignant Railton was, the more overwhelming would be his discomfiture.

Railton would have disdained to watch fellows from behind a rose-clustered lattice! He disdained Ratty's methods entirely! But he would have to admit that those methods delivered the goods, as it were—and that his own trusting ways were taken unscrupulous advantage of by a set of disgraceful young blackguards!

Ratty smiled over that gate. Ratty had a sense of duty, and it was his duty to nail those offenders. But never had he set about doing a duty with such zest.

For several minutes, Mr. Ratcliff stood looking over the gate and considering the matter. All the seven were in the trap, and they were going to be caught in it. Railton was going to be brought to the spot to see what was to be seen with his own eyes! There was going to be no lying and shuffling this time—there was not going to be a loophole for the offenders! Railton was going to be driven, whether he liked it or not, into taking those young scoundrels to the headmaster for judgment.

Obviously, they would stay there some time. There was ample time for Ratty to walk over to the School House and fetch Railton before they emerged. On the other hand, he was not going to take the slightest risk of the birds having flown when he returned with the School House master. The place had to be watched while he was gone. He was taking no chances!

Mr. Ratcliff walked a little distance from the gate, looking round him. He wanted a New House prefect. He did not feel that he could trust a School House prefect in such circumstances.

He beckoned to Sefton of the Sixth, a prefect of his House, whom he spotted at a distance.

Sefton hurried up.

Sefton was, if Ratty had only known it, rather a black sheep—a sporting pal of Knox and Cutts in the other House. But he was always very civil and obsequious to his Housemaster, and Ratty had a high opinion of him.

"Pray, come with me, Sefton!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir!" answered Sefton, in wonder.

Ratty walked back to the old courtyard gate, with Sefton at his side. He had a key to that gate and, to Sefton's further wonder, he unlocked the gate and signed to the New House prefect to follow him in.

"Now, Sefton," said Mr. Ratcliff, "a number of School House boys have gone down into the crypt here for the disgraceful purpose of smoking and card-playing. I happened to see them, and they are now in the crypt."

"Oh!" ejaculated Sefton.

"I am going to call Mr. Railton to deal with them, as they belong to his House!" continued Mr. Ratcliff. "While I am gone, I desire you to keep watch here, and to see that they do not leave."

"I understand, sir!" said Sefton.

They looked in at the old doorway of the tower. Within, all was dusky. But they could see the aperture in the old flagged floor, from which steps led down into the crypt.

"They're down there now, sir?" asked Sefton.

"Yes, Sefton—seven School House juniors!" answered Mr. Ratcliff. "Apart from certain information I have received, you can guess for yourself what their object must be in such a remote and hidden spot!"

"Not much doubt about that, sir!" answered Sefton. "Some of them were caught at it last term. The same lot, I suppose."

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"No—quite different boys this time—but the same disgraceful occupation, undoubtedly. Make no sound, Sefton—I do not desire the young rascals to be put on their guard before their Housemaster arrives."

Mr. Ratcliff stepped quietly towards the aperture in the floor, and looked down.

Sefton remained at the door.

There was a momentary gleam of light in the blackness below. Someone was carrying a pocket torch. A voice floated up:

"Bai Jove! It's feahfully dark heah! Have you got that bike lamp, Blake?"

"I'm lighting it, ass!"

"It's wathah a wummy place, deah boys!"

Mr. Ratcliff smiled, and trod softly back to the doorway.

"They are there!" he said. "I have heard them! Remain here, Sefton, until I return, and see that no one leaves!"

"Very well, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff departed for the School House.

Sefton of the Sixth remained in the doorway, leaning on the old stone wall, to await his return. He comforted himself with a cigarette while Ratty was gone!

THROUGH THE SECRET PASSAGE!

"**N**OW for the jolly old secret passage!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Happily unaware of Mr. Ratcliff's activities above, Tom Merry & Co. had gathered in the dark old crypt under the ruined tower.

Three of them had brought electric torches, and Blake had a bike lantern which he had now lighted. Even with that amount of illumination it was still very gloomy and shadowy in the crypt.

They flashed the lights to and fro, and looked about them. They knew that the secret passage was there, though its existence had never hitherto been suspected. Figgins & Co. must have discovered it by accident—and they had little doubt when that had happened, now that they knew of its existence. There had been an occasion, weeks ago, when Fatty Wynn had been chased into that old crypt and had somehow mysteriously dodged his pursuers. They had never quite understood how Fatty had got away on that occasion. But they could guess now.

"Is this the place?" asked Blake. He shone the bike lantern into a deep alcove opening in the stone wall.

"Looks like it, from what that tramp told us!" answered Tom. And the seven gathered at the alcove.

All they knew, so far, was what they had learned from the tramp who had been skulking in the crypt and had seen Figgins & Co. use the secret passage and had followed them into the School House, unknown to them.

He had told them that there was a tilting stone at the end of an alcove in the wall, and this looked like the spot he had described.

There was nothing to indicate the opening of a secret passage when they looked into the alcove. The floor was of solid stone flags that looked as immovable as the rest of the place.

"Come on!" said Tom.

"Pewwaps you had bettah let me go first, Tom Mewwy!" suggested Arthur Augustus. "Accordin' to what that twamp said, the stone tips up suddenly and you might be taken by surprise! Bettah leave it to me!"

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"Fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Go it!" said Tom. "I'll show the light!"

"Wight-ho!"

It was a matter that required care, so Arthur Augustus trod carefully into the deep alcove, stepping along from flag to flag to the end.

On the last flagstone but one he stopped to look back.

"It feels as firm as anythin' undah my feet!" he said dubiously. "Pewwaps this is not the wight spot! Howevah, I will twy it to the vewy end."

Arthur Augustus stepped on the last flagstone.

The next moment there was a wild howl.

"Yawwoh!"

"Oh my hat!" gasped Blake.

That stone flag suddenly tilted.

Arthur Augustus had said that Tom Merry might be taken by surprise. There was no doubt that Arthur Augustus was!

Bump!

"Oh cwikey!"

"Gussy's found it!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The flag had tilted up and shot Arthur Augustus suddenly through into unknown regions below. Now it resumed its level position, closing over his startled head. Once more the floor of the alcove looked as firm as a rock.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"That stone must turn on a pivot!" he said.

"Gussy's found out how it works! Come on!"

Tom Merry trod on, followed by the rest. But he did not step on the tilting stone as Arthur Augustus had done. He placed one foot on it and pushed, and the end of the flag tilted down.

"Wow!" came a howl from below.

"You there, Gussy!"

"Ow! Wow! Yaas! Stop bangin' my head, you sillay ass! Wow!"

"Anything in it to damage?"

"You uttah ass——"

The floor below was only about three feet down. Arthur Augustus had been landed on it, and he was sitting there when the stone, tilting again, tapped him on the summit!

He rubbed his noble head and squirmed out of the way.

"Bai Jove! There's hardly woom for a fellow to move heah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I say, this is feahfully wuff on a fellow's clobber! I have pwactically wuined my twousahs! Oh cwikey!"

"Take the light, fathead, and see if there's anything farther on!" Tom Merry passed down a torch.

"Ow! Wow!"

"What's the trouble now?"

"I have banged my head again!" wailed Arthur Augustus. "There isn't space for a fellow to stand upright! Ow! My head is cwacked! Ow!"

"More than it was before?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass, Lowthah——"

"Get on!" said Blake. "We're waiting, Gussy!"

"I have cwacked my nappah—wow! My twousahs are smothahed with gwime fwom the floor! I——"

"Can you reach him with your boot, Tom?" inquired Manners, from the rear.

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"I'll jump down on him!" said Tom.
"Coming, Gussy!"
"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus moved on hastily, with his noble head ducked under the low roof of the passage.

Tom Merry dropped through and held the tilting stone upright for his comrades to follow.

"It's all wight!" came Arthur Augustus' voice.
"The woot is highah furthah on! This way, deah boys!"

One after another the explorers dropped through. The lights revealed a stone-walled passage leading away into the depths of the earth. Over their heads the tilting stone closed again.

In single file they trod along the underground tunnel. The gleaming lights revealed nothing but damp stone walls and roof.

"This is the way, there's no doubt about that," remarked Tom Merry. "We shall find our House at the other end."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"And those New House rotters have come this way, time and again, and burgled the School House!" said Blake. "No end of a catch for Figgins & Co. when they found this secret passage. I fancy they won't enjoy their next trip, though!"

"Not if we can help it!" agreed Tom.
"Bai Jove!" came from Arthur Augustus, in the lead.

"What—"
"Sign of the enemy, deah boys!" chuckled Gussy. "Pwetty plain that Fatty Wynn has passed this way!"

On the stone floor lay a paper bag that had evidently contained jam tarts.

The School House juniors chuckled as they looked at it.

In other respects, that old stone tunnel looked as if no human foot had trodden it for centuries. But that paper bag told another tale! Evidently, on a recent raid, Fatty Wynn had provided himself with refreshments!

"That settles it," chuckled Blake. "This is the way they came! Fatty's left his trademark!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The seven juniors pushed on.
They reached a stone spiral stair at last; evidently the way up into the School House! Up they went, winding round and round to the top.

It was rather a cram at the top, in the little stone cell in the thickness of the wall.

Tom Merry flashed the light over what looked like an open door. He groped over it, and there was a faint click, and it opened.

He looked out—in the Fourth Form passage of the School House. The other fellows stared.

"Well, my hat!" said Blake.
"Bai Jove! There's Study No. 6!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "It has bwrought us wight home!"

Tom Merry put his head out. The Fourth Form passage was, for the moment, vacant—most of the Fourth had gone out after tea. He stepped through into the passage.

"Buck up, before we get an audience!" he breathed.
"Yaas, wathah!"

Swiftly the seven emerged, one after another. Tom Merry closed the panel; and Manners, always thoughtful, opened his penknife, and cut

a deep scratch in the old oak, so that it could be easily found again. Once it was closed there was nothing to distinguish it from scores of others.

"Here we are again," said Tom Merry, "and nobody the wiser!"

"Quiet, here's somebody!" breathed Blake.
A fat figure rolled out of Study No. 2.

Baggy Trimble stared blankly at the seven juniors in the passage. The panel, fortunately, was closed; and there was no indication how they had arrived.

"Oh jiminy!" ejaculated Trimble. "I say, haven't you been to the old tower, you fellows?"

"The old tower!" repeated Monty Lowther sternly. "What do you mean, Trimble? The old tower's out of bounds! You know that!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Do you mean to imply that you thought we had gone out of bounds, Twimble?"

"Well, I jolly well heard you say—"
"You hear too much, old octopus!" said Monty Lowther. "Much too much! Boot him along the passage, you fellows!"

Baggy jumped back into his study, and banged the door, and the key turned! Baggy was rather glad that he had not, after all, kept watch for the seven in that dismal old crypt! Obviously—to Baggy—they hadn't gone there after tea; for here they were, loafing about in the Fourth Form passage in the School House.

"O.K. now!" said Tom Merry. "We know exactly where to wait for Figgins & Co. next time they pay a late call! Now what about a spot of cricket?"

And the School House seven, having completed the exploration of the secret passage, went to change for cricket—still happily and blissfully unconscious of the activities of Mr. Ratcliff!

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE!

"NONSENSE!"
"Mr. Railton!"
"I repeat, sir, nonsense!" said Mr. Railton. "I refuse, sir, I absolutely refuse to believe anything of the kind!"

"Sir!"
"Only this morning, sir, you made a ridiculous mistake—a grotesque mistake—in accusing a boy of this House! You have now, sir, made another mistake—still more ridiculous, and still more grotesque!"

Mr. Railton spoke with warmth. His face was pink with annoyance!

Generally he was tactful in dealing with his disgruntled colleague. This time he let himself go!

Mr. Ratcliff turned almost green.
"I repeat, sir!" he exclaimed, his voice rising shrilly. "I repeat that a number of boys of this House, whose names I have given you, are at this very moment engaged in disgraceful and blackguardly gambling and smoking in the crypt under the old tower—"

"And I repeat that the accusation is nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "The boys you have named, sir, are among the very best characters in my House—and not one of them, sir, is capable of the conduct you describe!"

"I have told you—"
"Merry is the junior captain of this House!" said Mr. Railton. "The others—Manners, Lowther, Blake, D'Arcy, Digby, Herries—are boys
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with whose characters I am perfectly well acquainted. Sometimes, no doubt, they are thoughtless, and perhaps a little exuberant. But every one of them is a thoroughly decent and self-respecting lad, and I have the fullest confidence and trust in all of them."

Ratcliff's lips set bitterly.

"Boys of this House, sir, were caught in that very place with cards and cigarettes last term!" he snapped.

"I am aware of it! Those boys, Racke, Crooke, and one or two others, were flogged! I am quite able to judge, Mr. Ratcliff, between one boy and another. The boys you have named are as unlike them as chalk is unlike cheese."

"Then for what reason, sir, have seven boys of this House gathered secretly and surreptitiously in a remote spot out of bounds?"

"I have no proof that they have done so!" retorted Mr. Railton. "I have no doubt that you are making another mistake, Mr. Ratcliff! And I am bound to say, sir, that I object, most strongly, to your interference in the affairs of my House!"

Ratcliff's lips tightened.

"It is my duty, sir, to put a stop to conduct disgraceful to the school," he said venomously.

"If you fail in your duty, sir——"

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"If you fail in your duty, sir, it must be done for you by a colleague more deeply concerned for the honour of the school!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff.

The School House master breathed hard.

"This discussion had better cease!" he said.

"Am I to understand that you refuse to take action in this matter, Mr. Railton?"

"You are to understand precisely that, Mr. Ratcliff!"

"The boys are there——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Railton. "This afternoon you reported two boys of my House for breaking bounds in that direction. No doubt they did not observe you in the vicinity. But that so numerous a party as seven boys should break bounds, under the eyes of a Housemaster, without a single one of them learning that they were under observation, is absurd."

Mr. Ratcliff opened his lips—and shut them again.

Ratty was satisfied with his own methods. But he did not care to explain to Railton that he had deliberately taken cover and spied. He was not ashamed of his exploits as a Peeping Tom, but he was not proud of them.

"I certainly saw them!" he snapped at last.

"And not one of them saw you?"

"As—as it happens, no."

"You are mistaken, sir. No doubt you saw them near the place and concluded that they had done what you suppose. But if you had been near enough to be positive on the subject, some of them certainly would have seen you, and they would not have gone out of bounds under your eyes."

Mr. Ratcliff was in rather a difficulty.

Really he could not explain that he had derived information by playing the eavesdropper, and then posted himself in cover to watch.

On the other hand, but for the fact that he had been well hidden from view, some of the breakers of bounds obviously would have spotted him in the offing, and would not have carried on under his eyes.

Mr. Railton had no doubt that he had seen

Tom Merry & Co. somewhere near the old tower, and jumped to a false conclusion—just as he had done in the case of Monty Lowther that morning.

"I repeat," said Mr. Ratcliff at last, "that I saw them enter the place, one after another, and that they are there now! And I tell you, also, sir, that I entered the old tower myself and heard voices from below."

"The old place is full of echoes," said Mr. Railton. "Really, Mr. Ratcliff, this is absurd! Anyone in the crypt would have heard your footsteps above, and obviously would have refrained from speaking."

Again Ratty was in a difficulty. He did not exactly like to explain that he had tiptoed stealthily.

"You are mistaken, sir!" said Mr. Railton; "and the proof is that you suspect these boys of conduct of which I know them to be incapable. Such boys as Trimble and Mellish might go there to smoke cigarettes out of sight; certainly not Tom Merry and his friends. The whole idea is absurd."

"I have left a prefect watching the place during my absence to call you" said Mr. Ratcliff. "The boys are there, and cannot escape unobserved. If you refuse to accompany me to the spot and see for yourself, I shall have no resource but to place the matter before Dr. Holmes."

"The matter, sir, concerns me wholly and solely, as Housemaster of this House."

"The matter, sir, concerns the headmaster, as it will be his painful duty to expel a number of boys of this House."

"Nonsense!"

"Very well, sir!" said Mr. Ratcliff, between his shut lips. "I will go to Dr. Holmes, as you refuse to act in the matter."

Mr. Railton paused. He did not believe for a moment Ratty's accusation against those juniors of his House. He did not believe that there was anybody in the old crypt at all. On the other hand, it was possible that some juniors had had the idea of exploring the old place. That might have happened—though certainly not the smoke-and-card party that Ratty suspected.

"I have said that it is nonsense, Mr. Ratcliff," he said. "I will, however, walk to the place and satisfy you that you are, as before, making a ridiculous mistake."

"That is all I ask, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a sneer. "You had better bring a light of some kind, as I have no doubt that they will attempt to elude discovery when they hear you coming."

Without replying, Mr. Railton sorted out a pocket-torch and followed the New House master from the study. They left the School House and walked into the quad.

In a few minutes they passed through the gate into the courtyard of the old tower.

Sefton of the Sixth, at the sound of footsteps, threw away the stump of a cigarette. His Housemaster found him dutifully on guard.

"You have not left this spot. Sefton?" asked Mr. Ratcliff.

"No, sir."

"Then the boys are still there!"

The two Housemasters entered the old tower and stopped by the aperture in the floor.

There was no sound from below. No glimmer of light was to be seen on the dark stone stairway. Mr. Railton, already angry and impatient, gave a contemptuous grunt.

"I hear no one!" he snapped. "Nothing——"

"I have no doubt that they have heard us, and

are keeping quiet!" sneered Mr. Ratcliff. "Will you descend with the light?"

"I will waste a few minutes more if it is your desire!" answered Mr. Railton, and he turned on his pocket-lamp and went down the steps.

Ratty followed at his heels.

In the vault below the School House master flashed the light round him. If there had been any other light there it was gone; if there had been a sound, it was silent.

Railton's expression, already sarcastic, grew more and more so as Ratcliff peered up and down and round about.

Obviously there was no one in the crypt. Railton did not believe that anyone had entered at all; but Ratty, who knew what he had seen, was puzzled and quite mystified.

"Well, Mr. Ratcliff," exclaimed the School House master at last, "are you satisfied now?"

"I am not!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "The boys are here! They must be here! They are keeping out of sight! Hand me the light, please."

Ratcliff took the light and made a complete circumnavigation of the crypt. He looked round and behind every stone pillar, he peered into every corner, he stared into a deep alcove—without entering it, as it was easily seen to be empty. More and more perplexed, more and more angry, grew his bony countenance as he failed to make any discovery.

Even one junior could not have escaped that meticulous search. And there had been seven of them!

They couldn't have vanished into thin air. Yet Ratty had seen them climb over the gate. He had actually heard some of their voices in the crypt. Sefton had watched all the while he was gone for Railton. It was quite uncanny. Ratty almost doubted the evidence of his senses. Had he only fancied that he had seen those seven juniors cutting over that gate? Really it looked like it!

He rejoined Mr. Railton at the foot of the steps at last. His face was crimson with vexation.

"Well," asked the School House master, "have you found anyone, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"No—no!"

"Precisely as I expected! No one is here!" said Railton. "You have made an absurd mistake, as I said—and wasted your time and my own! If you would have the extreme kindness, Mr. Ratcliff, to attend wholly to the affairs of your own House—"

"I saw them here—I heard them!" gasped Ratty.

Railton stared at him.

"Mr. Ratcliff, will you oblige me by talking common-sense?" he asked. "If you saw them here, where are they?"

"I—I fail to understand, but—but—" Ratty's voice trailed away. He was hopelessly flabbergasted.

Railton, with set lips, tramped up the steps to the floor above.

Ratcliff almost limped after him. Emerging from the stairway, he fixed baleful eyes on Sefton. Had Sefton failed to keep watch?

"Sefton, did you remain here the whole time during my absence?" he snapped. "I have found no one in the crypt."

"The boys never came out while I was here, sir, and I have been here all the time," answered Sefton. "Perhaps they've hidden somewhere, sir."

Ratcliff compressed his lips. He stalked out of the tower after Mr. Railton, leaving his prefect staring.

The two Housemasters went back into the quad. In the quadrangle Mr. Railton called to Kildare of the Sixth.

Kildare was in flannels, with a bat under his arm, and had just come away from senior nets.

"Kildare," called Railton, "I desire to know where seven of the House juniors are—Merry, Lowther, Manners, Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy. Can you tell me?"

"Yes, sir—at junior nets," answered the St. Jim's captain.

Mr. Railton laughed—he could not help it.

"Thank you, Kildare," he said.

"They are not at junior nets!" almost bawled Mr. Ratcliff. "They are, in some manner I do not understand, hiding out of sight in the crypt under the old tower!"

Sefton's suggestion seemed to Ratty the only possible explanation—thorough as his search of the crypt had been.

Kildare stared.

"They are certainly at the nets, sir," he answered. "I noticed Tom Merry batting, Blake bowling, and the others fielding as I came away."

"Nonsense!"

"If you care to walk in that direction, Mr. Ratcliff, you will see them for yourself!" said Kildare.

"I shall see nothing of the kind!"

"Let us walk in that direction, at all events!" suggested Mr. Railton, smiling.

And Ratty, with an angry snort, assented.

They walked in that direction. Railton smiled broadly, and Ratcliff's eyes almost popped out of his bony face at sight of Tom Merry wielding the willow, and Blake sending down the ball, and the other fellows standing round the net. All were in flannels, all were keen on cricket practice, and they did not even look round at the two Housemasters.

Ratcliff gazed at them.

There they were! He had to believe his eyes—though really he was getting a little doubtful of the evidence of his eyes!

"I think," said Mr. Railton, with a laugh, "that we may consider this matter closed, Mr. Ratcliff!"

Without waiting for an answer, the School House master walked away to his House.

Horace Ratcliff stood staring at the cricketers for a long minute—then he, too, turned away! Utterly puzzled and perplexed, and in the worst temper ever, Ratty walked away to the New House—and only found a slight comfort in smacking a New House junior's head as he went in!

NOT EDIBLE!

BAGGY TRIMBLE hesitated.

Baggy was loafing near the doorway of the New House.

That was not a vicinity that attracted Baggy, as a rule! New House men were rather liable to be playful if they found a School House man hanging about in their territory.

But the New House had for the fat Baggy an attraction just then that was hardly to be resisted.

After tea Figgins of the Fourth had gone out on his bike. That did not interest Baggy—he

did not even know that Figgy had gone, till he saw Figgy wheel his bike back into the bike-shed. Then Baggy became keenly interested; for Figgins untied a bundle from his bike, and carried it under his arm into the New House.

Baggy's eyes followed that bundle.

He did not doubt what it contained! Clearly, to Baggy, it was grub for a study supper. What else could it be?

School House warriors who had spotted Figgy with that bundle and came to the same conclusion might have rushed Figgy and bagged it, as spoil of war. But Baggy was no warrior. So far from rushing the mighty Figgins, he would not willingly have rushed Figgy's little finger.

But his podgy thoughts dwelt on that parcel. And when, a few minutes later, he saw Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn come out in flannels for games practice, his thoughts concentrated more and more on that parcel.

Baggy was not the man for hostile raids in the enemy's country, but he was the man for strategy. After all, a fellow could go into the other House—he might, for instance, be taking a message. Loitering by the door, Baggy considered it—but he hesitated long.

From the window of the Housemaster's study in that House, a sharp and unpleasant eye rested on Baggy.

Mr. Ratcliff noticed him, and wondered what that School House junior was hanging about the New House for.

Baggy was unconscious of Ratcliff. He was only worried by the possibility of being snaffled by playful New House men if he went in.

But he resolved to risk it at last, and he rolled in at the door.

Figgins & Co. were safe off the scene; the bundle would be in their study, up in the Fourth; really, it was worth a little risk.

"School House swab!" Two or three New House juniors spotted him as he headed for the stairs. "Bag him! Roll him out!"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Baggy. "I've got a message from Lathom! No larks, you know—Lathom's sent me!"

Baggy was allowed to pass in peace. If Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, had sent him over with a message for a New House Fourth Former, that saw him through! Mr. Lathom hadn't, but in little matters like this, Baggy was not particular.

Up the staircase went Baggy.

Upstairs the coast was clear. Baggy cut rapidly into Figgins' study.

He shut the door of that study and glanced round. Then he grinned at the sight of a bundle lying on the table. It was the bundle he had seen under the arm of George Figgins.

"He, he, he!" gurgled Baggy in gleeful triumph.

He could hardly venture to carry that bundle off. New House men who saw him departing with a bundle would hardly have believed that he had come on a message from Lathom.

But that was all right! Figgins & Co., at cricket practice, were good for half an hour, at least. Baggy had plenty of time! He was not going to carry off that parcel under his podgy arm. He was going to carry off the contents in his capacious inside! As the New House juniors downstairs were not provided with X-ray outfits, they would not spot it in that hideout!

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The bundle was wrapped and tied as Figgins had brought it in!

Baggy cut the string and unwrapped the brown paper.

He felt the shape of a large tin inside that wrapping-paper. Canned pineapple, very likely—or peaches—anyhow, something in a tin. Baggy's fat face glowed with anticipation as he unwrapped it.

And then—

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Baggy.

It was a large tin! It was a heavy tin! But it was not a tin of pineapple! It was not a tin of peaches! It was not a tin of apricots. On the outside appeared the dismal words:

"RED PAINT."

It was a tin of paint!

Baggy gazed at it, with feelings that he could not have expressed in words.

Red paint had its uses. No doubt George Figgins had a use for it, as he had taken the trouble to bike down to Rylcombe to fetch it to the school. But Baggy Trimble had no use for it!

Even had he had a use for it he could not have carried it off. Baggy was not very particular what he put in his capacious inside—but even Baggy drew the line at paint.

He gazed at that tin of red paint in utter disgust.

He had run all these risks—to blink at a can of paint in Figgins' study. Never for a moment had he dreamed that Figgins was fetching in paint. What on earth could a fellow want paint for? St. Jim's juniors did not decorate their studies to the extent of painting them.

Then Baggy guessed. Fellows, certainly, did not paint their own studies—but they might paint other fellows' studies by the way of a lark. One night the New House raiders had painted Tom Merry's study in green and blue and yellow.

That was it. This meant that another New House night-raid was coming, with red paint featured in the programme.

Baggy snorted!

He was not interested in House raids. He was interested in grub—and there was no grub!

Baggy breathed very hard.

He left the tin of paint on the table. Nothing would have induced him to sample the contents of that tin. He turned to the study cupboard.

But it was as bare as the cupboard of the well-known Mrs. Hubbard! Fatty Wynn was not the man to leave anything over, after tea in the study.

With deep feelings, Baggy Trimble left Figgins' study. He rolled away to the stairs. As he descended the stairs, he heard a sharp and acid voice below. It was the voice of Mr. Ratcliff.

"Trimble!"

"Oh jiminy!"

Mr. Ratcliff was looking up the staircase! His sharp eyes were fixed on the fat man from the School House. His expression was unpleasant.

"What are you doing here, Trimble?"

"I—I had a message from Mr. Lathom, sir!" Baggy was not so sure that this would work with Ratty! But it was the only string to his bow.

"Indeed! For whom?" asked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh! For—for Figgins, sir—"

"Indeed! When I saw you from my study

window, Trimble, I saw Figgins pass you. Why did you not give him the message?"

"Oh! I—I mean Redfern, sir!" stammered Baggy.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Ratcliff grimly. "You mean Redfern, do you, Trimble? No doubt Mr. Lathom will confirm this, if I inquire."

"Oh! I—I mean——"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I—I mean, I just came to—to speak to a New House man, sir!" stammered Baggy.

"Now—now I think of it, I—I hadn't a message——"

"I thought not!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Follow me to my study, Trimble!"

"Oh jiminy!"

In low spirits Baggy followed the New House master to his study.

PULLING RATTY'S LEG!

MR. RATCLIFF picked up a cane from his study table, and swished it thoughtfully.

Baggy Trimble eyed him with great uneasiness.

Ratty had no right to cane a School House man! But he looked as if he was going to do it, all the same.

"Now, Trimble," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I have not the slightest doubt that you entered this House for some lawless purpose. I have no doubt that you have played some prank in a New House boy's study! However, I do not desire to be severe with you."

Baggy was glad to hear it!

"Thank you, sir! M-m-may I go now?" he stammered.

"You may not, Trimble! This afternoon, when I found you and another School House boy out of bounds, I chanced to hear something you said as I approached the gate. I had intended to question you about it, Trimble, as it is a matter affecting the good name and discipline of the school. I shall do so now, Trimble, and I shall expect you to answer frankly."

Mr. Ratcliff swished the cane again, as a hint of what Baggy might expect in the absence of frankness.

Baggy blinked at him. He tried to remember what he had been saying to Mellish—which Ratty, he could see now, had overheard.

"Oh! It was only about some School House men, sir!" stammered Baggy.

"I am aware of it!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "That is immaterial! You made remarks to the effect that Merry of the Shell, and certain friends of his, were using the old crypt as a secret place for disgraceful orgies."

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. "I—I didn't mean—I never knew—I—I—oh jiminy!"

Baggy did not dare to tell Ratcliff that it was no business of his—which certainly it was not! It was Railton's business, not Ratty's. Railton certainly would never have obtained the information by listening to juniors' talk—and certainly he would never have asked a junior for information. Ratty had his own manners and customs. What was clear to Baggy was this—that Ratty wanted to know, and that if Baggy did not satisfy him, he was going to be caned for larking in Ratty's House!

Baggy Trimble had his faults—indeed, their name was legion. But even Baggy was no sneak. Really and truly, he did not want to give information about other fellows kicking over the traces.

But still more, he did not want to be whopped. He had had two whops from Railton that afternoon. And Railton's whops were as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with Ratty's whops.

But Baggy was like a fat fish in a net. He had walked into Ratty's House like Daniel in the lions' den. Ratty had him. And Baggy's chief concern was to get out of the study without being whopped.

"I advise you to tell me the truth!" said Mr. Ratcliff coldly. "You are aware, Trimble, that Merry and his friends use the crypt under the old tower as it was used last term by other young rascals."

"Oh! No——"

The cane swished in the air.

"I—I mean, yes!" gasped Baggy.

The cane came to rest again.

"When," asked Mr. Ratcliff, "do they generally go there, Trimble?"

"I—I don't know——"

"What?"

"I—I mean, pretty often, sir!" groaned Baggy. "I—I thought they were going this afternoon, but they've put it off. I—I thought they were gone, and then I saw them in the study passage——"

"No doubt there is some hiding-place known to them in that old crypt where they are able to get out of sight in case of a search?" asked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh! Yes! I—I think so, sir!" Baggy did not think so. He had not thought anything about it at all. Baggy was simply giving Mr. Ratcliff the answer he evidently wanted to hear, with a view to keeping clear of the cane. "In—in fact, I—I'm sure of it!"

"Have you heard them mention it?"

"Lots of times, sir!" In for a penny, in for a pound was Baggy's idea. If Ratty wanted this, he could have it!

"I thought so!" said Mr. Ratcliff grimly. "I had no doubt of it! Now, Trimble, from what I heard you say, you are not in sympathy with their disgraceful conduct."

"Oh no, sir!" said Baggy virtuously. "I'm disgusted at it! I was jolly well going to show them up!"

"Last term," said Mr. Ratcliff, watching Baggy's fat face intently, "a boy named Racke and some of his associates were found to have resorted to the crypt after lights out. No doubt Merry and his friends do the same."

Baggy paused before he answered that.

With all his fatuous suspicions of Tom Merry & Co., Baggy did not suspect that those cheery youths were in the habit of breaking House bounds after lights out, after the style of Aubrey Racke.

Still, in for a penny in for a pound! Ratty, so long as he stood between Baggy and the door with a cane in his hand, had to be satisfied. Baggy was not thinking about the truth; he was thinking about the cane.

His hesitation caused Mr. Ratcliff to knit his brows. The cane swished ominously in the air. Ratcliff was going to extract the truth. He did not realise that his method was likely to extract anything but the truth. That swish of the cane was enough for Baggy!

"Yes, sir, often and often!" he gasped.

"They're going to-night!"

Ratcliff's eyes gleamed.

"To-night!" he repeated.

"Oh, yes, sir! I—I say, you—you—you won't let them know I told, sir!" stammered Baggy. "I—I—I should get scragged, sir, in my House! Mr. Railton wouldn't like it, either, sir!"

"I shall not speak to Mr. Railton on the subject, Trimble!"

Baggy was relieved to hear it. He did not want to have to explain to his Housemaster that he had been pulling Ratty's leg to get out of Ratty's study.

"Speak frankly, Trimble," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I am aware that you knew that these young rascals were going into the crypt this afternoon. No doubt you are aware of their present intentions. But are you sure?"

"Oh, quite, sir!" groaned Baggy. "I—I heard Blake say to—to Tom Merry: 'What about to-night, as it is off this afternoon?' Those were his words, sir."

The expression on Mr. Ratcliff's face showed Baggy that he was on the right track. This, evidently, was the way to get out of Ratty's study without sampling the cane!

Baggy pushed his advantage. If Ratty had any idea of spying in the old crypt late at night Baggy wished him joy of it! He was not likely to find anything there, except spiders and snails, and perhaps a toad or two!

"And Tom Merry said: 'Make it midnight—that's safe!'" went on Baggy. Baggy was no man for half-measures!

Ratty's eyes gleamed green.

"And then Lowther said: 'Don't forget the cards,'" pursued the cheery Baggy; "and Manners said: 'Or the smokes, either, you chaps!' Then—then they saw me, and—and never said any more. That—that's all I know, sir!"

It was quite enough for Mr. Ratcliff!

He gave Baggy quite a genial look.

"Very well, Trimble, I am glad that you have been frank with me," he said. "I am glad to see also that there is at least one boy of high principles in Mr. Railton's House."

"Oh jiminy! I—I mean yes, sir," gasped Baggy. "I—I always try to—to be high principled, sir! I—I'm absolutely disgusted with those fellows! I—I despise the lot of them, sir."

"That is very right and proper," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You may go, Trimble!"

To Baggy's immense relief, he laid down the cane.

"Thank you, sir!" Baggy rolled towards the door. Then he turned. He was all right with Ratty: but his fat flesh almost crept on his podgy bones at the idea of Tom Merry & Co. ever hearing what he had been telling Ratty! "Of—of course, sir, you—you—you won't say I—I had anything—"

"Certainly not, Trimble! You need not be uneasy!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"T-t-thank you, sir!"

And Baggy rolled away comforted. He left Mr. Ratcliff quite pleased with him.

Ratty probably would not have been so pleased had he heard Baggy murmur to himself: "Silly old ass!" as he rolled out of the New House!

RAIDERS OF THE NIGHT!

"O! my hat! Ratty's up!" breathed George Figgins.

It was dark in the quadrangle of St. Jim's.

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The quarter past eleven had chimed, when three shadowy figures dropped silently one after another from the back window of the New House and stole softly away.

At that hour, masters as well as boys had generally gone to bed. So Figgins took notice at once as, looking back at the New House, he noticed that a light was burning in Mr. Ratcliff's study.

Kerr and Wynn glanced back at the glimmer from Ratcliff's study window. That glimmer



Mr. Ratcliff stared, with popping eyes,

showed that the New House master had not gone to bed.

"Blow him!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "Ratty's been shirty all day about something, blessed if I know what. But he can't be sitting up for us."

"Hardly!" said Kerr. "I believe he's had one of his rows with Railton over in the School House. If he'd had an eye on us, we should have seen some sign of it—we're all right."

"O.K.," said Figgins. "Come on!"

The three threaded their way quietly and cautiously in the direction of the old tower. They dodged in the shadows of buildings to keep out of the summer starlight.

It was an awfully serious matter for fellows to get out of their House after lights out. Figgins & Co. were running the risk of a Head's flogging every time they raided the rival House after lights out.

But that risk did not deter them. Ever since Fatty Wynn had discovered that secret passage they had had the rival House on toast. And they were cheerfully resolved to make the School House sit up all through the term. It seemed to the New House trio a tremendous lark; all



the three faces coated thick with paint.

the more so because their old rivals were absolutely helpless to deal with them. They came and went as they pleased in the rival House. There had been rag after rag, and Tom Merry & Co. could only wonder how the dickens they did it.

They reached the little gate in the corner of the quad, and whipped over it.

There, however, Kerr paused to listen.

"Did you fellows hear something?" he whispered.

"Only the wind," answered Figgins.

"There's not much wind. Listen!"

They listened for a long minute, but there was

no sound save the faint sough of the summer wind in the leafy old elms.

"All serene," said Figgins. "You don't fancy that Ratty is taking a walk abroad this time of night, do you?"

"I don't see why he should," said Kerr. "If he suspected that fellows were out of the House he would nose into the dorm. It's not that. But I thought I heard something."

"Might be some fellow out on the tiles," said Fatty Wynn. "You remember we spotted Cutts of the Fifth here one night. That School House sweep cuts across here when he breaks out at night."

"Come on!" said Figgins. "It's all right!"

They trod cautiously over the old courtyard to the doorway of the tower.

But Kerr did not seem quite at ease. The Scottish junior of the New House was wary and canny, and he was almost certain that he had caught the echo of a light footfall in the silence. The New House raiders did not want to be spotted, even by some fellow breaking bounds at night.

Inside the old tower it was black as a hat.

Figgins turned on the gleam of a pocket-torch.

Kerr caught his arm.

"Shut that off, Figgy!" he whispered.

"Safe enough here, old man."

"Can't be too careful."

"Oh, all right! But we don't want to take a header down the steps, Kerr. I've only got one neck!"

Figgins shut off the light. They groped carefully to the aperture in the floor at the top of the stone steps. It was none too safe a spot for groping about in the dark.

"Listen!" breathed Kerr suddenly.

"My dear chap, are you getting nervy?"

"Fathead! Listen, I tell you!"

They listened.

From the courtyard a sound came distinctly. It came from the direction of the gate over which they had clambered.

Figgins caught his breath.

"Cutts again, you bet!" he whispered. "That sportsman often goes out after lights out. He nearly spotted us here once."

"It sounded to me like the gate opening!" muttered Kerr.

"Couldn't have been; it's kept locked. Only the beaks have a key to it," answered Figgins.

"Cutts, I expect, same as it was before—or perhaps Sefton of our House; he's that sort."

"I can hear him!" breathed Fatty Wynn.

It was a footstep—soft, but distinct. There was somebody in the courtyard outside the doorway of the old tower.

"Quick—and quiet!" muttered Kerr. "Get down the steps. Don't turn on that light, for goodness' sake!"

"Careful, then; one of the steps is jolly shaky—"

"Quiet!"

Kerr led the way, feeling every step with his foot as he went.

Figgins crept down after him, and then Fatty Wynn.

In blackest darkness they reached the floor of the old crypt. There they stopped for a moment or two to listen, but all was silent.

"Better have the light now!" whispered Figgins.

"Don't!" said Kerr.

"Look here, you Scotsmen are too jolly

cautious!" grunted Fatty Wynn. "I don't want to bang into something in the dark."

"And I don't want to go up to the Head for breaking out at night!" said Kerr. "If we were caught here we might be suspected of being up to Racke's game last term. Don't be an ass, Fatty! I can find the way in the dark. Hang on to me and keep mum!"

It needed some groping to find the alcove in the old stone wall in the black darkness.

But Kerr found it, and let his comrades into it.

Then the tilting stone let them through into the underground tunnel, and once it was closed over their heads even Kerr admitted that it was safe to turn on the light, and Figgins flashed it on.

"O.K., now!" said Figgy cheerfully, as he led the way by the secret tunnel, little dreaming that Tom Merry & Co. had trodden that way in the afternoon. "It was some shady sweep out of bounds that we heard. He won't be around when we get back."

They pushed on so the spiral stair that led up into the School House.

"I've got three pounds of paint in this time!" grinned Figgins. "Think it will amuse those School House fatheads to find the seats of the armchairs in their studies painted red? We'll do about a dozen studies, just to let them see we're impartial. But I'm going to keep a spot of paint for Tom Merry, to wind up with. What about waking him up with a dab of paint on his boko?"

The Co. chuckled.

"He will have to turn out and wash," said Figgins. "An extra wash won't do those School House rotters any harm. We'll keep that till the finish, though. We shall have to cut pretty quick after waking them up."

Figgins led the way up the spiral stair. The raiders reached the oaken door at the top, and the light was shut off.

Figgins opened it, after shutting off the light.

They looked out into the Fourth Form study passage in the School House—dark and silent, lighted only by a glimmer of stars from a high window.

Silently they stepped into the passage, leaving the panel partly open behind them for prompt retreat when the time came.

"Study No 6 first," murmured Figgins. "And let's hope that Gussy will sit in the armchair before he notices the paint. Think of his beautiful bags, if he does!"

And the New House raiders, grinning, tiptoed towards Study No. 6.

And then—

ONCE TOO OFTEN!

"KEEP awake, you fellows!"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Anybody got a megaphone?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"Bai Jove! What do you want a megaphone for, Lowthah?"

"To make sure that Figgins & Co. will hear us and cut off before we can bag them, if they come to-night. Or what about stamping on the floor?" suggested Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"If that silly owl doesn't shut up I'm going

to bang his head on the wall, and chance it!" breathed Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Keep quiet, Gussy, old man!" murmured Tom Merry.

"I was only warnin' you fellows not to drop off to sleep. It would not be much use sittin' up for those New House boundahs if you dwop off to sleep."

"Kill him, somebody!" said Herries.

"Wats!"

Seven juniors, who ought to have been fast asleep in their dormitories, were sitting up in the dark in the Fourth Form passage in the School House. They sat on the floor, their backs against the wall, and waited. There was no doubt that they were all sleepy. Fellows who turned out of bed at eleven o'clock at night could not help feeling sleepy.

But they were not going to sleep, and they really did not need Arthur Augustus' warning.

They were very wary and watchful.

Whether the enemy would come that night they could not be certain. But it seemed probable, for two reasons. Last time Figgins & Co. had been interrupted, and had had to cut off with their nefarious work unfinished; also, Baggy Trimble had mentioned that can of paint he had spotted in Figgy's study over the way, and it was easy to guess to what use that can of red paint was intended to be put. So the seven watchers were hopeful of making a catch.

They were all quite near the secret panel on the old oaken wall, but not near enough to be spotted by the enemy if the enemy came.

They did not want the enemy to take the alarm and back out. They wanted the enemy to drop into their hands like ripe plums. And if the enemy did not come that night, they were prepared to keep watch every night till the enemy did come. Now that they knew the exact spot where Figgins & Co. effected ingress, it was only a matter of patience.

All they had to do was to keep watch on that secret panel. Having opened it themselves, they knew that it gave a faint click when it opened. They listened with all their ears for that warning sound.

Eleven had been chiming when the Terrible Three crept down from the Shell dormitory and joined Study No. 6 coming down from the Fourth Form dorm.

Long minutes had passed since then, and it was now near half-past eleven. Arthur Augustus nearly nodded off several times, which was no doubt the reason why he impressed upon his comrades the necessity of keeping awake.

Faintly through the summer night came the chime of the half-hour from the clock tower. It was followed by a whisper from Arthur Augustus.

"Bai Jove! It's half-past eleven, deah boys!"

"Why didn't you tie that image down in his bed, Blake, before you came down?" hissed Manners. "It's up to you fellows, as you're his keepers!"

"You cheeky ass—"

"Can't you sit on his head and keep him quiet?" breathed Lowther. "They may be here any minute, if they're coming at all!"

"Pway don't talk so much, Lowthah!"

"What?"

"It is wathah injudicious to keep on talkin' when those New House boundahs may be comin' any moment! You are feahfully thoughtless, old chap!"

Monty Lowther rose.
 "I'm going to slaughter him!" he hissed.
 "I'd rather slaughter him than all the New
 House, including Ratty! I——"
 "Quiet!" breathed Tom Merry. "I heard
 something——"

It was a faint sound like a rat behind the wainscot. Seven fellows were breathlessly silent, even Arthur Augustus checking the remark that was rising to his lips.

It was the faintest of clicks. But seven pairs of ears heard it. The enemy were at hand.

It was too dark in the passage for the seven watchers to see that the secret panel in the wall had opened. But they knew it was open.

Breathlessly, they listened to the soft and stealthy sounds of three fellows stepping in, one after another.

The enemy had arrived!
Excitement was at almost fever-heat.
In the silence, they heard the whispering voice
of George Figgins. Still they could see nothing,
but soft footfalls moved down the passage towards
Study No. 6.

And then—
"Bag them!" rapped Tom Merry.
A light shot on.

The glare of an electric torch blazed full in the startled faces of Figgins & Co. And as Tom Merry flashed on the light, six fellows grabbed. Figgins & Co. had absolutely no chance!

Even as the light dazzled their eyes, their arms were grasped, and each member of the New House Co. was pinioned by a fellow on each side of him.

"Oh!" gasped Figgins.
 "Oooh!" gasped Fatty Wynn.
 "Sold!" breathed Kerr.

"Got them!" he said. "Hold them—they're not going yet! Glad to see you, Figgins—awfully kind of you to drop in in this informal way!"

"Don't wriggle, old bean!" said Blake. "We shall bang your head on the wall if you wriggle, Figgv!"

Blake had one of Figgy's arms, Herries the other.

Figgins had no chance—but he did wriggle—energetically!

"Have another?" asked Blake affably.

"Oh crumbs!" Figgins ceased to wriggle. He did not want another. "You School House rotters, how did you find it out?"

"They—they knew——" stuttered Fatty Wynn.
"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

It was clear to Figgins & Co. that the secret had been discovered—how, they could not guess.

But the fact that seven fellows were watching the secret panel was proof enough of it. Time and again had the New House raiders entered by that secret panel, unseen, unsuspected. More than once watch had been kept—but never near that spot. Not till the secret had been discovered had Tom Merry & Co. dreamed of a hidden door in the Fourth Form passage. Now, evidently, they knew.

The New House raiders had raided once too often. It was not the School House that was on toast this time—it was the New House!

"How did you know, you sweeps?" hooted Figgins.

"Oh, this is the brainy House, you know!" said

Tom Merry airily. "You New House duffers haven't a look in, really!"

"Wathah not!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think you won't be paintin' any armchair for me to sit in, Figgins!"

"Jolly good-natured of Figgins to bring this can of paint, though!" said Tom Merry, taking possession of it. "Got a brush, Figgins?"

"Just going to! Here it is!" Tom jerked the brush from Figgy's pocket. "Keep them pinned, you chaps—while I do the painting!"

"I—I say!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Don't you—ooooogh!"

Fatty spluttered as a brush, laden with red paint, dabbed at his plump face.

"Better not talk!" advised Tom. "You might get some in your mouth!"

Fatty Wynn wriggled wildly in the grip of Digby and Lowther, while Tom Merry got on with the painting. But he did not talk any more. He did not like red paint in his mouth. One dab was enough for Fatty!

Figgins and Kerr watched that painting process in dismal silence. Their own turn was coming! They had brought three pounds of red paint to the School House. They were going to take it back with them. And the amount of washing they had ahead of them when they got back to their own House was likely to be a record.

"Mmmmmmmmm!" mumbled the hapless Fatty.

With the light in his left and the brush in his right, Tom Merry painted industriously.

About a pound of paint was ladled on the plump features of the wriggling Fatty. There was no help for it. They were in the hands of

|||||

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the Amalekites. In a few minutes Fatty Wynn was redder than the reddest of Red Indians. Chingachgook or Sitting Bull would have looked pale beside him.

"Mummmmm!" mumbled Fatty.

"Red as a rose is he!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! He is blushin', deah boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your turn next, Figgy!"

"Look here, you School House scug—you—grooogh! Oooogh! Wooogh!" Figgins shut his mouth tight as the paint-brush commenced operations.

Figgins had his pound of paint! He glowed crimson like Fatty.

Then Tom turned his attention to Kerr. Kerr did not speak—he raised no objections—keeping his lips sealed. He had to have the paint outside—but he did not want any inside!

Seven School House juniors chuckled as they watched.

Figgins & Co. had had a long run of luck! For weeks on end they had ragged the School House at their own sweet will. But their luck was out at last. It was a win for the School House at the finish. The New House raiders had raided their last raid—they had come for wool and were going home shorn. It was quite certain that after that wild night's work Figgins & Co. would be tired of raiding the rival House in the nocturnal hours. It was their last visit—and they were getting something to remember it by!

Tom Merry scraped out the last spot of paint for transference to George Figgins' glowing features!

The three New House juniors looked at one another. They reeked with paint—their own paint. They were highly decorated. Paint trickled down their necks. It daubed their collars. From the bottom of his heart, Figgins wished that he had been satisfied with a pound of paint for that raid. Three pounds was really a lot. And they had all of it. The very last spot was scraped out of the tin. Then at last the paint-brush was pushed down Figgins' neck. It was done with, and Figgins was welcome to take it back to the New House with him.

"Oh cwumps! What a cweu!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh cwikey! They nevah wash in Watty's House, but they will have to wash this time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Three crimson raiders were walked back to the open panel. Seven hilarious juniors chortled as they stepped through. Three crimson faces glared back speechless wrath at the grinning seven.

"Come again, old beans!" said Tom Merry. "Always glad to see you! Drop in any time you like, and don't forget to bring the paint!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—grooogh!" gurgled Figgins. "I'll—ooogh—you've done us this time, but—grooogh—I'll—woooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You School House—grooogh!—rotters! You—ooogh! Gurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The panel clicked shut!

Tom Merry & Co., gurgling with merriment, went back to bed.

Figgins & Co. also gurgled as they went on their way! But it was not with merriment.

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ROUGH ON RATTY!

MR. RATCLIFF caught his breath.

A sound came to his ears!

It was pitch dark in the old crypt under the tower. In that pitchy darkness stood Ratty, with a flashlamp in his hand, all ready to turn on.

It was not a breaker of bounds that Figgins & Co. had heard when they crept into the old tower! Little as they suspected it, it was their Housemaster.

Of Ratty's activities that afternoon, and of the remarkable information he had screwed out of Baggy Trimble, Figgins & Co. knew nothing, and Tom Merry & Co. knew as little.

Nobody dreamed that Ratty was up and on the warpath that night. But Ratty was!

In fact, it was very soon after Figgins & Co. had gone by the secret passage that Mr. Ratcliff entered the old tower and turned on a light to descend into the crypt.

He found it vacant!

None of the young rascals had arrived, so far. But Ratty did not expect them yet. Midnight was the time—as he had learned from Baggy. Ratty was on the scene quite early!

Having glanced round the crypt, Mr. Ratcliff stationed himself behind one of the old stone pillars and turned off his light.

It was not pleasant, waiting there in the darkness. It was, indeed, fearfully unpleasant. Ratty did not like it at all! But he did not dream of giving up his watch. He knew—at least, he fancied he did—that those shady young scoundrels, Tom Merry & Co., were coming to that secluded spot for a smoke-and-card party, as Racke and his friends had done last term. He was going to catch them in the very act!

What would Railton say then?

Railton would not be able to say "Nonsense!" He would not be able to refuse to take the matter up. He would not be able to elude the disgrace of expulsions in his House. Willy-nilly, he would be forced to take those seven young rascals to the headmaster to be sacked—or, at the very least, to be flogged. Probably Tom Merry, as the ring-leader, would be sacked, the rest flogged. Perhaps all three of the Shell fellows would be sacked, and the Fourth Formers let off with a flogging. Howsoever the matter turned out, it would be a terrific disgrace for the School House, a most disagreeable jolt for Railton, and a triumph all round for Ratty, who had detected this rascality on the part of School House boys to which their own Housemaster was blind!

That happy prospect consoled Ratty for weary waiting in the dark.

He had only to wait till midnight. He knew from Baggy that they would be there then. He had only to be patient.

But it was not yet midnight when a sound came to Mr. Ratcliff's sharp, listening ears, and he started.

It was a sound of footsteps, and a sound of mumbling.

It seemed to him that a whiff of paint floated to his nose—fancy, perhaps. But it seemed like it.

He had not heard anyone descend the stone stair; but they were there. He could hear them, though he could not understand why they were mumbling and grunting.

A light flashed on.

Three dark figures dawned on Ratty as he peered from behind the pillar. One was carrying a pocket torch.

There were only three—not seven, as he had

expected. And they were heading for the stone stair, as if to leave the vault, though they had not been there more than a minute. If they suspected danger they were not going to escape that danger.

Mr. Ratcliff rushed from behind the pillar. In a moment he was standing between the three and the stone stair, and he flashed his light full on those three.

"Oh!" came a gasp from Figgins & Co. For the second time that night they were taken completely by surprise.

"Stop!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "I have caught you! I—I— Goodness gracious! What—what—"

Ratty's eyes fairly popped at the three faces in the glare of his torch! If they were three of the seven, they were not recognisable. He stared with popping eyes at three faces coated thick with red paint, and utterly unrecognisable!

"What——" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Who—who—who are you? Who——"

Figgins & Co. stopped dead—and dumb!

The sight of their Housemaster utterly amazed them. They were caught—caught out of House bounds at close on midnight—caught by Ratty! It was an awful moment.

But as Ratty gasped "Who are you?" they woke up, as it were.

They remembered the paint. Obviously, Ratty did not recognise them. Their nearest and dearest relatives could not have recognised them just then.

"Who are you?" shrieked the amazed Ratty.
"Who——"

Figgins made a sign to his comrades. Ratty did not know them. It behoved them to get away before Ratty did!

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "Stop! I command you!"

He clutched.

That the young rascals, when they were cornered in the crypt, would venture to handle a House-master certainly had not occurred to Ratty. Neither, certainly, would it have occurred to Figgins & Co. if they had not been masked with paint, and unrecognisable.

"Merry—stop—Lowther, you young— Stop!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff, clutching and gripping.

Figgins had shut off his light. Mr. Ratcliff's light went crashing to the floor, and was instantly extinguished. Darkness reigned. In the darkness there was a wild scramble.

Ratty had two of them by their collars. He was not going to let them escape. But three of them gripped Ratty, all at once, and the whole four rolled over together in a wild mix-up, and thick, wet paint was transferred to Mr. Ratcliff in large quantities.

Paint smudged his thin features, paint rubbed into his collar, and his neck, and his ears as he mixed up with the painted three!

Ratty had to let go his hold. Three were too many for him. In a dizzy and dazed state, spluttering with paint, Ratty rolled on the old stone flags.

Leaving him for dead, as it were, Figgins & Co. scrambled up the stone stair and scudded out of the old tower.

"Quick!" breathed Kerr. "He never knew us! That paint came in jolly useful, after all. Quick!"

They fairly flew.
Mr. Ratcliff was still sitting on the floor of

the old crypt, struggling for wind, when Figgins & Co. clambered in at a back window of the New House.

It was some time later that a breathless House-master tottered home to the New House!

Figgins & Co., in their dormitory, were wearily washing off paint. But Mr. Ratcliff was not thinking of Figgins & Co. Ratcliff also had paint to wash off! He was busy in a bath-room below while Figgins & Co. were busy in their dormitory.

Figgins & Co. had finished and gone to bed while Mr. Ratcliff was still rubbing and scrubbing and scraping and scouring, in the very worst temper ever!

TOM MERRY & CO. smiled when they saw Figgins & Co. in the quad the next morning.

Figgins & Co. had rather rosy complexions that morning.

"Dwop in again some time, deah boys!" he called out. "And mind you bwing some wed paint!"

But Figgins & Co. were not likely to drop in again. They had had, as Monty Lowther remarked, a drop too much!

That secret passage was a back number now. Figgins & Co. were done with that secret passage. The old crypt remained deserted and unvisited, save by Mr. Ratcliff, who penetrated every now and then in the hope of catching those young rascals, Tom Merry & Co., on the hop.

But Ratty never made a catch!

THE END.

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THE STRANDED SCHOOLBOYS!

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ROPED IN!

"I GUESS those galoots are looking for trouble!"

Bob Lawless knitted his brows as he spoke. The chums of Cedar Creek School were camped by the bank of a rushing stream high up in the rocky Cascade Mountains. Yen Chin, the Chinese, was tending the camp-fire, and Chunky Todgers was busily engaged in cooking antelope steaks.

Frank Richards and Bob and Vere Beauclerc were standing by the bank, watching the swift rush of waters that rippled and glistened in the sunshine. On their left, at a distance of two hundred yards, there was an abrupt fall in the stream where the waters dashed over rugged rocks to a lower level. The roar of the falling waters awoke incessant echoes in the pine forests that clothed the hills.

On the right of the three chums the stream ran broad and smooth towards the falls, but the current was swift and strong, and driftwood whirled past them at a rapid rate.

Bob Lawless, looking up the stream, fixed his eyes upon a birch-bark canoe that had come into sight. There were two paddlers in the canoe, and little could be seen of them so far but their broad stetson hats.

The chums of Cedar Creek were rather surprised to see the canoe in that lonely recess of the North-Western mountains. The canoe came on, and apparently the occupants were unaware of the falls that lay ahead.

"The silly jays!" said Bob Lawless. "They must be tenderfeet, and no mistake! They'll be over the falls if they don't look spry!"

"Better call out to them!" said Vere Beauclerc. "They won't hear at this distance!"

Frank Richards watched the canoe and its occupants as it came nearer and became clearer to the view. He expected to see men in it—trappers or miners belonging to the locality; but he soon discerned that the pair were boys.

"Two blessed kids!" said Bob. "What on earth are they doing up here in the mountains?"

Frank smiled.

"Same as us, perhaps—on holiday," he remarked.

"It isn't safe for kids to come to this section on holiday," said Bob. "We can look after ourselves, but those two jays can't. They'll be over the falls—and that's sudden death. Can't they hear the water, the jays?"

Bob put his hands to his mouth and shouted with all the force of his lungs:

"Hallo, there! Look out!"

Frank Richards and Beauclerc added their voices. For some moments they did not seem to be heard. Then one of the canoers looked up and stared towards them. As he raised his head

the three chums caught sight of his face under the broad hat, and they recognised him.

"Gunten!" exclaimed Frank.

"By gum! And the other galoot's Keller!" exclaimed Bob Lawless.

There was no mistake about it. The two canoers were Gunten and Keller, their schoolfellows at Cedar Creek. Frank Richards & Co. were on the worst of terms with the two Swiss at Cedar Creek School, but they did not think of that now. They thought only of the danger of the canoe.

"Gunten!" shouted Bob, in stentorian tones. "You duffer! Look out! Can't you see you're heading for the falls?"

Bob's powerful voice sounded through the roar of the waterfall.

Kern Gunten started up. A cigarette dropped from his lips. The cad of Cedar Creek had been smoking and talking to his companion as he idly paddled on the mountain stream, oblivious of the danger ahead. It now burst on him suddenly.

Standing in the canoe, he stared ahead to where the line of dancing foam marked the rocks over which the stream poured and thundered. His sallow face became white.

Keller, observing the peril at the same time, sat like one stunned, the paddle idle in his hands. A skilful canoer, with a nerve of iron, might have shot the fall with success, though the attempt would have been fraught with terrible peril; but neither Gunten nor Keller was of that sort. Both of them were utterly unnerved by the sudden and fearful danger that had now burst upon them.

"Help!"

That was Gunten's reply to Bob Lawless' shout of warning.

The canoe was moving faster now, coming on rapidly towards the spot where the three chums stood, but it was too far out in the stream for them to think of reaching it when it came abreast.

To venture into the water was madness, for the current would have whirled away the strongest swimmer in a second.

Frank Richards & Co. stood in dismay. They could not help the unfortunate canoers, and the latter could not help themselves. The canoe rushed on.

"The rope!" panted Bob at last. "There's a chance! Get my lasso, Franky—and for goodness' sake buck up!"

Without stopping to speak, Frank Richards ran back to the camp, where Chunky Todgers was still cooking in placid contentment.

Bob Lawless shouted again to the canoers:

"Gunten!"

"Help!" came the reply.

"Look out, Gunten! I'm going to heave my lasso when you come abreast. Catch it, and

make it fast to the canoe, and we'll try to pull you in! Savvy?"

"Help!"

Gunten was so terrified by the danger he had recklessly run into that it was doubtful if he understood. But it was the only chance of saving the canoes.

The two Swiss began paddling again, making a desperate attempt to reach the bank where Bob and Beauclerc stood. But they struggled with the rapid current in vain. The canoe whirled on.

The paddle slipped from Keller's hand, torn away by the fierce water from his nerveless grasp.

"Oh, the jay!" muttered Bob. "Franky!"

"Here you are, Bob!"

Frank Richards dashed up breathlessly with the lasso. The rancher's son grasped it. The canoe was almost abreast of the schoolboys now, but a good twenty yards out on the turbid stream.

"Watch out, Gunten!" shouted Bob.

The Swiss made a sign that he understood. With a steady hand, though his face was pale, Bob Lawless made the cast, and the rope uncoiled through the air towards the canoe.

Bob was a master with the lasso, and the cast was unerring. The looped rope dropped fairly into the whirling canoe. Gunten and Keller made a clutch at the same moment, and both of them obtained a grasp on the rope. If they had been quick and active and cool they could have secured the rope to the canoe and the fellows ashore could have pulled them in.

But they were not cool. They held frantically on to the rope, the only link between them and safety, and the canoe whirled on from under their feet.

Frank, Bob, and Beauclerc were holding on to

the lasso with both hands, and it tautened. As the canoe was swept onward, Gunten and Keller plunged into the water. For a moment they disappeared from sight. But the pull on the rope told that they were still holding on, and in a moment their heads appeared on the surface.

"Hold on!" muttered Bob.

The three chums held fast and drew on the rope. The lives of the two Swiss depended now on their keeping hold of the rope, and they were clinging to it like cats. The rushing current drove them on towards the falls, but the rope held, with the result that they swung in towards the bank lower down the stream.

Frank Richards & Co., still pulling in the rope, moved along the bank, and in a few minutes more Gunten and Keller were dragged out of the water, drenched, dripping, and almost fainting.

As they rolled, exhausted, on the rocky bank, the canoe disappeared over the falls lower down, to be dashed into a hundred pieces on the rocks far below.

UNPLEASANT GUESTS!

"THAT was a close call, I guess!" gasped Bob Lawless.

Kern Gunten sat up dazedly.

"Safe now, Gunten," said Frank.

"Oh!" gasped the Swiss, shuddering.

Keller groaned. He was still quivering with fright.

"All O.K. now!" said Bob Lawless. "You've had a jolly narrow escape, I guess!"

"Where's the canoe?" panted Gunten, as he staggered to his feet



Faint sounds were audible from the direction of the tethered horses.

"Over the falls!"

Gunten shivered. But for Bob Lawless and his rope the two Swiss would have been over the falls with the canoe, and lying lifeless under the foam on the rocks.

"All's well that ends well!" said Frank Richards comfortingly. "You chaps had better disrobe. This sun will soon dry your clobber. We'll get you some blankets."

"Thanks!" muttered Gunten.

"You've dropped in just in time for dinner," grinned Bob.

Gunten and Keller accompanied the three chums from the bank to the camp.

"I—I say, I believe you fellows have saved our lives!" muttered Keller.

Bob laughed.

"Not much doubt about that, I guess," he said. "You're welcome. Get your duds off, and get into some blankets before you catch cold!"

That advice was too good not to be taken. Gunten and Keller stripped, and rubbed themselves dry, and then sat down, wrapped in blankets, while their clothes dried.

"Dinner's ready!" announced Chunky Todgers.

"You'll join us, of course, you two?" said Bob.

"You bet!" answered Gunten. "We've lost all our truck in the canoe. I guess there'll be no getting any of it back!"

"I guess not, unless you dive under the waterfall for it."

"Then we're stranded!"

"Looks like it," agreed Bob. "We can stand you grub-stakes, though, till you get fixed!"

Gunten looked at him curiously. Bob Lawless seemed to have forgotten entirely that the Swiss was his enemy at school, and to be thinking only of good-natured hospitality. That was not Gunten's way at all, and he could not understand it—if he had cared to understand it.

The schoolboy explorers sat down to an ample dinner round the camp-fire, and the two Swiss joined them. Both of them looked glum. All their truck had gone over the falls, and they were left in the mountains with nothing but their clothes. It was not a pleasant situation, and the fact that they were dependent on the hospitality of Frank Richards & Co. did not make it any more pleasant.

"What are you fellows doing up here?" asked Bob Lawless, while the meal was going on. "I never expected to see you in the Cascade Mountains."

"We came up North-West for our holiday, same as you did," answered Gunten. "We were doing it in a canoe, though."

"Good idea—if you knew how to handle a canoe," said Bob, with a smile. "A bit risky otherwise!"

"I've done a lot of canoeing!" growled Gunten. "This country is new to me, of course. I guess we're stumped now. Grub and clothes, and tent and rifles—all gone over the falls. It's rotten luck!"

"I guess you were lucky not to go over with them!"

"I know that, but it doesn't make it any better!" grunted the Swiss. "I wondered whether we should fall in with your crowd up here. I never reckoned it would be like this, hang it!"

"Well, you can get to Last Chance Camp, and home from there," said Bob. "Or, if you've got the dust, you can rent a new canoe there, and buy fresh truck."

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"I'm not short of money," said Gunten arrogantly.

"Then you're fixed all right. It only means a tramp to Last Chance. You can buy anything you want there, if you've got the dust."

"How far is it?"

"About twenty miles, following this valley and the lower trail."

"Twenty miles on foot in this kind of country! Oh, gum!"

"I wish we had hosses to lend you," said Bob. "But we've only got our own gees and the pack-mule. We'll fix you up with grub, anyhow, and give you your bearings. Stay here till tomorrow, and start at dawn, and you'll land in Last Chance by dark."

"Twenty miles in a day in this country!" said Gunten. "That's rather too big an order for me!"

"Blest if I see what you'll do, then, unless you roll down the mountain!"

Gunten grunted, and was silent.

Dinner finished, Chunky Todgers rolled himself under a tree to take a nap, as was his custom.

Gunten and Keller changed from blankets into their clothes, which had dried now, between the sun and the fire.

Gunten turned a cigarette-case out of his pocket, and muttered a curse as he found that the contents were soaked with water.

"You galoots got anything to smoke?" he asked.

"No!" answered Frank Richards curtly.

Gunten sneered.

"Still keeping up the high-falutin game in the mountains?" he asked. "What for? Miss Meadows can't spot you here, I guess!"

"Oh rats!"

"If you'd been looking after your canoe instead of smoking, your truck mightn't have gone over the falls!" said Bob Lawless.

"Thanks! When I want a sermon I'll ask for one, Lawless!"

Bob's eyes gleamed, but he made no rejoinder. The Swiss was a guest in the camp, and Bob resolved to bear him as patiently as he could till he took his departure.

"You fellows staying in this spot long?" asked Gunten, after a long pause.

"We were going on to-day," answered Bob; "but if you're staying over the night, we'll stay."

"Look here," said Gunten, "we'll join you in your trip, if you like."

"Oh!" said Bob.

"We can get horses from somewhere," said Gunten. "In fact, you could lend me a mount to ride down to Last Chance and buy a couple of gees. I've got the money. I could sell them again in the Thompson Valley when I get home. I guess I've had enough of canoeing. What do you say?"

Frank Richards & Co. looked rather uncomfortable. They did not want the company of Gunten and Keller, whom they did not like, and who, they knew, disliked them intensely. They were sorry for Gunten's disaster, but that was really no reason why the two Swiss should plant themselves on the party in this way.

"Well?" said Gunten.

"I guess we'll ask you to excuse us, Gunten," said Bob candidly. "We don't pull together, you know, and it would only end in a row sooner or later. We'll help you all we can, but we can't travel together."

"Dash it all, Gunten, we're always rowing at school!" said Frank Richards. "You don't want our company."

"Any port in a storm!" said Gunten, with a sneer.

"Well, if you put it on that footing, you can hardly expect us to agree," said Bob Lawless tartly.

"No wantee Gunttee," murmured Yen Chin. "Gunttee bad felllee. We good felllee. Oh, yes!"

"You've got a dashed heathen with you," said Gunten, "and that fat pig Todgers—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers, who was apparently sleeping with one ear open. "What's that, Gunten?"

"Oh, you're awake, are you? I called you a fat pig!"

"Well, I'd rather be a fat pig than foreign trash!" said Chunky. "And if you don't mend your manners, Gunten, I'll give you a black eye to carry away with you!"

"Get a move on, then!" said Gunten contemptuously.

Chunky sat up.

"I guess I will, if you want it!" he exclaimed.

"Well, why don't you?" sneered the Swiss.

Chunky Todgers jumped up in great wrath.

"Chuck it, Chunky!" said Bob. "You're not going to fight Gunten. There's not going to be any fighting here!"

"Look here, Bob—"

"Go to sleep, old chap. If Gunten fights anybody, it's going to be me!" said Bob.

"Oh, all right!" yawned Chunky Todgers.

"Give him one in the eye for me, Bob—I don't mind!"

And Chunky curled up on a bearskin again.

Bob Lawless turned to the Swiss.

"Now, you'd better draw in your horns, Gunten," said Bob, very quietly. "I don't want to row with you, as you're a guest here, in a way, but if you're spoiling for a fight, I'm ready to oblige you!"

Gunten shrugged his shoulders. Evidently he was not spoiling for a fight with Bob Lawless.

Gunten and Keller moved away again, scowling.

STRANDED!

THE holiday party from Cedar Creek remained camped in the upland valley that afternoon, on account of the two unexpected guests.

It had been Frank Richards & Co.'s intention to move on westward, but it was left now till the morning to "pull up stakes."

When the night fell on the valley the party gathered round the camp-fire, fed with branches and pine cones, and glowing merrily.

At supper, Gunten and Keller seemed to throw off their resentful mood, and they became a good deal more agreeable.

Kern Gunten chatted away quite pleasantly and gave the schoolboy explorers the impression that he was not so ill-tempered and thankless a fellow as he had appeared.

Night lay dark on the mountains, and through the gloom came the sound of the falling waters from the cascade near at hand. Close by the camp, the horses and the pack-mule were tethered on the trail ropes and lying at rest.

Bob Lawless rose from his seat on a log at last.

"Time to turn in!" he remarked.

"My watch first!" said Frank Richards.

Kern Gunten gave them a sharp look.

"You keep watch at night?" he asked.

"You bet!" answered Bob.

"But surely there's no danger here?"

"Can't be too careful in the hills. There are

a good many horse thieves in this section. This isn't the Thompson Valley, you know. We're in the North-West now."

Gunten's brow clouded for a moment.

"Well, I guess it's just as well to be careful," he agreed. "You'll take it in turns, I suppose?"

"Correct!"

"We'll take our turns, then, while we're with you."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bob good-naturedly. "You fellows get a good sleep. You've a long walk before you to-morrow. We can keep watch."

"But we'd rather take our share," said Keller. "We don't want to sleep while you fellows are staying awake. It's not fair."

Bob Lawless hesitated.

"I suppose you can trust us to keep awake?" said Gunten, rather disagreeably. "Look here, Keller and I will keep one watch together, if you like. Dash it all, we're simply not going to snooze all the time while you chaps do sentry-go!"

"Well, if you like, it's a go!" said Bob.

"It's only fair," said Gunten.

"Right you are, then!"

"Which watch will you take?" asked Frank Richards.

"Well, suppose you call us at midnight," said Gunten. "Then we'll take a couple of hours."

"You'd really do better to get a good rest before your tramp to-morrow," said Vere Beauclerc.

"What rot! You're going on the trail to-morrow. I suppose we don't need any more rest than you do."

Beauclerc smiled without replying. In point of fact, the two Swiss were not by any means so fit as the Canadian schoolboys, and were not equal to roughing it as they did. But Gunten was allowed to have his way.

Yen Chin eyed him rather curiously while he was speaking, with a peculiar gleam in his almond eyes. Neither Yen Chin nor Chunky Todgers shared in keeping watch, as a rule. The three chums preferred to rely upon themselves; and Chunky, at least, could never be depended upon to keep awake.

Frank Richards took first watch, and the rest of the party rolled themselves in their blankets and stretched themselves on the ground, with their feet to the fire. They were asleep in a very few minutes.

Frank, sitting on a boulder close by the camp, with his rifle on his knees, remained on watch. At the approach of midnight, however, he rose and shook Gunten by the shoulder. The Swiss started up.

"Your turn!" said Frank. "But if you'd rather stick to your blankets, Gunten, I'll call Bob."

"I guess not," said Gunten, rising and stretching himself with a yawn. "Fair's fair, you know. Come on, Keller!"

He shook his companion and Keller rose.

Frank Richards was glad enough to roll himself in his blanket and sleep, and in a few minutes his eyes were soundly sealed.

Gunten and Keller sat on a log near at hand, wide awake, and certainly watchful. But their watchfulness, curiously enough, was directed towards the sleeping schoolboys. They spoke occasionally, in low whispers.

Kern Gunten rose to his feet at last.

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"O.K., Keller!" he whispered, almost inaudibly.

Keller caught him by the arm.

"Let up!" he breathed.

"What's the trouble?"

"The Chinese's awake!" breathed Keller. "He's watching us!"

Kern Gunten drew a quick breath. He glanced towards Yen Chin, who was rolled in a blanket within a few yards, half-seen in the flicker of the dying camp-fire.

The little Celestial was motionless.

Gunten listened intently.

"He's asleep, like the rest, Keller," he whispered at last.

Keller's grip tightened on his companion's arm.

"I tell you he's awake!" he muttered. "I caught the firelight on his face for a second, and his eyes were open. He doesn't trust us, Gunten, and he's watching, sure."

Gunten gritted his teeth hard. The little Chinese's face was hidden in shadow, and Gunten fixed his eyes upon the spot, waiting for the next leap of the dying flame.

It came, and for a moment Yen Chin's face was visible. The eyes were closed, as if in slumber.

Gunten breathed with relief.

"He's fast asleep," he whispered. "You were mistaken, Keller. He's as safe as the rest. Why shouldn't he be?"

"He's a suspicious little hound. I saw him watching you when you were proposing to take watch."

"It's all O.K., I tell you! Come on!"

"I guess—"

"I tell you it's all right!" muttered Gunten impatiently. "We want to get a good start before they wake. Come on!"

Keller yielded to his companion and rose from the log.

With noiseless footsteps the two Swiss backed away from the fire in the direction of the staked-out horses. The fire died down again, and all was gloom.

Then Yen Chin, the Chinese, moved, and his almond eyes opened very wide indeed. His head was slightly raised, and he peered through the darkness. Dark as it was now round the camp, he could see that Gunten and Keller were no longer seated on the log.

His eyes glittered, and he sat up quietly. From the direction of the horses there came a sound of movement and the snort of a horse. Yen Chin rose to his knees and moved quietly towards Frank Richards, and shook him gently by the shoulder.

"Flanky!" he whispered.

Frank Richards' eyes opened. Yen Chin placed a finger on his mouth before he could speak, and Frank gazed up at him in the gloom, amazed.

"No talkee!" murmured Yen Chin. "Bad foreign flash steal hossee. Me no thustee foreign flash; keepee watchee. Guntee and Kellee go takee 'way hossee. Oh, yes!"

Frank Richards started violently. He threw off the Celestial's hand and sat up, throwing aside his blanket. Such treachery seemed incredible, even on the part of Gunten and Keller, rogues as he knew them to be.

"Flanky, listen!" muttered the Chinese.

Frank listened. The fire had died down, and he could see little but the vague shapes of the pine-trees and the great rocks. But from the

direction of the tethered horses faint sounds came.

The horses were being loosened from the tether.

Frank Richards sprang to his feet, his eyes gleaming with anger and indignation. As he did so Keller came back towards the camp. He was heading for the saddles and bridles, which were heaped near the fire. His intention was plain enough.

The trail-ropes had been unfastened, and Gunten had the horses in hand, but bridles and a couple of saddles were wanted by the young rascals.

Frank Richards kicked the fire, and a spurt of flame shot up from the embers, lighting up the camp.

Keller started back with a cry.

"You rascal!" shouted Frank. "What are you doing?"

He ran angrily towards the Swiss.

Keller, with a gasping cry, ran back into the darkness, calling:

"Look out, Gunten!"

In the blaze of the revived fire Gunten was visible for a moment, holding the trail-ropes in a bunch, with the five horses attached. But the flame died down, and the darkness swallowed him again.

Frank ran on in the gloom, close behind Keller. He overtook the gasping Swiss and seized him by the shoulder.

"You rotten cad!" he panted.

Keller turned on him desperately, his hand clutching up a loose rock.

Thud!

Frank Richards gave a cry as the rock thudded on his chest, sending him spinning backwards. He fell heavily to the earth.

Bob and Beauclerc, and even Chunky Todgers, were wide awake now and on their feet, calling out to know what was the matter.

As Frank Richards fell, Keller ran on and joined his comrade.

"Vamoose!" he panted.

Gunten was already running, leading the five horses after him, and Keller ran with him. There was no time then to think of saddles and bridles.

Bob Lawless uttered a shout as he heard the hoofs from the darkness.

"The hosses! They're loose!"

"Where's Frank?"

"Flanky here!" called out Yen Chin. The little Chinese was on his knees by Frank Richards' side. "Flanky hurt!"

"What!"

Bob and Beauclerc rushed to the spot, almost stumbling over them in the gloom.

Frank staggered to his feet, panting.

"They've taken the horses!" he gasped. "Gunten and Keller! Keller knocked me over with a rock!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Down the valley, hidden from sight, the ringing hoofs could be heard, receding farther every moment.

Bob Lawless gave a yell of wrath.

"Halt, you coyotes!" he roared. "Gunten, bring those hosses back, or I'll fire after you!"

He had his rifle in his hand, and he threw it to his shoulder as he called. There was no reply save the jingling of hoofs on the rocks.

Crack!

Bob Lawless was as good as his word. He fired high, however, though it was the thought of the horses, rather than the two rascally Swiss, that made him do so.

The report of the rifle rang out among the rocks with a thousand echoes.

"Come on!" muttered Bob.

He rushed in pursuit, guided by the sound of the hoofs, with Beauclerc and Chunky Todgers at his heels, breathing wrath and vengeance.

Frank Richards followed them more slowly. He was aching and breathless from the heavy blow he had received.

But the trampling hoofs receded farther and farther. The chums could guess that Keller and Gunten were mounted now, and on foot they had no chance against the horses. It was risky enough to ride unbridled horses in the darkness, but the way down the valley lay clear for some miles, as Gunten had observed during the day.

Farther on, there was a rocky descent, where it would be necessary to dismount. But there the Swiss would be far out of reach.

Bob Lawless halted at last.

"No go!" he said abruptly. "We can't overtake them on foot. Let's get back to camp."

And the chums of Cedar Creek, in a furious mood, returned to the camp-fire.

NECK OR NOTHING!

THERE was no more sleep for Frank Richards & Co. that night.

They replenished the fire and sat down by it to discuss the situation.

Gunten and Keller had taken away the horses of the whole party, leaving only the pack-mule, a useful animal enough, but useless for pursuing the amateur horse thieves.

"The sneaking coyotes!" said Bob Lawless between his teeth. "I guess Gunten had this in mind all the time when he was proposing to take his turn at keeping watch."

"We oughtn't to have trusted him," said Beauclerc.

"Well, who'd have thought of a treacherous trick like this?"

Yen Chin grinned.

"Me tinkee," he said. "No tinkee Guntee. Me watchee, wakkee Flanky. Oh, yes, Chinese velly clevee old lascal!"

Bob grinned.

"We're stranded," he went on. "Of course, those galoots don't mean to steal the horses. Even Gunten would draw the line at that, I reckon. They've borrowed them and left us stranded. They didn't want to walk to Last Chance to-morrow; and they did want to play us a rotten trick. I guess they'll leave the critters at Last Chance for us—if they get there! Like a silly jay I told Gunten all about the trails, and how to get there, bother him!" Bob gritted his teeth. "Fancy playing a trick like that on us after we yanked them out of the river and saved their worthless skins!"

"Guntee velly bad fellee!" said Yen Chin. "And me no tinkee gettee back hossee."

"You young ass, Gunten wouldn't dare to steal them!" said Beauclerc.

"No gettee back, allee samee. When Guntee done with hossee, turnee loose, me tinkee. Oh, yes!"

"My hat!" murmured Frank Richards.

Bob Lawless nodded.

That Gunten would attempt to sell the horses like a real horse thief was not probable. He was none too honest, but he had the consequences to fear. It was only too probable that he would turn the animals loose to wander, perhaps

intending to explain later that they had got loose by accident.

In that case, he would only have to answer for a practical joke; but the effect would be the same for the chums, who would be stranded in the mountains without their horses—to say nothing of their value.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Beauclerc at last. "Gunten's rotter enough for anything. I'm afraid he doesn't mean us to see the horses again."

Bob Lawless was thinking hard. He did not speak for some time, and his chums were silent.

"I guess it's so," said Bob at length. "We've got to get the horses back. We can't run them down, and there's no trail on the rocks. We've got to head them off."

"Head them off!" repeated Frank.

"Sure! They're bound to make for Last Chance. It's the only settlement in this part of the mountains, and they're lost otherwise. They've got no grub, and only the clothes they stand up in. When they get to the end of the valley they'll have to go slow in the dark; it's a dangerous trail. Last Chance Camp is five hundred feet lower down than this valley. I guess we can head them off, but we shall have to wait for morning."

"But—"

"The camp's twenty miles," said Bob. "That's by the trails. But in a straight line three miles would take us into the trail a bit out of the camp. Only it means climbing down through rough mountain, through the pine forest, with your neck to pay for it if you make a slip. You fellows game?"

"Phew!" said Frank.

"It's that, or lose the hosses," said Bob.

"We're game," said Beauclerc quietly; and Frank Richards nodded.

The three chums were grave enough as they made their preparations for the adventure. But they did not hesitate. As soon as the first rays of dawn gleamed down on the mountains they started.

Bob Lawless was the guide; his unerring instinct in woodcraft was the only guide they had. Gunten and Keller, with the horses, were certain to follow the path Bob had explained to them to get to the camp.

From the high uplands, where the schoolboys had camped, the descent in a direct line was rough and precipitous, by sloping cliffs and yawning crevices, shadowed by scrubby pine. The three chums plunged into the pinewood, and the descent commenced, Bob Lawless leading the way.

In places the descent was so steep that they had to cling to rocks and to thickets to avoid rolling down, and in other places they forced their way through tangled thickets, with scratched hands and torn clothes. But they kept on steadily as the sun rose higher in the sky.

They were able to look down into the lower valley at last, where the trail lay to the camp, worn by countless hoofs. By that trail Gunten was bound to pass if he was heading for Last Chance.

"I guess we're well ahead of the thieves," said Bob breathlessly. "With the hosses they had fifteen miles to cover to get as far as the trail yonder. And I calculate they wouldn't ride fast in the dark, and not knowing the country."

(Continued on page 35.)



NO FLUTTER FOR TUCKEY!

POM-POM!

Pom-pom-pom!

The dull beating of the tom-tom echoed far and wide on the broad Savannah, outside Port of Spain.

Jack Drake and Dick Rodney looked round them with interest. They sat in the buggy with Arthur Cazalet, their West Indian chum; Mr. Cazalet, the sun-browned planter, was driving.

It was a half-holiday on the school ship, and Drake and Rodney were enjoying a run ashore; the last, probably, before the old Benbow lifted her anchor and steered westward.

Along the road from Port of Spain innumerable vehicles were passing, and still more innumerable pedestrians tramped. To the juniors it seemed as if most of the population of Trinidad were converging towards the race-ground.

White men, brown, black, and yellow crowded the road and the Savannah. Loud music—more or less musical—came from a huge merry-go-round, with shrieks of laughter and excitement from festive negroes and mulattoes. By the roadside a white-haired African was beating a tom-tom, and a dozen blacks were dancing round him. Evidently it was a day of festivity for the coloured population.

"What a thumping row!" remarked Jack Drake. "Those fellows seem to be enjoying it, though!"

"They enjoy most things," said Arthur Cazalet, with a smile. "The blacks take life pretty easily. Hallo, there are some of your schoolfellows!"

He nodded towards three fellows in straw hats who were strolling by the group of negroes, glancing at them curiously as they passed. The three were Daubeny, Torrence, and Egan of the Shell.

Drake waved his hand to Daubeny.

"Cheerio, Daub!" he called out.

Vernon Daubeny glanced round and waved a
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HIS OWN ENEMY!

By Owen Conquest.

Star school story, introducing Jack Drake & Co., the boys of the school ship Benbow.

hand back to him. Torrence smiled, and Egan frowned. The latter slipped his arm through Daubeny's and drew him quickly away.

"Come on, Daub!" the juniors in the buggy heard him say.

Vernon Daubeny hesitated, but he walked away with his companions, and the trio disappeared in the crowd.

Jack Drake knitted his brows for a moment. It was pretty clear that Egan meant to keep Daubeny at a safe distance from the Fourth Formers.

The buggy rolled on as fast as the crowded state of the road allowed, and the thumping of the tom-tom became duller behind. The raucous strains of the merry-go-round grew louder and sharper. The buggy stopped at last, and Mr. Cazalet turned to the three boys.

"I'll put you down here," he said. "I can trust you to look after yourselves for a time, I suppose?"

"I hope so, sir," said Drake.

"There is a fair here as well as the races, as you see," continued the planter. "Plenty for you to see, without getting into mischief. You will find me in the grand stand when you want me."

The chums alighted and walked along the booths, where voluble negroes and negresses were offering articles for sale, in a constant clatter of tongues. Coolie pedlars, with olive, East Indian faces, displayed trays of their wares. Silent, sedate Chinamen moved about, surveying the animated scene with grave, almond eyes—some of them with their wives bedecked in the most striking finery. The grand stand was crowded with the wealth and fashion of Port of Spain. The endlessly varying costumes in the crowd struck the schoolboys; above all, the finery of the most wealthy black ladies, some of whom were clad in expensive Parisian confections, which must have been extremely uncomfortable under the blazing sun of Trinidad.

"Hallo, old tops!"

A fat hand was laid on Jack Drake's sleeve. It belonged to Tuckey Toodles. The fat junior grinned affectionately at the chums of the Fourth and gave Cazalet a careless nod.

Drake and Rodney did not look very affectionate. They could easily have dispensed with the society of Rupert de Vere Toodles.

"Hallo, you're here after all!" grunted Drake.

"Certainly, old fellow. Dr. Pankey's brought a crowd of the chaps to see the sights," said Tuckey. "I came with the rest. But I've dodged away. I'm not going to have the merry medico watching me all the afternoon."

"Better go back to the party, hadn't you?"

"My dear old fellow, not at all. I spotted you and ran down. Surely you didn't think I would desert you?" said Toodles affectionately.

"Besides, the fact is, old scout, I'm going to have a flutter."

"Fathead!"

"There's a horse they call Cristobal Colon—after old Columbus, I suppose," said Tuckey. "He's a goer! He's going to win the five o'clock."

"How do you know, you ass?"

"Well, Egan thinks so," babbled Tuckey. "Egan knows a lot about horses. You know he often used to win when he plunged at St. Winny's. Daub and Torrence generally lost money, but Egan often brought it off. I remember you remarking on it when you used to go in for that kind of thing with them, Drake."

Drake flushed red. He would gladly have forgotten that there had been a time when he had been foolish and reckless in company with the bucks of St. Winifred's. But Tuckey Toodles was not famous for his tact. If there was anything best left unmentioned, Tuckey could always be relied upon to blurt it out.

"You silly goat—" began Rodney.

"I'm backing Egan's fancy," said Toodles, unheeding. "I'm going to have a quid on Cristobal Colon. You fellows come along with me and I'll introduce you to the bookie."

"You silly owl!" exclaimed Drake.

"I say, old fellow—"

"If I see you speaking to a bookie I'll give you my boot!"

"My dear chap, we're quite safe here," said Toodles fatuously. "Old Pankey can't have his eye on us all the time. Perhaps it would be a bit too conspicuous to go among the bookies. But it's all right—there's the captain."

"What captain?"

"Egan's friend—Captain St. Leger," said Tuckey Toodles. "He's a regular sportsman. Army man, you know. He doesn't look much like an Army captain, but he says so. He takes bets. Egan's betting with him, you know. He'll give us the odds. I say, will you lend me a few pounds, Drake? I'll hand it back this evening out of my winnings, and stand a feed on the Benbow, too."

"You born idiot!" gasped Drake.

"If you've got a quid or two to spare, Rodney—"

"Rats!"

"I think you're jolly mean!" said Toodles. "I've just given you a tip worth no end of money. I say, Cazalet"—Tuckey Toodles turned his sweetest, fat smile upon the planter's son, whom he had hardly noticed hitherto—"I dare say you've got a few quids about you."

"Quite so," said Arthur dryly.

"Lend me some."

Jack Drake interrupted Tuckey Toodles at that point by smacking him forcibly on top of his hat.

Tuckey was sporting his big Spanish sombrero, which was too big for him, and the smack on the crown drove the sombrero down over his ears, and Tuckey was buried to the chin.

"Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groogh!" came in muffled accents from the interior of the sombrero. "Yow-ow! Pull it off, you rotters!"

Tuckey struggled with the sombrero. But it was jammed down quite tightly, and it was no easy task to get it off again. While Tuckey was engaged in that interesting task, Jack Drake & Co. walked away at a good pace, leaving him to it.

When Tuckey's flushed and wrathful face emerged from the sombrero at last, the chums of the Fourth had disappeared.

A ROW AT THE RACES!

ARTHUR CAZALET was looking rather thoughtful as he walked away with his friends from the Benbow.

Drake and Rodney felt extremely uncomfortable. Tuckey's fatuous babble had been very exasperating. The Benbow fellows were on the Savannah that afternoon to enjoy themselves; but Master Toodles evidently had an eye to personal profit—not that he was likely to bag any profits by speculations on horseflesh. But if he had lost money, Tuckey would have had the consolation that it wasn't his own.

Cazalet smiled as he found Drake's glance turned on him.

"That chap Toodles is rather original," he remarked.

"He's a born silly ass!" growled Drake. "I'm sorry I didn't kick him now! Who's this Captain St. Leger he was speaking of? Have you ever heard of him?"

Arthur Cazalet nodded.

"A rather shady character of Port of Spain," he said. "He's no more a captain than he is a field-marshal. He lives on races and billiards. The fact is, my father saw one of your fellows talking with him in Frederick Street one day and chipped in. He thought he ought to put the kid on his guard."

"Quite right. It was Egan, I suppose?" said Drake. He could not help thinking, however, that perhaps it was Daubeny.

"Yes, Egan," said Arthur. "He took what my pater said in good part; otherwise, I think dad would have felt bound to mention the matter on the Benbow. That man isn't fit for a fellow to speak to."

"I suppose he's here to-day?"

"He's always at the races; it's his living."

Drake looked round him with a clouded brow. He had little doubt that Vernon Daubeny would make Captain St. Leger's acquaintance that afternoon, if he had not made it before. He knew that Daub's half-hearted efforts at reformation would fail if Egan had his way.

"There he is!" added Arthur.

Near a corner of the grand stand, behind the building, three Benbow juniors stood chatting to a horsy-looking man who had the half-fashionable, half-hangdog look of the professional punter.

"So that's Captain St. Leger?" muttered Drake.

"That's the man."

Drake eyed the bogus captain with a glance of strong disfavour, from his carefully polished boots to his dyed moustache and sharp black eyes. "Sharper," was written all over the man's keen brown face; but the bucks of the Benbow seemed quite satisfied with him. The four were talking together earnestly.

Vernon Daubeny had his pocket-book in hand. He started as he saw Jack Drake near him and flushed hotly.

Drake stopped.

"Wait a minute for me, you fellows!" he muttered. "I want to speak a word to Daub."

Without waiting for Rodney or Cazalet to reply, Jack Drake walked quickly towards the group by the grand stand.

"Even money," the captain was saying as he came up.

"Done!" said Egan.

Egan gave Drake a bitter look as he arrived. The captain glanced at him and nodded carelessly—a salute of which Drake did not take any notice. He had no politeness to waste on a gentleman who lived by his wits. He touched Vernon Daubeny lightly on the arm.

"What do you want?" exclaimed Daubeny irritably.

"Your company, old chap," said Drake amicably. "We've got seats in the grand stand—Cazalet's got them—and we can make room for you. You'll come, won't you?"

"Not now."

"The races begin pretty soon," said Drake.

"I know."

"Daub's with us, Drake," said Egan, with a dangerous look. "What sort of a bounder do you call yourself to wedge in like this?"

"Do you think I don't know what your game is, Egan?" exclaimed Drake, his eyes flashing. "You're getting Daub to play the goat again in your rotten way!"

"Fair words, please!" said Egan, between his teeth.

"Plain English is good enough for you!" said Drake scornfully. "You are a rotter, and you're playing a rotten game! Daub, old chap, come along with us now!"

"Daub isn't exactly a kid in leading strings!" said Egan derisively. "Are you going to feed him, and put his bib and tucker on?"

Daub made an angry movement.

"Look here, Drake, I'm with these fellows," he said. "I suppose I can look after my own affairs?"

Drake checked the hot words that rose to his lips.

"Dr. Pankey is about the place somewhere, Daub," he said quietly. "If he should spot you playing the goat like this, you know what it means when you get back to the Benbow."

"Are you going to tell him?" sneered Egan.

"Hold your tongue!" said Drake savagely. "Daub, won't you do the sensible thing? Come along!"

"I won't come!" muttered Daubeny.

"If you're seen with this man—"

"Are you alluding to me?" struck in the captain, coming a pace forward and taking a grip on the cane he carried under his arm.

Drake eyed him fearlessly and contemptuously.

"Yes," he answered. "It doesn't need more than one look at you, Captain St. Leger, to see the kind of man you are!"

The tint in the captain's brown cheek deepened.

"You cheeky young cub—" he began.

"What the thump do you mean, Drake—in-sultin' my friends?" broke in Daubeny angrily. "Mind your own business—bother you! What the dickens do you want to meddle with me for?"

Drake bit his lip hard.

"Well, I won't meddle any further if it comes to that," he said. "If you choose to play the goat it's your own look-out, I suppose."

"Go and eat coke!"

"And take that to remind you of me!" said the captain, giving Drake a light cut across the shoulder with his cane.

Drake's eyes flamed. The worthy captain could not have anticipated the result of his

action, or doubtless he would have kept his cane under his arm.

Drake sprang forward with his hands up, and before the captain knew what was happening a hard set of knuckles crashed upon his rather bulbous nose.

Bump!

Captain St. Leger went down on his back with a shock that made him gasp—and with a nose more bulbous than ever.

"By gad!" he gasped.

"You rotten ruffian!" shouted Egan. "How dare—"

He broke off and backed away as Drake turned on him with flashing eyes.

Rodney and Cazalet came up with a run. The captain was struggling to his feet, his face pale with fury. There was every prospect of a terrific row; but a tall, broad-shouldered, coloured policeman came along through the buzzing throng that gathered immediately about the spot.

The sight of the officer of the law was enough for the captain—and for his friends the bucks, too. Captain St. Leger melted away in the crowd, and Daubeny & Co. disappeared as quickly as possible. Arthur put his hand through Jack Drake's arm and drew him away.

By the time the tall policeman was on the scene all was over.

Drake's lips were set as he hurried away with his friends. He had very nearly figured prominently in a racecourse row, which might have ended in the whole party being marched off to the police station. He shivered as he thought of that. He was not likely to waste much further thought on Vernon Daubeny that day.

DAUB'S LUCK!

"HALLO, dear old tops!"

It was Tuckey Toodles again. He joined the trio about half an hour after the scene with the captain, as they were making their way towards the entrance of the grand stand.

The afternoon racing was about to commence, and the throng on the Savannah was thicker than ever.

"Oh, buzz!" snapped Drake. His temper was still a little ruffled.

"I say, I'm sticking to you for the rest of the day!" said Toodles cheerily. "Too bad, my missing you before, wasn't it? I say, I left my cash on board the Benbow somehow, and I haven't even been able to go on the roundabouts. Have you fellows been on?"

"Bother the roundabouts!"

"You don't seem in a very good temper, Drake. I say, I heard Sawyer major say you'd been mixed up in a row with some racing roughs. Is it true?"

Drake compressed his lip. Evidently the scene with the captain had been witnessed by some of the Benbow fellows from afar.

"Bother Sawyer major!" he said.

"Bother him to bits, if you like!" answered Toodles. "He's an awful cad! He wouldn't lend me a miserable quid when I asked him. You fellows going into the grand stand? All right, I'll come!"

Drake paused.

"You haven't been on the roundabouts?" he asked.

"Not yet."

"Come on, then!"

"Good, old fellow!" said Tuckey affectionately. "I'm your man!"

Drake walked the fat junior away to the merry-go-round, put him on a wooden horse there, and paid for him.

The roundabout started, with a whirl and a clatter and a crash.

"Ain't you having a ride?" shouted Tuckey Toodles.

Drake smiled, and walked back to his friends. The merry-go-round was going fast, and Tuckey Toodles was safe for three minutes till it stopped. In that three minutes Jack Drake & Co. disappeared into the grand stand, far from Tuckey's pursuit.

When Rupert de Vere Toodles alighted, he looked for his schoolfellows, and found them not. They had escaped again.

"Rotters!" murmured Toodles; and he went to look for Sawyer major again, in the faint hope of "touching" that young gentleman for his further "exes."

Drake and Rodney and Arthur found their seats, rather low down in the stand, at the end of a row. Under the awnings, shaded from the sun, they had a good view of the course. The first race was already in progress when they settled down, and Rodney looked at his card.

"Hallo, Cristobal Colon's running in this!" he said. "Blue and white—that's the gee that Tuckey fancied, the ass!"

"There's six runners," said Arthur, his eyes on the race. "Blue and white doesn't seem to me to have much of a look in."

The juniors watched the race with interest. It was exciting enough, and thousands of eyes were upon it, and there was a ceaseless boom of shouting and yelling from the negroes.

Cristobal Colon, the horse fancied by Master Toodles on Egan's authority, was last of the six so far, and it was not till the end of the second lap that he pulled ahead a little.

Drake, who was at the end of the row of seats, heard a muttered exclamation as the horse began to gain, and looked round. Outside the stand, below him, leaning against it, was Vernon Daubeny. He did not see Drake or know that he was at hand; his eyes were glued upon the race.

From the tense expression on Daub's face, it was easy enough to see that he had backed Cristobal Colon heavily—more heavily, probably, than even the wealthy Daub could afford.

Drake looked at him rather grimly, but Daub did not glance up. The expression on his face grew more and more eager as he saw Cristobal Colon draw ahead of first one, and then another, of his competitors. Then dull, angry despondency settled on his features as the horse failed to make any further gain.

Drake heard him mutter savagely—it sounded like a curse—as the intervening heads blocked his view of the horses.

Jack Drake had lost his interest in the race now. Merely as an exhibition of horsemanship it was exciting enough, but it was certain that there were few who looked on the racing merely as a sport. The inseparable betting and black-guardism were there; the galloping horses were little more than an animated roulette-wheel to the eyes that watched.

Rodney touched his chum's arm, and Drake looked up quickly.

"How's it going?" he asked.

"Been asleep?" said Rodney, with a smile. "It's over."

"My hat! Who's won the thing?"

"The chap in the green jacket."

"Not Cristobal Colon?"

"Last but one," said Arthur, with a smile.

Jack Drake glanced down at the fellow leaning outside. Daubeny was standing, with a white face and clenched hands, staring straight before him. He made a sudden movement, and strode away into the crowd.

Drake started to his feet.

"Daub!" he called.

The Shell fellow did not hear. He strode away blindly, and Jack Drake's last look at Daub's face haunted him.

"What's the matter?" asked Rodney, glancing in wonder at Drake's troubled face.

Drake made a gesture towards Vernon Daubeny, who was just vanishing in the throng.

Rodney glanced after the Shell fellow; he could see only the back of his head, but the droop of Daub's head showed what he was feeling like just then.

"It's Daub!" muttered Drake. "He—"

"Hard hit?" said Rodney.

"Looks like it."

"Serves him right!" said Rodney.

Jack Drake made no reply to that.

Rodney was right enough, but his opinion was that of a fellow who had always been strong enough to go straight, and who felt as much scorn as compassion for wanderers from the right path. But Drake had recollections of his own which made him judge Daubeny more gently. It was not so very long since his own good-natured carelessness and the influence of evil counsellors had landed him in just such a scrape.

"You're not going?" asked Arthur. "There's several more races to be run yet."

"I'll come back," said Drake.

He quitted the stand with the intention of seeing Daubeny in the crowd.

Dr. Pankey was in the stand, as he noted, with a crowd of Benbow fellows, watching the show. Behind the stand there was solitude, as the view of the races was shut off. Only a big negro full of rum was lying on the ground, insensible, with innumerable flies and mosquitoes buzzing over him. Close to the building, as Drake came round, there was a sound of excited voices.

Daubeny was there, with Egan and Torrence.

Torrence had a pale, troubled look; his straw hat was pushed back from a perspiring brow. Daub and Egan seemed to be engaged in a hot dispute.

"I can't do it, I tell you!" Egan was saying. "It's not my fault the dashed horse has lost, is it? I can just get through—just. I tell you I can't spare a red cent for anybody else!"

"You—"

"I would if I could. You know I would," said Egan. "I can't, and there's an end. How are you fixed, Torrence?"

"Stony!" was Torrence's laconic reply. "I've paid up, and it's cleared me out!"

"What am I goin' to do?" Daubeny's voice was low and husky. "I tell you I can't settle! You idiot, Egan, with your dashed dead certs! The horse was no good!"

"See the captain and make an arrangement with him," said Egan. "He's a sport."

"A blackguardly racing tout, you mean!" said Daubeny bitterly.

"Whatever he is, you were willing enough to bet with him, and take his money, too, if you'd

won!" said Egan tartly. "It's no good cryin' over spilt milk. He will make some arrangement. He knows you can get money. Tell him you're expectin' a remittance from home."

"He knows the Benbow sails in a few days."

"We'll see him."

Jack Drake came up. He gave Egan a glance of angry contempt, and called to Daubeny.

"I say, Daub—"

"Hallo! You again?" said Daubeny, with a sneer. "Have you come to give me some more good advice? Go and eat coke!"

He strode away before Drake could reply.

DESERTED!

"**T**IME we cleared!" remarked Dick Rodney. The racing was over, and the chums of the Fourth were strolling round the Savannah, taking a last look at the crowds in the red glow of the sunset.

"I suppose we'd better clear," agreed Drake. "Dr. Pankey's gone with his little army. They'll have to tramp it back to the harbour. We're in luck. I'm sorry the Benbow is sailing next week. I wish you were coming up the Orinoco with us, Cazalet!"

Arthur smiled.

"I wish I were!" he said. "I'll see you again if the Benbow touches at Trinidad."

"I suppose your pater will be ready to start," said Drake. "Let's see, anyhow."

They found Mr. Cazalet with the buggy, a couple of negroes putting the horse in. He greeted his son and the schoolboys with a smile. The juniors stepped in, and the planter drove away, in the midst of a stream of other vehicles.

At the Cazalets' house the planter alighted, leaving his son to drive his guests down to the port. He shook hands warmly with the schoolboys, and bade them a hearty farewell. The buggy bowled on towards Port of Spain, Arthur handling the reins.

There was a sudden call from among the pedestrians by the roadside under the trees.

"Hallo, Drake! Give us a lift, will you?"

It was Torrence of the Shell. Egan was with him, but Vernon Daubeny was not to be seen.

Arthur Cazalet glanced at Drake and drew in by the roadside.

"We can find room, if you like, Drake," he said.

Drake's feelings were not exactly amicable towards Daub's pals, but they were Benbow fellows, and he was willing to help them along.

"Jump in, Torrence!" he said.

"Thanks! We couldn't get a cab back. Riches take unto themselves wings, you know, and fly away!" said Torrence, laughing.

"You coming in, Egan?"

Egan hesitated for a moment or two, reluctant to accept a favour from Jack Drake. But it was a long and weary walk back to the quay, and he was already tired; and the juniors had to report on the school ship by sunset. He nodded and followed Torrence into the buggy. Arthur drove on again.

"Daubeny gone back already?" asked Drake. Torrence coloured a little. Egan affected not to hear the question.

"I—I think not!" stammered Torrence.

Drake opened his eyes.

"He's not staying on the Savannah, surely?" he exclaimed. "He won't be back on the Benbow for calling-over, at this rate."

"I—I dare say he'll follow on," said Torrence uneasily. "Not my fault, Drake. He wouldn't come. You—you see, poor old Daub went in rather deep. We all did, for that matter. I'm stony. And Egan is bust to the wide, aren't you, Egan?"

"Yes, came the reply, in a growl.

"So is Daub," said Torrence. "But Daub went in too deep. We were so jolly certain that the horse would win; and, of course, Daub's got plenty of money. Only he hasn't got it on him, you know. He can get a remittance from his father, but that means delay. As we sail so soon, there won't be any more remittances to Port of Spain, and the next won't be till we get to Bolivar, in Venezuela. That means that Daub's stony broke for some time to come."

"Well?" said Drake impatiently.

"Well, he owes Captain St. Leger money on his bet," said Torrence reluctantly. "He would give him a note, to be met later, but—but—"

"But what?"

"St. Leger won't trust anybody out of his sight," said Torrence. "He—he thinks that once the Benbow's sailed Daub would laugh at his claim; of course, it can't be enforced legally."

"If—if Daub doesn't pay by to-morrow morning, Captain St. Leger is coming aboard at ten. I dare say he thinks that Daub can get the money from somewhere if he tries. Anyhow, that's what he's told Daub. And—and Daub daren't face it. If—if it came out what he's done, it's as likely as not that Mr. Vavasour would send him home to England by the next steamer, practically expelled. Poor old Daub can't face it. So—so he's not coming back to the Benbow, he says."

"Not coming back!" exclaimed Rodney.

"So he says. He can't face the row."

"And you left him to it—you, his pals!" said Drake savagely.

"What else could we do when he wouldn't come?"

Drake touched Cazalet on the arm.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "I'm getting down. I'm going back for Daubeny."

"Not alone," said Rodney quietly. "I'll come."

The buggy stopped.

"You two fellows are going back to look for your friend?" asked Arthur Cazalet.

"Yes," said Drake.

"Then I'll drive you back and help."

"I—I say, that's jolly good of you!" said Drake, hesitating. "But—but you can't be troubled like that!"

"That's all right," said Arthur, with a smile.

"These chaps can jump down. It's not much of a walk to the trams from here which will take them to the quay."

"We know our way," said Egan sullenly.

"Come on, Torrence!"

Torrence hesitated, but he followed Egan.

Arthur Cazalet turned the buggy in the road and drove back in the direction of the Savannah.

Drake gave him a grateful look. The young West Indian's help was invaluable in looking for the hapless Daubeny, and it was evident that he was ready to render any service he could.

The buggy bowled along under the purple sunset, till the sun's rim dipped at last and the darkness of the tropical night fell like a cloak of black velvet. From the darkness of the wide Savannah came the glimmer of bonfires, with shadowy figures dancing round them to the dull, beating drone of tom-toms.

Next Wednesday: "DAUBENY'S DEBT!"



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THE STRANDED SCHOOLBOYS!

(Continued from page 29.)

More likely, they waited for daylight once they were safe out of our reach."

"More likely," agreed Frank.

The three chums clambered on, and forced their way through the last thicket of spruce, and reached the open trail through the valley. There they sat down to rest. They were very tired by the rough clamber down the mountainside, and glad of a chance of getting their breath back.

The sun rose higher on the hills as they sat and watched the trail.

It was two hours before they heard a clatter of horses' hoofs.

As Bob had surmised, the amateur horse thieves had deferred their ride till daylight, after once putting a good distance between themselves and Frank Richards & Co.

Bob Lawless rose and drew his chums into the cover of a clump of pines.

"I guess it's our galoots!" he said.

The chums of Cedar Creek watched the trail between the trees. The clattering hoofs came

nearer, and they recognised Kern Gunten and Keller.

As the two riders came abreast of the trees Frank Richards & Co. rushed out into the trail.

Before Gunten and Keller even knew what was happening, they were seized and dragged from the ponies' backs.

Bump, bump!

With loud yells, the two Swiss landed on the ground. They sat up dazedly, hardly believing their eyes as they saw the three chums standing over them.

"Y-y-you!" stuttered Keller.

"You!" gasped Gunten. "How did you get here?"

"I guess we got ahead of you, you pesky coyote!" roared Bob Lawless. "Take the ponies, Cherub! Where are the other horses, Gunten?"

"They—they got loose—"

"You turned them loose, you mean!" said Bob. "I guess we shall have a hunt for them. But you're going through it first!"

He took one of the trail-ropes and coiled it grimly.

(Continued on next page.)

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Gunten and Keller watched him apprehensively, and, as Bob stepped towards them, they made a sudden rush to escape.

Frank and Beauclerc collared them promptly.

"Stick 'em on the trail!" said Bob.

The two Swiss, quivering with apprehension, were flung face down on the trail and held there. Then Bob Lawless got to work with the trail-rope.

Gunten and Keller yelled wildly as the coiled rope descended on them in turns.

Bob Lawless was impartial. He gave them equal punishment, and he laid it on till his stout arm was aching.

By that time, however, Gunten and Keller were aching a good deal more than Bob's arm, and their wild yells had died away into gasping and groaning.

"I guess that will do!" panted Bob at last. "You'd better think twice before you start hoss-stealing again, you pesky coyotes! Now light out before I give you some more!"

Gunten and Keller staggered to their feet. As Bob made a threatening gesture with the trail-rope they started, and went limping away down the trail, still groaning. With all their cunning, the two Swiss had not escaped the walk to the camp, after all.

"Now I reckon we've got to round up the other hosses," said Bob Lawless. "I reckon we shall find them on the trail somewhere. You'll have to ride double with the Cherub, Franky. I'm the heaviest."

The three schoolboys mounted the two ponies and started in the direction whence Gunten and Keller had come.

Yeu Chin's pony and Chunky's little fat steed were sighted a short distance up the trail and soon rounded in. Gunten had brought them a

good distance from the camp in the hills before letting them loose, but in that he had unconsciously played into the hands of the Cedar Creek fellows.

But Beauclerc's black horse, Demon, was not to be seen. Till noon the three chums hunted for him, but without success, and at last they took their way up the mountain paths to the camp.

"I guess we'll find the critter later, Cherub," said Bob comfortingly.

Chunky Todgers came to meet them as they drew near the camp at last.

"Got the other critters?" asked Chunky. "Oh, good! Demon's come back."

"Come back?" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"Yes; he trotted in on his own," grinned Chunky. "Got a lot of sense, that horse! There he is, Cherub."

There was a whinny, and the black horse came trotting up to greet his master.

Beauclerc's face was very bright as he fondled his horse.

"Good old gee!" said Bob Lawless. "No wonder we couldn't find him on the trails when he'd come home on his own accord! You ought to have thought of that, Cherub."

"I ought!" agreed Beauclerc, with a laugh.

"Dinner's ready," said Chunky. "I thought I'd get it ready. I've had mine, but I'll have another with you chaps, to keep you company."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Richards & Co. enjoyed that dinner. They felt that they had earned it. And two young rascals, limping wearily on the trail to Last Chance, still smarting from Bob's trail-rope, were very far from enjoying themselves.

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