

Next
Wednesday:

"THE MASKED ENTERTAINERS!" By Martin Clifford.

Every

Wednesday.



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CHAPTER I.

A Race—And a Study Feed.

“**R**ACE you round the quad, Figgie!” Tom Merry, the leader of the School House champions of St. Jim’s, suddenly addressed himself thus to a long-legged, wiry-looking junior, as the group of Lower School footballers trooped off the field after an hour’s strenuous practice.

The long-legged junior, who was none other than George Figgins, the great champion of the New House in the rivalry that raged exultantly between the juniors of the two Houses at St. Jim’s, accepted Tom Merry’s challenge with alacrity.

“Right-ho! I’m on!”
“Good! Hold this footer, Leather!” said Tom Merry, clucking the muddy ball into the arms of his class.

“Nothing like a good run just before tea!”
“Are you ready, then?” asked Figgins. “Keep here till start us!”

“I’m ready! Go ahead, Scuttie!”

Tom Merry and Figgins crouched down, ready to spring off the mark the instant the starter gave the word.

Keen, the Scottish partner in the lances firm of Figgins & Co., took out his handkerchief and held it aloft, while the group of laughing juniors of both Houses halted under the old class to watch the race.

“Ready, steady, go!” shouted Keen, dropping the handkerchief with a sweep of his arm.

Tom Merry and Figgins got off the mark together, and shot away over the crisp turf like a couple of robbers.

There was a yell of encouragement from the watching team.

“Go it, Tom Merry!”

Figgins & Co.'s Feud!

*A splendid long, complete school tale of
the chums of St. Jim's.*

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

“File in, Figgie!”
“Show ‘em what the School House can do!”
“Stick to it, New House!”

The racing figures dashed off in the gloom of the February evening, almost neck and neck. However, the keen eyes of Morley Leather and Manners, Tom Merry’s special chums and study-mates, noticed that the shorter of the two figures was gradually forging ahead, and they set up a fresh yell.

“Go it, Tenney!”
“Tom Merry look!”

Tom Merry’s natural quickness and agility, combined with that splendid physical fitness which helped to make him the champion athlete of the St. Jim’s juniors, certainly seemed to be giving him an advantage over the lanky New House fellow.

But Figgins’s chums, who knew their champion’s powers, were no whit dismayed. Figgins was a wonderful stayer, and those long legs of his had a habit of carrying him to the front at the end of the chase, just when his opponents had expended it.

As the two runners were swallowed up in the dusk of the old quad, with Tom Merry still leading slightly, the answering cheer of the New House supporters rang out no less confidently:

“Stick to it, Figgie!”
“Back up, New House!”

Tom Merry grinned as he heard the shouts.

“Steer your stamps, old man!” he jested over his shoulder.

“You’re getting left!”
“There was a snort from Figgins.

“Don’t you worry, Tom Merry!” he howled. “I’m coming by you in a minute.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” chuckled Tom Merry, rather heartily.

Next Wednesday:

"THE MASKED ENTERTAINERS!" AND "BIRDS OF PREY!"

"There was a sudden hail as the runners passed the steps of the School House on their circuit of the quad.

"Hallo, dear boys! Stop a moment!"
The hail came from an exceedingly thin and elegant janitor, wearing a monocle, who was just descending the steps—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, a member of Blake & Co. of Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage.

"Can't stop; we're racing!" shouted Tom Merry, as he sped past, with the long-legged Figgins in hot pursuit.

The race was nowing its end now, and Figgins was beginning to creep up to Tom Merry. But the School House janitor also had something up his sleeve still, and was only waiting for his rival to come abreast of him, before letting out his final spurt.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, swift as he was, was not to be so easily put off. He evidently had something important to say to Tom Merry and Figgins, and as he was a fast runner, he set off in chase of them without a moment's hesitation. Being fresh, and in the bottle, he soon drew level with Figgins, who was running strongly close behind Tom Merry now.

"I say, Figgie, dear boy—"
"Gee-oo! I missed Figgins. 'Shoo off!"
"Woolly, dear boy—"
Figgins started, but, not to be outdone, D'Arcy started too, and there was a sort of gasping roar from Figgins.
"Go away, and! Carry you—no we're— Oh! Oh!"
"Gee-oo! You! Help!"

As they streamed along side by side at a terrific pace, the very thing that Figgins feared happened, D'Arcy sneezed slightly, and lunged against Figgins, and in a moment both were thrown off their balance, and went with a crash to the ground.

They rolled over together in a jumble of arms and legs, and there was a roar of derision and wrath from the crowd of janitors who were waiting at the finishing post by the side, only a few yards away.

"Oh, you chaffers!"
"School House! School House!"
"Ha, ha! Look at 'em!"
Tom Merry ran a winner, and looked over his shoulder in surprise as he slowed down. He had heard a crash, of course, but had seen nothing, so had not known what it meant. He was surprised at not being challenged by Figgins at the post.

"My hat!" he exclaimed, as he saw Arthur Augustus and the New House janitor rolling together. "Guss's brought him down a cropper, and no mistake. Hope they're not hurt!"

There was a rush to surround the fallen janitors. Figgins was completely washed by the hail at the end of his grizzling run, and could only gasp and puff helplessly, as he was assisted to his feet by many kindly hands.

The indignation of the New House janitor knew no bounds, and many and furious were the glances bestowed upon the runner D'Arcy as he strove to rise with the assistance of the hard Monty Leather extended to him.

"The blamed one! What did he want to clip in for?" growled Fatty Wynn, the plump Welsh member of the famous New House Co. "Figgie was overhauling Tom Merry hand over fist when that silly ass lunged his way!"

"Oh course he was!" yelled Poot, another New House junior. "It's a beauty shame! Hard luck, Figgie!"
"It's rotten! Figgie'd have won easily!"
"Hoar, hoar!"

"Oh, dear it said, you shape!" said Monty Leather, to the indignant New House congress. "Tom Merry would have won all right, all the same! He had a winning load all through."

"Faith, an' so he did!" exclaimed Reilly, the School House janitor heading from Belfast.

"Anyone could see that, of course!" ejaculated Manners, of Tom Merry's own study.
There was a howl from the New House fellows.
"But!"

"But!"
"And many of 'em!"
"Well, hang a young man's way!" said Leather, laughing.
"Tom Merry actually won, anyway. Come on, Gussie!" he added, giving the swell of St. Jim's a powerful pull up.
"What are you sitting down there for all this time! Up you go!"

"Ma Jove! I-I can't, dear boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus, making a manful effort to rise. "I've twisted my foot, or something!"
"My hat!"

The janitors, New House as well as School House, were all sympathy at once, and all their indignation was forgotten. Even Figgins felt the consolation that he was about to give vent to against the fellow who had brought him down so lowly, subsided as quickly as it had arisen.

Arthur Augustus was lifted gently up, and it was found that he had indeed twisted his ankle. It was not really very bad, but it was severe enough to cause him considerable pain, and to make him walk with a very pronounced limp.

D'Arcy himself made light of the mishap.
"It's a wretched business, of course," he remarked. "But it'll be all right in a day or two. It's nothing really!"
"Hope so, Gussie, but you wouldn't put more weight on it than you can help for a bit," said Manners. "Lean on me, old son."

And Manners proffered a sturdy shoulder to support the swell of St. Jim's across the quad.

"I'm sorry this has happened, Gussie," said Figgins sincerely. "But what an earth did you want to shove in for just when we were having a race!"

"But Jove! I was forgetting! I came out to ask you fellows to be in—Tom Merry & Co. and Figgie & Co. as well. I've just had a veritable lesson my governor, and Blake and Howison and Dig are getting a really wiggins' tea ready. I just came out to ask you fellows to, as I explained with you two ass, as you would not listen to me. I am sorry, however, that I was the means of giving you a beauty lay, Figgie, dear boy!"

"Oh, pray don't mention it," said Figgins a little gruffly.

"It's jolly good of you to ask us to tea, though, Gussie," he added graciously. "We'll come, rather."

"I should jolly well think we would, Figgie!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn warmly. "You're a jolly good sort, D'Arcy!"

"Ha, ha! You were saying he was a silly ass just now!" chuckled Leather.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, rats!" said Fatty Wynn. "That was—that was below!"

"Before he asked you to a feed!"
"Oh, choose it!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're a corking one, Monty Leather!" growled Fatty Wynn. "When shall we come, D'Arcy! Now, right away!"

"Certainly, if you like, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus. "But I thought beforehand—"

"We must run in and change first, Fatty, you see!" said Figgins, laughing. "Come on! They'll have a little something for you, I dare say!"

"But look here, Figgie," protested Fatty Wynn, "D'Arcy says we can go right in now, just as we are. You don't mind us not changing, D'Arcy, do you?"

Finished the fat janitor, turning abruptly to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Certainly not, dear boy!" said D'Arcy graciously.

"There you are, Figgie," urged the Welsh janitor. "Much better not be late for a feed, you know."

"Well, I jolly well know I'm going to change first!" said Figgins. "So come along, you blessed peepers!"

"I'm jolly well going as I am!" declared Fatty Wynn obstinately. "D'Arcy's the best, and he's given me his permission, so it's all right, ain't it, you see? Besides, I wouldn't be able to help with the cooking, and—"

"And with the washing!" put in Monty Leather.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, chuck it, Leather!" growled Fatty Wynn. "You jakes ain't funny; rotten bad taste I call 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, come on, D'Arcy, I'll go with you now!"
"Very well, dear boy!"

"Come on then, Kerr, and leave that peepie to do as he likes," grinned Figgins. "We shan't get him away from D'Arcy as long as there's a crumb of the feed left, that's certain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
And Figgins and Kerr sprinted off across the quad, to the New House, while their fat chum, with Tom Merry, Manners, and Leather, escorted the limping swell of St. Jim's into the School House, and up to Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage.

There Fatty Wynn was seen in his element, assisting Blake

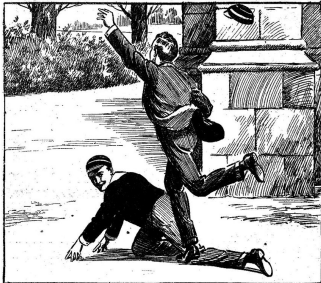
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(See column 2, page 27 of this issue.)

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Blake heard the prefect close behind him, and suddenly threw himself down upon the ground. It was an odd trick, but it worked. Right over him Mowatt went sprawling, with a wild yell. (See Chapter 4.)

and Co. in their elaborate preparations for a grand study "feed," and performing wonderful feats of culinary skill, and incidentally partaking of a good many snacks, just to keep his strength up, until the meal was ready. It is likely that Fatty Wynn "snacks" alone, if put together, would be considered a very good meal by any other boy at St. Joe's; but Fatty excused himself for these little indulgences by the oft-repeated remark, "That this blessed February weather always makes me feel extra hungry, somehow."

However, in the course of time, all was ready. Figgins and Kerr arrived from the New House, looking fresh and ruddy after a rub down and change, and in response to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's generous invitation to "come in, dash boys," the feed commenced, with a great clatter of knives and forks, and a great deal of chatter and laughter.

Daily Fatty Wynn did not join in the talk and laughter. Daily, as one of the hosts, did attempt to draw him into conversation now.

"What's your opinion of the Reddy's return match on Saturday, Digg?" he asked. "Do you think—"

"Can see a piece more fun, will you?" said Fatty Wynn, holding up his plate. "This here's prime, and no mistake."

"Good! I'm glad you like it," said Digg, looking away at the big York bars, and piling the Welsh lamb's plate with slices. "Now, as I was saying—"

"Shove on a bit more of the fat, will you? I like the fat," said Wynn.

"Certainly! About the match, do you—"

"You can give me a bit more fat as well, if you like, Dig. I like the fat, too."

"Right-ho! Here you are! Now do you think the first seven—"

"Shove the butter along, will you?"

"Yes. Now—"

"And the rubs."

"Here you are. Now, about the—"

"Yes, I'll shove a little more ginger-pop, thanks!" said Fatty Wynn, his fat face shining with satisfaction. "It's jolly good stuff, this pop—don't you think so, Dig?"

"Yes," said Digg, a little shortly. His arm was getting a little tired with passing things for the indistinguishable Fatty. "Is there any other little thing I can pass you?"

"Well, thanks, there it," said Wynn. "I don't like to trouble you, but—"

"Oh, don't mind me!" exclaimed Digg, with assurance. "Just you ask for what you want. No good being shy, you know."

"Jolly good of you to say so, Dig. It's just what I think myself," said Fatty Wynn. "You might just chuck over those message-calls there, will you? and the sandwiches, and the meat-pies, will you see about it. Then the toast—"

Digg passed and passed, and made no more attempts at conversation with the great

Ben Fatty Wynn, for his part, did not seem to notice the criticism. He was too busy.

CHAPTER 2.

A Challenge.

WHEN the first edge of the juniors' healthy appetites was taken off, and the many pairs of jaws began to fling protesting, the slender cluster merged into a more general conversation.

It was Tom Meyer who first touched upon a subject that had been very much on the juniors' minds of late.

"What sort of game's your blessed head prefect playing at, Figg?" he inquired. "Mowatt's been backing against old Kikkers, the captain of the school, a good deal of late. Just now he's going it worse than ever."

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order in Advance.

"That's so. It's rotten!" affirmed Jack Blake, the leader of the School House Fourth-Formers.

"Look here, you New House boys!" growled Figgins, turning rather red. "He's not half a bad one, really."

"Oh, I know you always stick up for Monteth, because he's your powder!" said Tom Merry goodly. "But we want to discuss this matter without prejudice, as the better jobman say. It's a jolly bad thing for the school to have the best prefect of the New House working against the captain."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yess, waihh!"

"It's like this," continued Tom Merry. "Monteth used to be a rotter—with all due respect to Figgins & Co.—in fact, the chaps used to call him Old Monteth."

"That was ages ago," muttered Figgins. "What do you want to do?"

"Hold on, Figg!" said Kerr quietly. "Let's hear what they've got to say first!"

"Yes, your turn will come, luteh, deah luteh," put in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Just at present we will consider ourselves as a committee of justice of both Houses, to discuss this really rotten thing without prejudice."

"That's the idea, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Now, as I was saying, Monteth used to be a rotter—"

"Look here—"

"Oh, shut up, Figg!" He used to be, and then he seemed to develop into quite a decent chap, and pulled well with old Kildare for a long time."

"Hear, hear!"

"Now comes the mystery," continued the captain of the Shell, warming to his work. "Just lately the beggar has gone back to his old ways altogether. He's worse than ever, if anything. The chaps are already beginning to call him Old Monteth again."

"Rotter?"

"Yes, it's rotten! Monteth's on bad terms with Kildare again, and with everybody else about. He's got fearfully unpopular all round, even in his own House."

"Oh, yes!" growled Figgins.

"Yes, I know you New House chaps won't admit it, but it's true all the same," said Tom Merry determinedly. "Monteth's a worse rotter than ever now, and the question is, why this change for the worse, and how are we going to put matters right again, and how is Kildare going to—"

"In that all our question?" asked Monty Loather innocently.

"Rather a puzzle if it is," chuckled Digby.

"He, he, he!"

"Look here, this is a serious matter!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "With the heads of the two Houses always arguing, the school will go to the dogs."

"Hear, hear!"

"It isn't Kildare's fault either," put in Blake. "He does all that's possible—too much, I think—to keep the peace. But Monteth's simply hopeless. What on earth's come over the hounds?"

"Look here, you chaps," broke in Figgins. "I don't like to hear you all slanging me and me, and me—and me—"

"Of course!" said Kerr.

"Rather!" added Patty Wynn, with his mouth full.

"But all the same I don't mind telling you chaps, privately, that Monteth's certainly going a bit too thick," admitted Figgins candidly. "He's got his hair into me—especially, too; but that's not the point at present. What I say is, he's since he's been so gaily with Setton, the prefect of our House, that Monteth's been so rotten."

"My hat, so it is!"

"That's so!"

"Setton's a rotter, and friend of that bully, Knax, of the School House, and it's my idea that Setton's been leading Monteth wrong," said Figgins severely. "I vote we keep an eye upon him."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurray!"

"Good old Kildare!"

The School House fellows chorused their approval of this sentiment; but got so the New House jokers.

Figgins opening to his feet.

"Not against Monteth!" he said warmly. "It's his backing up our head prefect all the way!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Kerr and Patty Wynn together, the latter having at last pushed his plate away satisfied.

"But you need yourself just now that Monteth is a rotter, you mean?" yelled Blake.

"Bairn! We're going to back him up against the School House, anyway!" retorted Figgins stoutly.

"What do?"

"Housed if I ever saw such an obstinate set of diffidit!" hooted Blake. "You admit Monteth's a cad, and then you stick up for him for all you're worth!"

"He's New House, you see," observed Kerr, grinning.

"And a New House chap's worth any two School House ones, any day."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins, as the three New House jokers drew together in anticipation of trouble.

"Thank you well!"

"Clear out!"

"Get back to your old casual ward!"

"Who's going to check us out?" yelled Figgins defiantly.

The fat was fairly in the fire now, and there was a rush at School House fellows which threatened to sweep the rest Figgins & Co. out of the study.

But an interruption occurred from an unexpected quarter just in time.

"Hold on, deah luteh, please!" came the reproving tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was known for his Chesterfieldian politeness. "I trust you are not going to forget the courtesy due to our guests! Figgins & Co. came here at my special invitation!"

The threatening rush of jokers stopped short.

"Well, perhaps it is a bit thick to check them out on their necks, as we asked 'em to tea!" growled Blake.

"But they're asking for it!"

"Bairn!" grinned Figgins. "We're only upholding the honour of the New House. Thanks for the tea, Gussy. I hope your legs will be better shortly. I guess we'll be clearing out now."

"You'd better!" said Blake indignantly. "And next time you want to be locked in a room round the quad, Figgins, you and your crew to the School House. Any of our other chaps you, won't we, chaps?"

"Yes, rather!"

"He, he, he!"

Figgins had his hand on the door-handle, but at this last jarring remark of Blake's, he turned back into the room again.

"Hold on!" he said quietly. "I admit that Tom Merry won the race, but he's in the Shell; and besides, we don't know what might have happened if Gussy hadn't bargued into us. Now, if there's any chap here of my Form—the Fourth—who thinks he can race me, I'd like to hear him say so!"

There was a simultaneous clasp from Jack Blake, Morris, Digby, and D'Arcy, the four School House Fourth-Formers present.

"I do!"

Figgins grinned.

"Good! Then I challenge any two of you to a race, any distance you—er—afternoon. New House versus School House, you know."

"Taken!" cried Blake. "We'll hold them down rounder who's cock-horn at running, anyhow."

"We know!" grinned Figgins & Co. "New House!"

"School House!"

"We'll see to—er—er, anyway," remarked the practical Kerr. "I suggest a hare-and-hounds race. Two of you School House chaps can be the hares, and the New House Fourth-Formers the hounds."

"Good scheme!" exclaimed Figgins, slipping Kerr on the back. "Trust you for thinking things out, Kerr, old man!"

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"It's a jolly good idea!" said Tom Merry heartily. "You could start from Holywell Common, across the river and the railway, run round the raised abbey, and hence over the moor to the school."

"Good egg!" explained Blake. "The hares to have five minutes start, and if they get home without being caught, the School House wins."

"And if we catch 'em before they get home, the New House wins!" said Figgins, with a grin. "It's a bargain, Jack Blake!"

"It is, my son!"

"Then that's settled. Which of you chaps are going to be the hares?"

"Well, myself for one, I suppose," said Blake; "and either Dig or Herries. Gumpy's out of it, with his twisted ankle!"

"Yes, it's waddy wotten luck!" said Arthur Augustus discontentedly. "Still, there's something in going to the New House a sporting chance, ain't it?"

"What the deuce do you mean, son?" roared Figgins.

"Well, you waddy wouldn't have much of a look in it if I was running against you, Figgie, dear boy?" explained the swell of St. Jim's modestly. "It would simply be a walk-over for us, you know."

"Why you—you blundered tinker's darning!" roared Figgins. "A man with a wooden leg could give you fifty yards in a hand, and a leading!"

"Waddy, Figgie!"

"Peace, my infant!" broke in Tom Merry pacifically. "As far as I have followed your arguments, both of you right honorable gentlemen have been guilty of exaggeration, so you'd better say quit! The question before the committee is—whether Herries or Digby is to accompany Blake as hare tomorrow."

"Not much question about it, I think," remarked Digby.

"I ought to go, of course."

"Bain! I ought, you mean!" said Herries.

"Bain!"

"Nonsense!"

"As the two candidates for the post of hare don't seem inclined to agree as to which is the most fitted for the job," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "I propose that it be left to Jack Blake to choose his companion by the run. After all, he ought to know which is the better runner, as both are his chums."

"Hear, hear!"

"I agree to that," said Digby, after a moment's silence.

"And I," said Herries readily.

"Very well," said Blake, after a little hesitation. "I choose Herries. Score, Dig. I know you're fast, but Herries stays better in a long run."

"Right-ho!" said Digby, who was nothing if not a sportsman. "Perhaps you're right. Good luck to both of you, anyway!"

"Then that's settled!" said Figgins, from the door.

"Blake and Herries will be ready to start after dinner tomorrow. New House Fourth-Formers to be hounds!"

"That's the ticket, Figgie!"

"Yess, waddy!"

"Good! We'll be there! So long for 'em present!" And Figgins & Co. swung out of Study No. 4, leaving the School House fellows discussing the morrow's run in all its bearings.

When they were half-way across the quad, on the way to the New House, Kerr said quietly:

"So you're going to back Mcintosh up, Figgie, in spite of everything?"

"Yes!" said Figgins seriously. "I know the beast's frightfully down on us, and we've got a regular feud on with him; he's letting the New House down frightfully too, over this rotten quarrel with Kildare, who's worth twenty of him, really! But I think it's up to us to back the cad up outside the House, for the honour of the New House."

It was not often the jugged Figgins made such a long and serious speech; but Kerr appreciated his feelings in the matter. He knew how dear the honour of his House was to George Figgins.

"Quite right, Figgie," said Kerr quietly. "I'm with you all along the line."

"Same here!" said Fanny Wynn.

And the three loyal champions of the New House walked on in silence.

CHAPTER 3.

School House vs.—New House.

KILDARE, captain of St. Jim's, took out his watch. "Are you ready, Blake and Herries? Five minutes' start, I think!"

"That's it," said Figgins; "and they'll need it."

"Oh, isn't!" said Jack Blake cheerfully. "Why, my dear

chap, you New House wasters won't see us again, before calling-over!"

It was after dinner on the following day, and a big crowd of juncos from St. Jim's had collected upon the border of Holywell Common, head by the ancient school.

Most of them were clad in light flannels, in readiness for a long and hard run across country. Conspicuous among them were the two "hares"—Blake and Herries.

The rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's was hot in everything, and especially in sports, and each party was fully provided with a couple "knack spots" off the other as running, jumping, swimming, football, or anything else you liked to name.

But, so far as the question of running was concerned, it was likely to be settled and laid to rest, for a time at least, by the paper-chase laid for this Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at St. Jim's.

Kildare, the captain of the school, had agreed to give the start.

Blake and Herries were punctually on the spot, and the New House Fourth-Formers came trooping up in their racing clothes.

Most of the School House boys were there to see them off.

"Thirty seconds and you go," said Kildare, looking at his watch. "Quite ready!"

"Rather!" said Jack Blake. "Good-bye, Figgins & Co! We ain't see you pretty faces again till the evening."

"Just you wait and see," said Figgins dourly. "If I don't run you down this side of the bridge, you can see my head in a football!"

"My dear chap, I've no use for a wooden football! It—"

"Go!" interrupted Kildare, laughing.

"Right-ho!"

And away went the two hares at a swinging trot, with their legs of wood about behind them, across the breezy common.

Kildare waited, watch in hand.

The New House juniors showed signs of impatience before three minutes had passed.

"I say, Kildare," roared Wynn, "ain't it five minutes yet?"

"Two more," said Kildare.

"Bare your watch ain't losing?"

Kildare laughed.

"Don't you worry, Fatty," advised Tom Merry. "You won't run a hundred yards, anyway, so what are you bothering about?"

To which remark Wynn replied only with a disdainful sniff.

"How long now, Kildare?" asked Kerr.

"One minute more."

The New House boys looked wistfully in the direction taken by the hares. They had already passed out of sight beyond a belt of firs.

Kildare closed his watch with a snap.

"Time up!"

Figgins blew upon his bagpipe, loud and clear, and the pack started off. Away they went, a straggling crowd of runners in the blue-and-white of the New House. The School House boys raised an ironical cheer as they started. Figgins swapped his breath. He was determined that, by hook or by crook, the hares should be run down, and the colours of the School House lowered.

Kildare and the School House boys watched the runners till the last blue jersey had disappeared in the firs, and then the youngsters turned back towards St. Jim's, eagerly discussing the event, but all agreed upon one point, that Blake and Herries would never be captured by the New House pack.

Meanwhile, the ringing bagpipe had warned the hares that the hounds were on the track. Blake and Herries had made a pretty good start, running at a steady trot, and saving up their wind for the harder work that was coming later.

"Hallo! They've started," said Herries, with a backward glance over his shoulder. "We've got to back up, Blake. We've got to beat them, if we can, consider. The new House would cover us and if they caught us on this run."

"Rather. We shall do it all right. The only one I'm afraid of is Figgie, with his thundering long legs."

The river was in sight now, gleaming through the bushes ahead. At this spot the Byd was a mere stream, and was crossed by a bridge formed of a single plank, laid upon stones on either side. Herries grinned as they came in sight of the plank.

"I say, Blake, what a luck to shift it, and give them a swim! But I suppose it wouldn't be wicker."

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THE
WEDNESDAY.

"THE MASKED ENTERTAINERS!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 221.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order in Advance.

ANSWERS

Jack shook his head.

"Hardly, Herries. It doesn't look any too safe as it is, does it?"

"No; that's the main, I suppose."

Recent rains had swollen the Sky, and the water, which was usually low between the banks, was now almost on a level with the plank bridge, which, from its appearance, had hardly been washed over by the stream. It looked doubtfully insecure, but there was no time to hesitate, for the ringing of the bells behind showed the harem that they had been sighted. The market streets were conspicuous objects from afar. Jack looked back, and saw the common alley with blue-and-white. He ran out lightly upon the plank.

"Look out!"

He did not finish. A desperate board carried him on to the shore as the plank slipped.

He plunged up to the waist in mud and rusty water, and fell. He kept a splash behind. He was on his feet in a second, and he turned back to see Herries struggling in the water.

Herries had gone right under in the middle of the stream; the plank was floating away towards Rykocote. Herries came up in a moment, and dived towards the shore. He had lost his head for a moment, and made for the bank he had just left.

"This way!" shouted Blake. "Come on, you duffer!"

Herries dived back. Blake plunged thigh-deep in the water and seized him, and dragged him through the water. His bag of money was sopped and swollen, and he was waded from head to foot, and gasping like a newly-headed fish.

"Hallo! This is a nice go!" he exclaimed.

Blake grinned.

"As bad for the hounds as for us, as far as that goes, but you are an old chap, and no mistake! We shall have to look up."

There was no doubt upon that point.

Furious minutes had been wasted by the mishap, and the hounds were streaming down to the other bank, and their shouts reached the ears of the harem.

"You'll soon get dry weeping," said Jack. "Come on!" And off they started again.

Figgins was the first to come down to the water and see that the plank was missing. He stopped abruptly.

"The villains!" exclaimed Kerr. "They've shifted the plank!"

"I expect it shifted itself," said Figgins. "I thought I saw one of them in the water. You? There they are! They've got a good bit here."

"How are we to get across?"

"I know how I'm going to get across," said Figgins.

And without a moment's hesitation he plunged into the stream.

Right across he went, swimming gamely, and the holdout of the New House held followed his example, while the rest spread up and down the stream in search of some water or other means of crossing.

Figgins checked glacially as he came out of the stream, and, shaking the water from him like a dog, took up the chase again.

The accident to the plank had worked out entirely in favour of the hounds, and they were now closer upon the track of the harem than they had dared to hope could be the case so early in the run. Figgins had hoped to catch the harem on the covered run. But to catch them in the first couple of miles was a triumph he had not dreamed of, and it now seemed within the realm of possibility. And he got his heart into the running, and his long legs struety flew over the ground.

Blake gave a backward glance over his shoulder.

"My hat," he exclaimed, "they're coming on! We shall have to give them some roak to do. Hoo! Stop! We're going over this wall!"

"Hoo!"

"Halo! Come on!"

Herries obediently made a back, and Blake reached the top of the wall in question, and gave Herries a hand up from the top.

The next moment they were down upon the inner side and running through the trees. The hounds were coming fast along the lane, and their cries came floating over the wall.

"I say, Blake!" gasped Herries again.

"Have your wind, old chap," replied Blake.

And he led the way with a spirit that made conversation impossible. Herries gave it up, but he was looking very mean.

"Hallo, halo!"

It was a gruff note, and a man stepped suddenly from the trees and made a grab at Blake. The lad promptly dodged, but Herries was not so lucky. His foot caught in a pool as he attempted to dodge, and he went down. In a few days' time.—No. 262.

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second he was seized by the stranger, a hearty fellow, in the park of a keeper.

"Ho! Ho! caught you at last, you young scoundrel!"

Herries wriggled.

"Let me go! I'm doing no harm."

"Ain't you!" said the keeper grimly. "I've bin looking out for a long time for them young varmint that compasses 'em, I have. And now I've caught you, and you're a-scooting up with me to see Sir George."

Herries turned hot and cold.

"Please let me go!" he said meekly. "It's a paper-chase, you know, and we were only taking a short-cut across the park."

The keeper started with indignation.

"Taking a short-cut across Sir George's park! The impudence! You come along with me!"

"Help, Blake!" shouted Herries, beginning to struggle and kick desperately. Jack had turned back the moment he saw that his chase was no longer with him. "Help! For sakes!"

"You varmint!" growled the man in red-stocks. Herries was hurting him, and he was not slow in retaliating. And he could hit harder than the boy, as the unfortunate junior soon found. Herries wriggled and yelled under a shower of slaps and heavy blows.

The keeper, after drawing that Blake would attempt to deliver his comrade, commencing dragging Herries away. Jack charged at him like a bull, and "barked" him in approved Buggler style. The keeper gave a yell as his hat flew in the air, and he came down with a thump that shook every bone in his body.

Herries was released for a moment, and a moment was enough. In a twinkling the two boys were off, running for their lives. The keeper staggered to his feet, dazed and unsteady, and shook his fist after them furiously. It was useless for him to attempt pursuit, and he knew it.

The hares vanished from his gaze like a beautiful dream. Jack chuckled gleefully.

"I say, Herries, what a surprise packet for the hounds!" he paraded.

And Herries grinned.

The hounds were almost upon the spot. The keeper, as he stood in doubt and wrath on the spot where he had been so roughly handled, heard a bugle-note, and gazed in astonishment at a lanky figure in blue-and-white came over the wall, and sprinted towards him. It was Figgins. The leader of the hounds was following the paper-trail, and it led him right up to the amazed, indignant keeper.

Figgins did not see the keeper till he was close upon him. Then he stopped with a gasp of dismay—too late! The indignant grip of the man in red-stocks was upon his shoulder.

"I've got you, anyway?" grunted the keeper. "Come along with me, you young villain!"

"Laffer!" howled Figgins. "I'm in a hurry! Lemme alone!"

"I'll let you alone, you heasty! Oh, eh!" Figgins, comprehending, was letting out, and the keeper caught a casual tap with his nose. Then the yield of his wrath overpowered. He twisted Figgins over and began to slap him, and slap him hard. Figgins struggled and roared.

"Roar, roar!" he yelled.

The hounds—the dozen of them who had kept up with Figgins—were peering over the wall. They saw their leader's predicament, and came on gallantly.

"Roar!" shouted Kerr. And he charged the keeper.

The man went down under the rush of the St. Jiv's juniper, and they fairly swarmed over him. He struggled and yelled, but against so many he was powerless, and they left him gasping on the ground as they dashed on, on the trail of the tort paper.

"Come on!" paraded Figgins. "There will be a row over this, but I don't care, so long as we catch these kids."

In a few minutes they were out of the park, and following the paper-trail along a deep, rutty lane, and Figgins gave a whoop as he caught a glimpse of scarlet ahead. The hounds were still close upon the track.

CHAPTER 4.

A Fine Flat.

BUCK UP, Herries! Blake's wiles was a little anxious as he glanced at his hairy comrade.

"Not perturbed already surely?" asked he.

"Nonsense," gasped Herries. "I'm all right; but—but that keeper chap did hit hard, and I feel a bit off colour, that's all. I'll be all right soon."

Blake gave a low whistle of dismay.

In spite of Herries's brave assurance, he could see that his comrade was a good deal off the worry for him made with the keeper, now that he looked at him, though Herries was quietly keeping up.

"Think you can keep on?" said Blake, with a sort of snarl.

"Of course I can," said Herries. "I'm only a bit winded. Do you think I'm going to let those New House chaps catch me?"

Blake made no reply. He knew that Herries would be game to the end. But how far off was the end likely to be?

It was clear that the horses must, for a time at least, depend more upon trickery than upon straight running; and Blake kept his eyes about him as he ran. He slackened down a bit, to make things easier for Herries, without saying anything about it. So long as he had made the pace Herries had laboured terribly to keep up.

Blake was distributing the scent, Herries keeping up by his side. Suddenly Blake uttered an exclamation:

"Shove on a sport, Herries, and we shall gain a bit here."

The shouts of the hounds could be heard behind. Aloud was a level-crossing, and though no train was yet in sight, the man in charge was beginning to close the gates in his usual manner. The two were expected for all they were worth, and the gates closed behind them. They had just got through.

Then Blake led the way over a rising ground, in the direction of the ruined abbey, which was the outward limit of the run.

From the top of the rise the hares looked back and over the hounds collected at the gate of the crossing, vociferating and shouting threats and objections to the man in the signal-box, who grinned and took no other notice of them. Blake grinned.

"Come on, Chappie; there's the abbey!"

At a steady jog-trot they covered the ground, and reached the ruined abbey without being sighted again by the hounds. How long Figgins & Co. were delayed at the level-crossing they did not know, but minutes were precious to them.

At the abbey they sat down for a couple of minutes for a breather, and then started again. Herries secured a good deal better for the rest, and after circling round the ruins and laying a winding trail through the masses of masonry and ruined walls the boys set their faces towards St. Jim's tower.

The return lay across the moor, a fairly and desolate part of the country. After that, crossing the Ryd by the bridge near Kyrkwood, the path would be through the village, and down the road to the college.

Blake looked back more than once as they crossed the moor. From the top of a knoll he caught sight of the hounds. Figgins ("You will be in the lead, and Ken was just behind him, and five or six others were straggled out at various distances. The rest of the New House pack had either given it up or had dropped hopelessly behind in the race.

"My snarl!" said Blake. "How old Figgie runs! These spider legs of his do get over the ground. If anybody's in at the death it will be Figgie!"

"Yes!" gasped Herries. "Hang that keeper! Blake, I'm afraid I can't stick it!"

"Blake looked at him anxiously.

"If it was an ordinary paper-chase," he muttered, "I'd check it; but to have the School House beaten by the New House! Herries, my son, you've got to stick it!"

Overdrew they went. A new idea came into Blake's mind, and instead of steering for the bridge, he led the way to the stream just below that rustic structure.

The Ryd just here was broad and deep, and especially since the rain it had been swollen to an extent that made it dangerous for swimmers.

But Blake's intention was evident.

"We can't run them out, Herries," he panted; "but if they follow us here, I'll admit that the New House is up to our work."

With a mighty heave he slung his bag of scent, now considerably lightened, right across the stream, and it dropped into the reeds on the other side.

Then he plunged into the rushing water. Without hesitation Herries followed. Gandy the two boys, excellent swimmers both, fought their way across the swiftly-running stream. Blake kept his eye upon Herries, and his grip supported the weaker boy when he showed a sign of falling.

"Back up!"

One more effort and they were dragging themselves ashore through the crackling reeds.

"I—I thought I was going!" gasped Herries.

"Never mind," said Blake cheerfully. "You didn't go. Now for a swim to the school!"

A cut across a field brought them into the road, and Blake stood for a moment on top of a fence to look back.

Figgins was just pulling himself out of the water, but the rest of the hounds had halted upon the further side of the river, and were turning away to go round by the bridge. Aloud, slung as ever, the chief of the New House jacks

took up the chase; but Blake saw that he was treading lightly, and with evident effort.

"Only Figgie left," said Blake glumly, "and he's about gassed. He looks awfully gassy; but he's sticking it well."

"Come on!" said Herries.

Down the road they went gallantly.

"There's St. Jim's!"

Ahead, over the trees, was the school tower. The sight was inspiring; the goal of the long run was in sight at last.

But Herries was now evidently failing. Blake again and again slackened his pace to accommodate him, and each time his anxiety increased. It would be absolutely "rotten" to be beaten with the goal in sight.

Herries lurched in his running. Then, with an almost agonised gasp, he sank down on the road.

"It's no good, Blake; I'm done!"

Blake's face set the iron. He drew a deep breath and stopped over Figgins.

"Blake, what are you up to?"

"I'm going to carry you!"

"I say—you're not—you can't!"

"I can, and will!"

"But—"

"Shut up!"

Blake lifted the fallen lad in his arms, and slung him on his shoulder, something like a sack of potatoes, and started covered with him.

Herries was almost fainting with exhaustion, and his senses were swimming. He made no further demur, but let Blake do as he liked.

Blake went forward, staggering under his burden, but game to the last. The school gates were in sight now, and round them were groups of the School House boys, and they greeted the returning laces with a ringing cheer.

"Bravo, Blake!" yelled Tom Mowry.

"Back up!"

"You'll do it!"

"There's Figgie! Back up, or he'll collar you!"

Blake looked up. Every ounce of strength in him he threw into a last desperate effort to reach the gates of St. Jim's. He knew that Figgins was close behind, straining every nerve to catch him, and gaining now at every stride.

Patter, patter, patter! Figgins's footsteps—not six yards behind!

A few seconds more, and— Those few seconds were enough. Blake staggered under the arch of the ancient gateway, and Herries slid from his shoulder to the ground. The hares led staggered, and Dicky caught him.

A moment more, and Figgins came bounding in. He roared breathlessly against the gate.

"You've—you've done it, Blake!" he gasped. "But—but it was a near thing."

Blake gave a gassy chuckle.

"Was by a beauty tack!" he said, panting. "You made a jolly good run, Figgie, old boy, and I'm proud of you! But you haven't beaten the School House."

And the School House juniors gave a cheer:

"Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

And they answered their own question with a yell:

"The School House!"

"Rats!" gasped Figgie, dejected still. "We're cock-house, and we're going to show you that before long, you knowers!"

And he staggered away towards the New House, to get a rub down after his run, and Blake and Herries were carried off to the School House by their comrades for the same purpose.

And now, at intervals, and in tens and threes, the New House boys came in from the run, and their voices inquired as to whether the hares had been caught, were answered with doubtful shakes of the head by their lean-fellows, and with dissatisfied sniffs by the School House boys.

"My dear chaps," said Leather patronisingly, "you can't teach the School House. You can't expect to. Get over to the usual world of runs, and don't ask silly questions! Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"School House!" yelled his comrades.

"The New House boys went disconsolately to their quarters.

The upper-class had established the supremacy of the School House upon one point at least, and however they chose to dispute it, they were painfully conscious that it was so. And Figgins, in spite of the splendid run he had made upon that great occasion, was made to realise that unless he did something to lower the colours of their rivals, his leadership of the New House juniors was in danger.

And Figgins & Co. set their wits to work—not without result.

CHAPTER 5.
The Ambush.

"FIDDINGS"

A descriptive tag put his head in at the door of the study occupied by Figgins & Co. in the New House at St. Jim's.

Figgins & Co. were supposed to be busy at preparing their lessons for the morning, but, as a matter of fact, the great Figgins was sitting upon the table, having thrown the law about a new plan of campaign against the School House, and the "Co." were listening with eager approval.

"It's a jolly good scheme," said Figgins. He was pleased with his idea. "We must do something to make those kids sit up, and—"

"Figgins!" The chief of the New House jinked looked dully at the interrupting boy.

"Shut up!"

"But Monteth wants you," said the boy.

Figgins grunted.

Monteth was head prefect of the New House, and under Mr. Kestoff, the Headmaster, he reigned supreme within the walls.

"What does he want?"

"The big grinner."

"I fancy it's something about the paper-face yesterday. I have got George Trevelyan to look up to see the Head."

"Oh, nothing," said Figgins. "I suppose I'd better go."

And he left the study, and made his way to the quarters of the New House captain. Monteth looked at him with a very unpleasant expression on his face. The prefect seldom looked very pleasant these days, as a matter of fact, but on this occasion his face was a little more sad than usual.

"Please I've come!" said Figgins.

Monteth rose, and took down a cane.

"Sir George Trevelyan has complained about your trespassing on his ground yesterday," said the prefect. "The doctor has left Kildare and myself to deal with the matter, such for his own House. Why didn't you catch Blake?"

"I did my best," said Figgins carefully. "He only won it by a neck."

"Well, hold out your head!"

Figgins obediently obeyed. He was by no means satisfied, and he thought he could see that Monteth was going to punish him, not for his real offence, but because he had failed to catch Blake in the paper-face.

"You ought to have caught him," said Monteth sourly. "You're older than he is, and you should've let those fellows take the New House down. I have enough to do as it keeps my end up against Kildare and his set, without having the School House jinkers crowding over on. But, of course, I'm going to ease you because Sir George Trevelyan complained of your trespassing on his property. Kildare is dealing with Blake."

"Swish! The cane came down with a spiteful force upon Figgins's palm, and he searched.

"Swish again and again till Figgins had had six—three on each hand. He bore the infliction well, and stored no sound, though his lips went white and hard.

"You can go!" said the prefect, throwing down the cane. Without a word Figgins left the study. The "Co." looked at him anxiously when he rejoined them. His look was sufficient to tell them that he had been caned, and they knew of old how the head prefect of their House laid it on.

"Blind cheese!" said Kerr sympathetically. "Monteth's a beast!"

Figgins nodded gloomily.

"Yes, he is a beast," he agreed—"a nasty, spiteful beast! Kildare will punish Blake and Heron, but he won't give them such awful wingers as Monteth gave you. It's because the School House got the best of us that Monteth was so spiteful."

"It's rotten we should have such a cad for captain," said Wynn thoughtfully. "The kids on the other side call him Cad Monteth, and we can't deny that the name suits him. He's a cad and a beast! I wish Kildare were our captain. We could be proud of him."

"It can't be helped," said Figgins. "Monteth's a cad; but we have to stick up for him against the kids. But to come back to our matter," he went on. "What do you think of the idea we were discussing when the beast sent you?"

"Fiddling!" was Kerr's verdict.

"First chop!" exclaimed Wynn.

"Then we'll carry it out to-night. Is that agreed?"

"Fiddling unambiguously," said Kerr. "But how are you going to do it?"

"Leave that to me," said Figgins.

"It won't be long to catch Blake napping."

"Easy or not, we are going to do it!"

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday.

" Bravo, Figgie! If it comes off, it will make the School House cede a big snail for a bit, anyway. But there may be a row, you know."

"I don't care if there is," said Figgins.

"Then that's all right. Only if the masters spot the thing—"

"Stop your croaking! If we never did anything that wasn't quite safe, the School House would crow over us all the time."

"Oh, all right!" said Kerr. "I'm game if you are. I suppose it's certain that the kids will go out for their spirit to-night?"

"Of course it is!" said Figgins bravely. "Don't they spirit every evening, and get back just in time for collaring?" Ain't they trying to get themselves in form to beat us at the junior House match when it comes off?"

"They see, but they won't do it," said Kerr. "Anyway, we'll go for 'em this time, and when the School House sees Blake come home, they will have to acknowledge that it's one up to us, and no mistake."

And the three jinkers chuckled gleefully. It was evident that a deep plot was being hatched, of which the degraded victims, the chums of the School House, were in blissful ignorance.

Figgins sat with one eye on his work, and the other on the window, which commanded a partial view of the quadrangle.

"There they go," he exclaimed suddenly—"three of 'em!"

In the dusk of the quad, three figures in evening-dresses could be seen making their way towards the gates. They were Blake, Digby, and Tom Merry.

Every day, when their preparation was finished, some of the jinkers of the School House went for a spirit to keep themselves in form. Blake having secured a permit from Kildare for the purpose.

"There they are," added Figgins; "no mistake about it! And this is where we come in!"

Wynn and Kerr threw their books aside.

"Harrah for the New House! Come on!"

"Go and get some of the fellows," said Figgins, "while I go to Monteth and get a permit. He's sure to give me one when I let him see that it's something up against the School House. Now, Kildare won't enter into a thing like that, so, you see, there's some advantage in having a cad and a beast for your House captain."

And, with this philosophical reflection, Figgins hurried off.

Monteth was still in his study, and his friend, Setton, was there also, talking to him. The prefect looked sourly at Figgins.

"Have you come back for some more, youngster?" he asked.

"No, no, Monteth. I want to ask you for a permit to leave the school."

"You can't have it! Clear!"

"If you please, Monteth, Kildare has given permits to Blake and Tom Merry and Digby. They've just gone out. I thought that if they went, half a dozen of us might go."

Monteth looked hard at the jinker. Setton grinned.

"Let them go, Monty," remarked the latter. "They want to train for the junior match, you know, and a spirit will do them good."

Monteth gave a quick nod.

"All right. You can go, Figgins. I'll write the permit."

And the precious paper was in Figgins's pocket when he triumphantly returned to his study. He found Kerr and Wynn there, with four more New House jinkers.

"Get it," asked Kerr eagerly.

"Yes."

"I was afraid he wouldn't let you have it."

"He wouldn't at first; but he shelled it out all right when I gave him a hint that it was up against Blake and Tom Merry," grinned Figgins. "It's all square! Come along, kids, and your snail will show you how to score off the School House!"

"Get the stinks!"

"Yes; safe enough."

And the seven New House jinkers trooped out, with many a suppressed chuckle.

But nothing was further from their thoughts than the spirit which had formed their excuse for leaving the bounds of St. Jim's.

They slung about a hundred yards from the school gates, and sought ambush in the shadow of the trees beside the lane. There, with the patience of Indian hunters, they waited and watched for their prey.

CHAPTER 6.
A SCARE FOR FIGGINS & CO.

PATTER, patter, patter! The light sound of running-shoes came up the dark, lonely lane. Three figures almost came out of the dark, running steadily and easily. They came abreast of the audience, and all of a sudden, without the slightest warning, seven forms detached themselves from the shadows, and came hurrying upon the runners.

"Here, what are you up to?" expostulated Blake, clinging to him.

Tom Merry fell, with Figgins and another on top, and Digby was dragged to the ground by three New House boys.

The trio went down in a twinkling, utterly astounded by the sudden onslaught, and before they recovered their wits they were flat on their backs, with their feet sitting on legs and arms, pinning them down.

"Hallo!" gasped Blake. "What's the little game?"

"Thieves!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Help!" gasped Digby.

"Shut up!" said Figgins. "Don't you know who we are, you silly cockoo?"

"New House thieves!" gasped Tom Merry. "What are you up to?"

"You're prisoners of war!"

"Oh, rascals!"

"You'll see, Chaps, kind these prisoners, and see that you tie them tightly! There's plenty of cord," said Figgins.

Blake and his chums began to struggle desperately; but the odds were too heavy against them, and the disadvantage they were at was too great.

Figgins & Co. had provided themselves with cord more than enough for the purpose, and the luckless three soon had their hands tied behind their backs.

Then Blake's right leg was tied to Digby's left, and his left to Tom Merry's right, and tightly, too, and the prisoners were dragged to their feet. They swayed and staggered like some three-legged monster, Blake being in the middle, and, therefore, the most helpless of the trio.

"Here, what are you up to?" expostulated Blake. "You can't tie up a chap like this, you know! It ain't proper!"

Figgins laughed.

"It seems that we're doing it, whether we can or not," he replied. "You three chaps are very much attached to one another, and so there's no reason why you shouldn't be bound together in close ties. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House boys, quite tickled by this joke.

"Did you ever see such a crew of giggling grose?" said Blake, in disgust. "Look here, Figgins—"

"Excuse me, I can't; your fate worries me!"

"You silly bouncer—"

"Go on!"

"I'll make you all up for this! Let us loose!"

"My dear chap, do you think we have taken all this trouble for nothing?"

"Is that what you call fair play—seems to them?" asked Tom Merry. "Give me my hands free, and I'll lick the lot of you!"

But the new House party only laughed. They did not mean to be provoked into releasing the prisoners.

"Give 'em the chains, Figgys," said Ken.

"I'm just going to."

"Blake, what's that?" ejaculated Blake, in alarm.

"What's the silly game now?"

"Bring 'em into the light," said Figgins.

The prisoners were lashed, lurching and stumbling at every step, into the dim circle of light cast by a lamp. Three Figgins set to work. He set to work with a will, and belabored chafin! The effect was not artistic, but it was quite satisfactory to the New House boys.

The upper half of Blake's face was chalked white, and the lower half blacked with charcoal. The effect was startling. It became still more weird when Figgins added black rings about the eyes, and a white line round the mouth.

Then he started on Tom Merry. One side of his face was coloured red, and the other side yellow. A black line down the centre gave a finish to the effect.

By this time Figgins, accompanied by the laughter of his associates, was waving to his work, and Digby, the third to suffer, came off worst of all. His countenance was striped

with nearly all the colours of the rainbow, and his ears were artistically blacked. When Figgins had finished, the trio looked at each other in a grim way. Their aspect was accordingly comic, and, with their hands fastened behind them, they had no chance of clearing the colours of their faces. They were utterly at the mercy of their rivals.

"There! I think that will do," said Figgins, with a look of satisfaction. "What do you think, Blake? I'm willing to meet you in any way, you know, and a touch of colour that you fancy could easily be shared out!"

Blake smiled a sickly smile.

"Thanks!" he said. "You're too good. I think that will do."

"Right you are! Don't say I'm not obliging. Now, I hope you won't be inconvenienced by that cord in getting back to the dorms!"

Tom Merry gasped.

"You're not going to send us back in this state?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the New House party. "They will make a sensation!"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Well!"

"Don't be a cad! It's rather—"

"What's come—my colouring? Can't agree with you, my lad! It will be a sensation for the School House. You will have to wash yourselves for once in your lives!"

"I'll wash you to-morrow!"

"I'd like to see you do it! Anyway, back to St. Jim's you're going! March them along, chaps!"

The trio stood their ground, and firmly refused to budge. But it was useless. The seven janitors of the New House hustled them along, and, after one or two painful falls, the School House chain gave it up, and snapped along.

Their hearts sank when they re-entered the quad. The New House boys spotted them across towards the School House, and left them in the light of the windows.

"Good-bye!" said Figgins. "I hope you won't frighten the maid into his when you get in. Ya-ya, kiddies!"

"Ya-ya!" howled the New House boys.

"What's cook-house at St. Jim's? Yek!"

And, shouting with laughter, they retreated through the dark towards their own house.

Tom Merry and his chums looked at one another in dismay. What were they to do? To be seen in their plight was to be covered with ridicule, and they wriggled at the thought of the derision their appearance would excite.

But it was evidently of no use to wait in the deserted quadrangle, and the answer it was got over the bottom.

"Come on!" said Blake desperately.

"Hallo—hallo! What's that?"

It was Mungell's voice. He was coming towards them with Selson. He stared at the unhappy pair, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Selson joined in it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, dotted up with snorts, and his cheeks of laughter attracted some more visitors, who were opening out of the gym. As fast as one set his eyes upon the hapless trio he went into fits of merriment.

"Come on, you chaps," snapped Blake. "For goodness sake, let's get out of this!"

But it was not so easy for the chaps to "come on." They stumbled and staggered at the eyes of the School House in a wild, beseeching manner, lurching to and fro drowsily.

Somewhat or other they reached the top, and blundered into the hall, and, as luck would have it, met one of the maid folk face to face.

The girl gave one glance at the dreadful appearance, and shrieked and fled. She burst, screaming, into the nearest doorway, which happened to be that of Mr. Ballton, the master of the School House.

"Help—help! Ghosts! Murder!"

Mr. Ballton jumped up, astonished.

"What's the matter—what's the matter?"

"Ghosts! Murder! Hags! Ha, Ha, Ha!"

And the frightened maid collapsed into a chair, and screamed.

The startled Housemaster sprang to the door, to see what had frightened the girl. He heard a clattering and rattling on the stairs, and looked in that direction. Blake and his companions in misfortune were making a desperate effort to escape, but the Housemaster was too quick for them.

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"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "What can that be? What is it?"

He sprang up the stairs after the trio. He gave a jump as he caught sight of their faces, and stared at them helplessly, and just then the unfortunate janitor lost their footing. They rolled against Mr. Holman, and he went rolling too, haphazardly clashing at the banisters and making them. A minute more, and the four were at the bottom of the stairs in a heap.

The disturbance had brought a crowd to the spot. Children, the school captain, helped Mr. Baileton up, and the trio were dragged to their feet some too gently. But when their faces were seen a yell of laughter went up that rang through the School House. Even Mr. Baileton, shamed as he was, could not help grinning.

"Boys, how have you got into this state? When does this mean?"

"It—It was an accident, sir," ventured Blake.

"There was a freak about it, laughter at this innocent explanation. The Housemaster was not likely to believe that the three janitors had got tied up and painted like Red Indians by accident.

Mr. Baileton tried not to laugh, but only partially succeeded.

"I will inquire into this in the morning," he said. "Children, will you remove those boys and see that—"

"Directions sent! What is all this?"

The voice struck dismay to the hearts of the janitors. Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, had come upon the scene. His severe face was full of amazement and wrath.

"What does this mean? How came these boys to be in this shocking state, Mr. Baileton?"

"I don't know, Dr. Holmes," said the Housemaster. He did his best to conceal his annoyance. He prided himself upon keeping his House in excellent order, and it was deeply annoying that the Head should have come upon the scene just then. "I intended to inquire into the matter in the morning."

"Ah, very well!" said the doctor majestically. "But please let the inquiry be conducted in my study, Mr. Baileton."

"Certainly, sir."

The doctor stalked away, with a swelling gait and a wonderful face. Mr. Baileton went into his study and closed the door.

"Well, you're in for it now!" said Kilham, as he opened his pocket-book and cut the bonds of the hapless janitors. "I suppose this is some more of that absurd rivalry business! Get off and show yourselves, do!"

Tom Merry and his chums made a bee-line for a bathroom. In half an hour all St. Jim's were laughing over the story; but the unfortunate trio did not feel inclined to laugh.

"The Head meant business," said Blake. "There's a row coming in the morning?"

And he was right.

CHAPTER 7.
In Hot Water.

"MERRY!"
"Sir!"
"Blake!"
"Sir!"
"Digby!"
"Sir!"

"You will kindly accompany me to Dr. Holmes's study!"

Tom made a very face. He had expected that courteous after papers in the morning, and it had come.

The three janitors obediently followed Mr. Baileton, and the sympathetic looks of their fellows followed them. It was an order to interview the Head of St. Jim's in his den.

The doctor was looking very severe.

"Now," he said, as the three culprits stood in a row before him, looking very abashed—"now, I shall be glad of an explanation of the absurd exhibition you made last night. Blake and Digby."

The doctor looked at one another.

"We are very sorry, sir," said Blake.

"No doubt," said Dr. Holmes grudgingly. "Unfortunately, that is not sufficient. I require to know how you came in that state!"

"There was no study."

"Answer me, Blake!"

"I haven't anything to say, sir," said Blake, turning red.

"Do you mean to say that you don't know who tied you up, and painted your faces in that absurd and barbarous fashion?"

"It was very dark, sir."

"Then you do not know!"

Blake was silent. The doctor frowned darkly.

"Then give names—No. 244."

"Am I to understand, Blake, that you refuse to answer me?"

"Allow me," said Mr. Baileton quietly. "I fancy Blake's silence is due to a boyish sense of honour, which will not allow him to betray the names of the boys who used him."

"It wouldn't be cricket, would it, sir?" said Blake apologetically.

Mr. Baileton concealed a smile. The Head who had a great respect for the Housemaster, changed his tone a little.

"I should be far from concerning any boy to do a thing he believed to be dishonourable," he continued. "In that, indeed, your motive for wishing not to speak, Blake?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I will question you no further. The matter, however, must be settled. I have not the slightest doubt that this outrage upon all propriety is due to the absurd rivalry between the two Houses, which has been the cause of so many disturbances, and which I am determined to keep within bounds. I will have inquiries made in the New House. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir!"

The three boys left the room, immensely relieved to get off so cheaply, but at the same time somewhat anxious about their rivals of the New House.

"The doctor's in a way," said Tom Merry. "There will be a row. But I don't see how Figg & Co. can get hurt if they keep quiet about it. As my rats, we haven't given them away, that's no comfort. We've fooled the game."

The Head was in a rage. When Mr. Baileton and the janitors had left him, he sent a note over to the New House, asking Mr. Ketchell to come and see him. The Housemaster came over immediately. He had heard the story of the ridiculous exhibition of the School House janitors the previous evening, and guessed what was wanted.

Mr. Ketchell, of the New House, was a thin, bald gentleman of middle age, with well-mental appearance and a pronounced distaste for sports and horseplay. He liked to keep his House quiet and orderly, and was heavily down on any exhibition of the feeling of rivalry between the Houses.

The master of the New House always did his best to keep in the Head's good graces, and so the present occurrence was especially annoying to him, for he could see that Dr. Holmes was angry.

"The Head did not say much, but what he said was to the point."

"You knew about last night's occurrence, Mr. Ketchell?"

"Yes, Dr. Holmes, and I am extremely disturbed and—"

"Naturally. I am extremely disturbed, too. The boys who suffered from that absurd practical joke do not wish to give the names of the aggressors, from a mistaken sense of honour, and I have decided not to insist upon it. I am convinced that the aggressors belong to your House, Mr. Ketchell."

"I am afraid it is only too probable, Dr. Holmes. I am extremely—"

"I depend upon you, therefore, to find them out and punish them adequately."

"I will have no more returned to do so, I am—"

"Thank you, Mr. Ketchell! I rely upon you. Good-morning!"

And the Housemaster returned to the New House in a very irritable frame of mind. He had not been able to say anything to the Head of St. Jim's, but in his own House he was manful of all he surveyed, and he proceeded to pass the doctor's wrath on. After morning school he sent for Moweth.

"You are head prefect of this House, Moweth," said Mr. Ketchell severely. "I have trusted to you to keep order. How have you done it?"

"I have done my best, sir."

"Indeed! You are aware of the outrage perpetrated last night, which has led to a painful interview between Dr. Holmes and myself this morning?"

"It was some joke of the janitors, sir."

"Quite so; but such a joke passes all bounds. It is your duty to keep the janitors in order, or to resign your position of prefect."

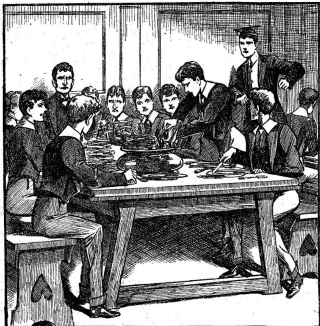
Moweth started.

"I will do anything you wish, sir," he replied meekly.

"I had already determined to ferret out the truth, and make an example of the offenders."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Ketchell stiffly. "See that it is done. I leave the matter in your hands, Moweth, but unless you can report to me that the delinquents have been found and punished, I shall have to consider very seriously about allowing you to retain your position as head prefect of the New House."

"You may rely upon me, sir."



Lynn, the bogus workhouse boy, with perfect gravity proceeded to insert his fingers into his plate, and fish out portions of meat and potatoes. "Oh, my hat," muttered Russell. "Look at him, the awful pig!" (For this amusing incident see the grand long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "SCORNED BY GREYFRIARS!" by Frank Richards, which is contained in this week's issue of our Companion Paper, "The Magnet" Library. Now on Sale at all Newsagents, Price One Penny.

Monteth went straight to his room, and sent his bag to Messrs Figgins & Co. in his presence. He employed the interval of waiting in selecting his student cane.

Now, if Figgins & Co. deserved to be punished for a trick upon the School House jokers, certainly Monteth was equally to blame, for he had guessed perfectly well what their intention was when he gave Figgins his pencil.

But that reflection did not make any difference to the prefect. He was going to punish the culprit, not because they deserved it, but because he was angry at being outwitted by the Housemaster, and to avenge his wrath on Mr. Rastell.

Figgins & Co. came into the prefect's study with very doubtful looks. The sight of the cane in Monteth's hand warned them what to expect.

"Anything wrong?" asked Figgins nervously.

"Yes. It was you three that painted up Blake and the others last night, I suppose?"

"We ain't bound to incriminate ourselves," ventured Figgins.

"It ain't necessary," said Monteth grimly. "I know it was you. That was what you wanted the pencil for, under pretence of springing for prizes."

"Why, Figgins gasped, "you then—"

"What—I know what?"

"You know it was something up against the School House, and—"

"What do you mean, you young rascal! Hold out your hand!"

"I won't! You've no business to take advantage—"

He got no farther. Monteth's grip was on his collar, and he was swung round, and the cane began to play about him like lightning. Figgins roared and screamed with pain, and kicked out. Monteth got a stinger on the shin, that made him reel with pain, and then he set his teeth and lashed Figgins severely.

That was more than the "Co." could stand. They exchanged glances, and sang themselves upon Monteth and dragged him off.

Monteth was now beside himself with passion. The absurdity of a struggle between a prefect and three rebellious jokers was forgotten, and the undisciplined ferocity he cut made no difference to him. He flung himself upon the boys savagely, biting out with all his strength.

Wyne received a terrific blow which sent him flying, but at the same time Kerry tripped up the prefect, and Monteth went down, and Figgins fell on top of him.

The jokers had the advantage now, but it was an advantage that frightened them. The head prefect of the House

down on the floor of his own study, with three Lower Fourth boys scrambling over him.

Even in the excitement of the moment the thought of the consequences could not be absent from their minds. The door opened, and Bolton looked into the room. He gave a whistle of amazement.

"Hallo, Monty! What are you up to? New system of gymnastics?"

"Help me, you fool!" gurgled Monteth. "Don't stand there like a dummy! Get hold of those boys!"

Bolton promptly did as he was requested. He gripped Figgins, and held him fast; and Monteth, staggering to his feet, seized Wynn and Kerr. The juniors were looking white and scared. Monteth's face was dark and convulsed with fury. He crossed to the door, and looked it.

"Now I'll make you smart, you little brats!" he hissed.

"Look here—" began Figgins.

"Shove him over the table!" cried Monteth.

Bolton grunted, and dragged Figgins over the table, face downwards. The case whirled in the air, and came down with a terrific thud, and Figgins pulled and kicked. Wynn and Kerr made an attempt to go to his aid, for their blood was up; but Monteth dashed them unmercifully with the same vigor they came within his reach. He threatened Figgins till his arm ached, and then the boy was released, white and quivering.

"You coward!" he said thickly. "You coward!"

Monteth gave him a cuff that sent him staggering.

"Get out of my study!"

He unlocked the door, and Figgins & Co. crept away, asking in every limb, and so white and gasping that everyone they passed turned to look at them.

A little later Monteth, having removed the traces of the struggle from his permit, reported to the Housemaster that he had found and punished the delinquents. Mr. Radford expressed his satisfaction. Perhaps he would not have been so satisfied if he could have guessed what the outcome of the affair was to be.

CHAPTER 5.

The Rival Prefects.

TAP! Figgins & Co. were in their study, gazing and gawping in chorus, when the tap came at the door. The three were looking very white and worried.

"Come in!" said Figgins feebly.

The door opened, and Jack Blake walked in. The three stared at him in astonishment. Boys of one House were not allowed in the other as a rule, and it was not exactly safe for the chief of the School House juniors to venture into the enemy's camp in this manner. But Jack had come on a peace errand.

"Pax!" concluded he as he entered. "I——" Then he broke off, staring at the three. "What on earth's the matter? Been fighting, you giddy cuckoo!"

"No," said Figgins. "It's come out that we used you like that last night, and Monteth has been laying it on."

"The boss!" said Blake sympathetically.

"Who are you calling a boss?" replied Figgins, quick to resent any slight to his House, from the feeling of spite-cherries, though at that moment he hated Monteth like poison. "Just you here, Monteth, and your bandy!"

"All right," said Blake. "I just came over to tell you that we've been stung by the doctor, and we're not going to give you away. I wanted to warn you that you could rely upon not speaking."

"That's decent of you," said Figgins; "but they guessed. Thanks for coming, though. But you'd better cut it. If Monteth sees you on this side he will go for you."

"That's all wrong. In—in!"

Blake nodded to the suffering three, and walked out of the study. In spite of his earlier words, he took very great care not to be spotted by Monteth; for he knew that the prefect only wanted an excuse to "go for" him.

Luck, however, was against him, for as he crossed the hall, Monteth came out of Mr. Radford's study, face to face with the School House junior. The prefect walked disconcertedly, and, closing the door, came towards Blake.

"What are you doing in this House?" he asked.

"I came to speak to Figgins," he said.

"You know that boys of one House are not allowed to enter the other?"

"That's because they row. I didn't come here to row, but just to speak to old Figgery," answered Blake meekly.

"That makes no difference, and I have only your word for it. You are one of the cheekiest and smartest of the School House juniors!"

"My word is good enough, I suppose!" retorted Blake, with spirit. "I'm not in the habit of telling lies, whenever the may be!"

"You may trust me to do justice to your motives," said the Housemaster dryly.

Monteth winced a little. He did not exactly like Mr. Radford's tone. Still, he was satisfied that he had made trouble for Kildare. As he left the School House he saw

Monteth gritted his teeth savagely. He found Blake's coolness and firmness very hard to bear.

"Come into my study."

"What for?" asked Jack.

Monteth did not trouble to answer the question. He made a grab at Jack, who promptly dodged, and eluded him. The next moment the junior was out of the New House, clearing the steps with a single bound, and springing across the quadrangle.

There was a rapid beat of footsteps behind him. He looked over his shoulder, and, to his dismay, saw the prefect in full pursuit.

"Hallo!" muttered Blake. "Boss's a go!"

He had not expected the prefect to take the matter up like this. He expected for all he was worth, but the prefect was quickly running him down. Blake had only one chance, and he took it. It was an odd trick, but it worked.

He heard the prefect close behind him, and suddenly threw himself down upon the ground. Right over him Monteth went sprawling with a wild yell.

Blake was upon his feet in a flash, and he darted into the School House.

Monteth picked himself up more slowly. He was severely shaken, and his hands were bruised and hurt, and he was in a towering passion. He strode into the School House, and made straight for Kildare's quarters.

The captain of St. Jim's was there, and he was alone. He stared at the New House captain came striding into his room without the preliminary of knocking.

"Hallo, Monteth! Anything the matter?"

"Yes," snarled Monteth. "Don't pretend to be so innocent. You must have seen it all from your window, if you yourself didn't see that young rascal on to do it!"

Kildare rose to his feet and looked him steadily in the eye. There had been no face lost lately between these two—the headmaster, senior captain of St. Jim's and the senior prefect of the New House.

Kildare always made every effort to keep the peace, but Monteth seemed determined to attribute his patience to weakness, and was made only the more incensed by it.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Monteth," said Kildare quietly. "Will you be kind enough to explain?"

"I have been tripped up in the quad, by Blake."

"Do you mean to say that he did that deliberately, without provocation?"

"I was following him, to punish him for entering the New House without leave."

"I quite understand," said Kildare, still quietly, but with a note of contempt in his voice that made the prefect wince.

"You picked up a filthy excuse to punish him, because he's in the School House, which isn't his fault. But you know as well as I do that you have no right to punish the juniors of the School House. You ought to have complained to me, and you know it. I never interfere with your side."

"You mean to say that he is not to be punished?" hissed Monteth.

"I expected you to take his part. But I warn you that the affair will run and here. Are you going to come him for tripping the up?"

The bullying tone adopted by the prefect was very hard for Kildare to bear; but he controlled his temper, and answered quietly:

"No; you had no right to touch him."

"Very well. I'll take my complaint to higher quarters, then."

"You can do as you like," replied the captain of St. Jim's disdainfully.

Monteth gave him a bitter look, and strode savagely from the study. He went straight to Mr. Radford's room. The Housemaster was just coming out. He stopped and looked inquiringly at Monteth.

"Do you want to speak to me, Monteth?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I am compelled to complain of the conduct of one of the juniors of the School House," said the prefect.

A look of displeasure crossed the Housemaster's face.

"You should go to Kildare."

"I have done so, but he refuses to take the matter up."

"Indeed," said Mr. Radford sharply. "What is your complaint?"

"Blake entered the New House without permission. I was following him to the School House to complain to Kildare, and he tripped me up—me a prefect!"

"That is a serious matter. You may be assured that I will look into it."

"Thank you, sir! Of course, my only desire is to have discipline properly maintained. I have no personal feeling in the matter."

"You may trust me to do justice to your motives," said the Housemaster dryly.

Monteth winced a little. He did not exactly like Mr. Radford's tone. Still, he was satisfied that he had made trouble for Kildare. As he left the School House he saw

the Housemaster enter the captain's study, and he went away feeling content.

What passed at the interview of course Monteth did not know; but when he saw Kildare shortly afterwards the captain of St. Jim's was looking very gloomy.

Mr. Bailton was toady upon the question of the discipline of his House, and no doubt he had been answered, and had spoken to Kildare a good deal more sharply than the latter deserved. Monteth felt pretty sure of it, and, knowing how extremely sensitive the Irish lad was, he felt that he had scored pretty well this time.

He had expected Kildare to utter some hot words when they met; but the captain had perfect control of his temper. He did not even look at Monteth.

The protest shrouded his shoulders. He knew that the captain's indifference was only assumed. He had scored this time, and he knew it; and the manner of his method did not trouble his conscience in the least. This time of that kind came very easily to the prefect of the New House. But Monteth was upon his track, if he had only known it!

CHAPTER 9.

An Attack in the Dark.

MONTETH wheeled his bike through the quad in the darkness. The hour was late, and the prefect, who had been out for a long spin, had let himself in with a key, for at St. Jim's the two head prefects had keys as well as the masters.

There was no thought of danger at that moment in Monteth's mind. He knew the way to the bicycle as well as the dark as in the daylight, and he whistled quietly to himself as he wheeled his machine along.

Some days had elapsed since his altercation with Kildare, and the prefect, who had looked for some kind of retaliation on the part of the captain of St. Jim's, had been disappointed.

Kildare seemed determined to let the matter drop. But Monteth, always suspicious, and knowing well what he would have done himself, was more inclined to believe that Kildare was only biding his time, and intended "to get his own back" at a convenient opportunity, by hook or by crook.

But he was not thinking of that now, but of supper in his study, and how, for he had been out a couple of hours, and was both hungry and tired.

The lamp on his machine gleamed ahead as he wheeled it along, and, as he afterwards realized, served to warn unwatched faces that he was coming.

He opened the door, resting his bicycle against the wall for the moment; and then he gave a sudden start, as he was seized by hands that reached out of the darkness and dragged him to the ground.

But he could struggle or cry out again he was down, and a slip-knot was passed over his head and tightened about his body, pinning his arms to his side.

He began to wriggle and wriggle, but he was taken at too great a disadvantage, and almost before he knew it another piece tightened about his legs, fastening them together, and he was helpless.

The sudden attack, and the complete success of it, had dashed him, and his heart quailed within his breast. But Monteth soon realized that he could not be in actual danger; his assailants were belong to St. Jim's, and this was only a trick that was being played upon him.

As he comprehended that, his terror changed to rage. "Let me go!" he hissed. "I know who you are, and I'll make you suffer for this! Let me go, I tell you!"

There was no reply. His assailants, of whom there appeared to be two, had uttered no word during the attack, made no sound save a hurried breathing.

Without speaking, they now proceeded to render more secure the bonds upon the prefect's limbs, and his wriggles and struggles availed him nothing.

He began to shout for help, but he had had only time to utter one shout. A handkerchief was thrust into his mouth, stifling his cries and almost choking him, and he gurgled and gurgled into silence.

Or—no—good—
Then silence. And still his assailants did not speak. He wondered thoroughly what they were going to do next. Who were they? Why were they doing this?

The enraged prefect had little doubt upon the point. He could see nothing of them, hear nothing but their breathing, but he was certain that one at least was a tall fellow; and, besides, it was absurd to suppose that any junior would dare to make such an attack upon a prefect.

No; it was a couple of seniors from the School House who had assailed him, and he was quite certain that one of them was Kildare. It was ludicrous to think so, but Monteth was beyond himself with rage, and he judged others by himself.

This was the revenge of the captain of St. Jim's, Doubt-

less he hoped to effect it without discovery being made of the part he had taken in the outrage; but let him wait till the morning, Monteth realized eagerly.

"Fresh cords were placed round him, and he was tied up to something hard; and he guessed that he was being linked to one of the bicycle stands to prevent him from wriggling his way out of the shed."

He could make no resistance, he could only submit passively and register inward roars of vengeance.

There was a shuffling of feet, the sound of a closing door. He was alone. He felt a chill at his heart.

Did they mean to leave him alone there all night? The thought was terrifying. He knew that no one was likely to come to the bike-shed at that hour, nor was anyone likely to stay up for him. He would not be missed until the morning.

It would make no sound, he could not wriggle himself free! Unless his captors took pity upon him he was doomed to pass a night or more hours there in the cold and solitude and darkness, with the cords occupying his limbs.

How could he endure it?

At that moment, with the terrible prospect before him, he would have forgiven his captors freely if they would only have returned and released him. But that, evidently, they had no intention of doing.

Could they really mean to leave him there till morning? He felt a sickening conviction across that point. They could not return and release him without exposing themselves to discovery. They would leave him alone to others, for the sake of their own security.

He groaned in anguish of spirit, and only a faint gurgle passed the gag.

Boom! It was the door striking down the clock-tower. Eleven more strokes followed. Midnight! Monteth wretched and groaned in the cold and darkness.

Then, if never before, he repented of past illdeeds. For, whenever his assailants were, since would not have happened if he had made himself respected and not hated. For it was too late to think of that.

His punishment was upon him, and he had to bear it as best he could, comforted only by the hope of vengeance on the morrow.

CHAPTER 10.

The Head's Decision.

"HALLO—hallo!"
Darral, a Sixth Form member, belonging to the School House, uttered the exclamation.

It was morning, but the hour was yet early. Darral was up with the dawn, intending to get his bike out and go for a spin, the morning being clear and bright, though cold. He had come down to the bicycle-shed, and the first object that caught his eye was Monteth's bicycle leaning against the wall outside.

"Hallo!" said Darral. "There's something up. That's Monteth's jigger. How the dickens did he come to leave it outside the shed?"

Considerably puzzled and mystified, Darral opened the door of the shed and entered. A wriggling object on the floor made a gurgling sound, and at once attracted his attention. Darral gave a jump.

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It was not very light in the shed, but he could see that the object was a fellow that faced and feet, and he looked also to a black-and-white dog with a black-and-white.

"Monsteth, by Jove!"
Monsteth groaned and gasped. Darrel, amazed as he was, did not waste time. He bent over Monsteth and extracted the cog from his mangled mouth, and then began to write the card. Monsteth gasped.

"Thank! I'm nearly dead. Oh, somebody shall pay for this!"

"How did you get like this?" demanded Darrel, in wonder.

"Who told you so?"

"I don't know."

"How long have you been here?"

"All night."

"All night! My hat!"

"I'll make him suffer for it! I've a suspicion who it was!"

"I'll make the perfect. If it's true I'll have his kicked out of St. Jim's! The beast! You nearly died with cold and hunger. Go away with that coat!—Where's the handkerchief?"

"What handkerchief?"

"The one that was in my mouth. It was shoved in by the chap who offered me leave in the dark. There were two of them. Give it to me."

"I don't know," said Darrel obediently. "He wouldn't be such a mug as to give himself away by using his own handkerchief, I imagine. Here it is. My Aunt Matilda!"

"He stared at the handkerchief in dismay. Monsteth's eye followed his, and fastened upon the message in the corner of the handkerchief, which was in a very dirty and muddy stain. The professor's eyes glowered.

"It's Kildare's?"

"Yes, and that only proves what I said, that the fellow didn't use his own handkerchief," said Darrel, reverting from his astonishment.

"Monsteth smiled appreciatively.

"Where was he to get anybody else's from?" he demanded.

"I suspected that it was Kildare all along."

"But it's not! As if Kildare would play a trick like that!"

"We'll see what he has to say about it!" roared Monsteth grimly.

"Do you mean that you are going to accuse him?"

"Yes, certainly I do."

"You'd better be careful what you are about. He——"

"When I want your advice I'll ask for it."

"Oh, all right! If you choose to make a fool of yourself it's no business of mine."

And Darrel turned and strode out of the shed. The School House agent was in reality somewhat uneasy. He did not believe that Kildare had done the deed, yet the feeling of the handkerchief was certainly strange. Darrel was the only person whose name he believed in him implicitly. He gave up the idea of a spin for that evening, and went straight to Kildare's room. Monsteth, looking white and haggard and very miserable, went off more slowly to the New House.

Kildare was up when Darrel knocked at his door, and his cheery voice made the entry come in. The captain was listening to his collar. He looked round inquiringly at Darrel.

"Hello! You're an early bird. What are you looking glass about?"

"Was I looking glass?" said Darrel.

"The fact is, Kildare, there's been a nasty accident happening. I suppose you don't know that Monsteth was surprised in the bike-shed last night, bound and gagged, and left there till this morning."

"No, Darrel."

"I thought not," said Darrel, with a breath of relief. "But he was gagged with your handkerchief, old chap, and he swears it was you that did it."

"My handkerchief! I lost one yesterday, after a spin on my bike."

"That somebody picked it up and used it to gag Monsteth with."

"I say, Darrel, this is a serious business! Monsteth is not the kind of chap to take this lying down, and there will be an inquiry," said Kildare gravely. "He has made himself pretty obnoxious in school-of-New House, but I never imagined a School House fellow would play such a trick. But it must have been some sort of our side."

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"I suppose so."

"It will have to be looked into."

"Yes, and the sooner the better, before that old cracked capital out of St. G. Of course, he's been badly treated, but he's fully glad of an excuse for going for the School House."

"I'll go over and see him," said Kildare, after a pause.

"It is ridiculous that he should think I was one of his assistants. I'm not on good terms with the fellows, but he ought to know that if I hit him I should hit him fairly, not in the dark. I'd better have a talk with him before he drags the matter into it."

And Kildare a few minutes later walked over to the New House, and entering, made his way to the prefect's quarters.

"Come in!" greeted a merry voice, as Kildare tapped.

Monsteth stared at the captain as he entered, and opened straight.

"What do you want here?"

"I have come to speak to you, Monsteth," said Kildare quietly. "I hear from Darrel that you suspect me of having had a hand in the outrage you have suffered."

"I know you best, said Monsteth.

"You are mistaken. I assure you——"

"Prove it, then. If it wasn't you, which of the School House fellows was it?"

"I shall make strict inquiry. If it is a practical joke of the juniors——"

Monsteth interrupted him.

"It wasn't. They were two of them, and one at least was a big fellow. They wore scarves, and not jackets at all. You can't show it off to the youngsters."

"Kildare flushed scarlet.

"Then you believe I was there?"

"I know you were."

"Then don't be so foolish as to say I gave you my word of honor that I have nothing whatever to do with the affair until Darrel told me ten minutes ago."

"I don't believe you."

"Very well; there will be an investigation."

"I shall demand one."

"You needn't trouble. As you have chosen to announce, I shall demand it myself!"

And Kildare walked away. The prefect scowled after him bitterly. He was occupied and angry all over, but there was a malicious satisfaction in his haggard face.

"It's my chance at last," he said to himself. "I'll bring him down over this affair. He has deluded himself into my hands at last."

The story of what had happened to the last prefect of the New House was not long in spreading over the college. The New House scowled with indignation from end to end. Monsteth was not much liked by anybody, but he was their captain, the head of their house, and so any insult offered to him was as an insult to themselves.

The seniors were angry and incensed, and the juniors, who took up everything upon vigorously, show their elders, were in a state of boundless rage and indignation.

"Figgins & Co., however, usually the leaders in everything, had little to say about the matter. Perhaps that was an account of their recent sufferings at the hands of the prefect. Figgins, indeed, was heard to say that it served the beast right.

"You, to it done, as far as that goes!" exclaimed Wyon. "But it's the insult to the House. Don't you feel that, Figgins?"

"No, I don't," said Figgins. "I say, good luck to whoever it was. Monsteth has wanted nothing on for a long time, and now he's got what he's been asking for."

"My sentiments," claimed in Kerr.

Wyon looked at them rather queerly, and said no more about the matter.

The rest of the New House juniors voiced their indignation whenever any two or three of them met together. The seniors discussed the matter more soberly, but with equal earnestness; but many insisted to believe that Kildare had had a hand in the affair.

Monsteth firmly maintained that he was sure of it, but that would be very little with the fellows who knew the prefect well.

"I say, Monty," said Sifton, "do you really think Kildare had anything to do with it?"

"Yes!" snapped Monsteth.

"Between ourselves, you know, of course."

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Flaggie, exasperated, was hitting out, and the keeper smelt a smart tap on his nose. Then the viola of his trunk overtook. He whirled Flaggie over, and began to step with hard. The New House leader struggled and roared. "Remove! Remove!" he yelled. (See Chapter 2.)

course, in any case we're going to make as much capital out of it as we can; but—

"Look here, command you, I am certain of what I say: Darrin's a witness that the headmaster shewed in my mouth was Kibb's."

"Kibb says he lost it."
 "He couldn't say anything else, after such an oversight."
 "Then you really think he did it?"
 "Have you, I know he did it?"
 "And the other fellow?"
 "I don't know, but a Richard Home thing, of course."
 "You don't think it might have been young Blake and his set?"

"One of them might have been, but one of them was a senior at least, and that I will swear to. None of the School House lads are so overgrown that I could have mistaken one of them for a senior by his size."

"No, that's so," agreed Saffron. "Well, we shall make something out of this, Maury."

"I mean so," Kibb's will get kicked out of St. Jim's if I can manage it," said the prefect viciously. "At all events, I'll make him sit up."

Shortly afterwards the prefect, who felt too ill after his

painful experience to go down that day, was visited in his study by the Housemaster.

Mr. Ratcliff was very sympathetic and indignant, and quite assured that the House rivalry was at the bottom of the business; but he, too, hesitated to believe Kibb's guilt. But Maury's positive assertion that a senior had been engaged in the attack, and the production of the headmaster's, helped to convince him.

"At all events, the matter will be very strictly investigated," the master said. "I will make my report to Mr. Roberts at once."

Maury's assumed an expression of concern.

"I don't want to appear in the light of a tale-bearer," he said. "If I had been able, I should have kept the affair more public knowledge. Unless you really think an inquiry will do good, sir, I should prefer to let the matter drop."

He knew perfectly well that Mr. Ratcliff was the last person in the world to let the matter drop. The Housemaster's answer at once assured him on that point.

"Your feelings do you credit, Maury, but for the sake of the school the matter must be satisfactorily cleared up," he said.

"Very well, sir, it is in your hands," the prefect said

weekly. "You will understand my reluctance. There has been bad blood between Kildare and myself, and my accusations might be regarded as malicious. The other day I was compelled to complain to Mr. Bailford because Kildare refused to take notice of an offence by one of his juniors. It was Hinks, who forced his way into the New House and behaved in a most unbecoming manner. That, I have no doubt, was Kildare's motive in this attack."

"Quite probably," said Mr. Batehill. "The matter shall be threshed out."

And he repaired forthwith to the Head of St. Jim's. Dr. Holmes had already heard of the happening of the night, and he was as determined as the Housemaster that the culprit should be discovered and severely punished.

"I can hardly believe that it was Kildare," he said; "but if it was, I shall expel him from the school. Kildare or not, the guilty parties shall be found and dealt with severely."

The whole school was assembled in Hall, and a thrill went through every boy there when the doctor entered, an accompanying figure in cap and gown.

The doctor's face was very stern as he looked over the assembly with a flashing glance, and began to speak in clear, hard tones.

"An extraordinary outrage was perpetrated within the walls of St. James' last night," began the Head. "A perfect case of the New House was seized and found in a most brutal manner, and destroyed to a bicycle-stand, whose he remained until he was released this morning."

He paused to give his words effect, but the boys, who knew all about it, were not very much impressed so far. The Head went on:

"I call upon the boys who were guilty of this outrage to stand forward and confess to their fault, and in that case I will deal with them as leniently as I can, though, of course, I shall have no option but to inflict severe punishment."

Another pause. The generous offer of amercement punishment at the reward of open confession did not appear to appeal to the culprit's sporting instincts.

"No takers?" murmured Hinks.

And Harris and Digby suppressed a giggle. The doctor waited for a full minute; but it became quite clear that no one intended to stand forward and confess, and he went on, in a still sterner voice:

"Very well. The cowardly scoundrels having refused to confess, the matter will proceed to a strict and searching investigation; and I may say now that every boy concerned in the outrage will be expelled from the school."

A sort of shiver went through the assembly. Expulsion was a terrible sentence. Would he be found out? Was it Kildare? Many curious glances turned towards the captain of St. Jim's, but he did not appear to notice them. His face was quite calm and composed. The Head was now gone yet, and the boys waited breathlessly for what was to follow.

"Moosehill!" The prefect stepped out of the ranks of the Sixth. "Kindly state what you know upon this subject."

"I know very little, sir. Of course, it was too dark for me to see the faces of the fellows who collared me, and they took care not to speak. I am certain that one at least of them was a senior."

"From his side?"

"Yes, sir."

"There are several big bags in the Lower Forms."

"Not in the School House, sir—not big enough to be taken for a senior, even in the dark."

"That is true."

"And then the handcuffed chap was forced into my mouth, sir, belonging to Kildare."

It was out now, and the boys of St. Jim's held their breath.

"Kildare?" The captain of St. Jim's stepped forward.

"How do you account for your handcuff being used to my mouth?"

"I had a handcuff yesterday, sir," said Kildare, in a clear, calm voice. "I have no doubt it was the same one."

"Where did you use it?"

"I don't know exactly; but some time when I was with my bike."

"Then it might have been in the bicycle-stand?" said the doctor.

"Quite likely, sir."

"It was very well and neatly, sir," struck in Darrel.

"I noticed by its look that it had been troubled on."

"Thank you, Darrel! I may take it, Kildare, that you know nothing at all about this outrage?"

"No more than is known to the rest of the school, sir."

There was a pause. The inquiry had come to an impasse, and all wondered what would be the Head's way out of it. Things looked suspicious against Kildare; but his frank answers had completely cleared him of suspicion in the eyes of the School House.

With the New House boys it was different. Some of their minds had been guilty of the outrage, and Kildare was the only one to whom the finger of suspicion pointed. That was enough for them.

"We are left in doubt," said Dr. Holmes slowly. "It appears to be the impression among a section of my boys that the outrage may solely be attributed to some member of the School House, owing to the absurd rivalry which has of late been so rampant between the two Houses. I cannot admit that as proved. All we know for certain is this—that two boys, including at least one senior, attacked a prefect in a barbarous way. I must refuse, without further evidence, to attach the guilt to either House. It rests upon the whole school to discover the culprit, and until it is done"—here the doctor paused, and the school hung on his words—"until it is done, a stigma rests upon the school, and punishment must in common fairness fall upon all alike."

There was a murmur.

"Until the culprit is discovered," went on the Head, raising his voice a little, "the usual half-holidays will be cancelled. If I see any reason to change my mind, you will be informed; but I do not think that is likely to be the case."

A bombshell would not have startled and dismayed the boys more. It was not till the doctor's railing power had rattled out of the hall that the assembly recovered from their consternation. Then a chorus of disapproval and rage broke out:

"Gated till we find them out!"

"Both half-holidays stopped!"

"Shame!"

"What becomes of the football fixtures?"

"Shame!"

"Shame!"

The masters tried to restore silence and order, but for a time they were unsuccessful. The whole school was wild with indignation, and especially the New House. Not a boy of that house but was certain that the culprit, whoever they were, belonged to the School House side.

Upon this point the School House boys themselves had very sunny doubts, though they were all ready to maintain the innocence of Kildare himself. To punish the whole school was bad enough, but to punish both houses, when the culprits were certainly in the School House, was unpardonable.

So the New House fellows declared, in no uncertain terms. Their last shred of doubt as to Kildare's guilt had vanished now. They were too angry to doubt it any longer. It was not logical, but very natural.

"Goodness, Kildare!"

"Confess, you scoundrel!"

"Make a clean breast of it!"

Kildare walked to the door, apparently not hearing the cries. Some of the excited New House fellows appeared to be about to make a rush for him, but the School House closed up round their captain. The hall was swayed in great disorder, angrily talking excitedly, and nobody taking the trouble to listen.

"What a set of blithering silly asses!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in disgust, as a group of New House boys passed him, loudly denouncing Kildare. "As if our captain would have had anything to do with such a trick! We can't say anything to the seniors, chap, but we'll look out for Figgins & Co. after lessons, and see what they have to say about it."

"What's he?" exclaimed Manners and Lovelace.

And when the Shell were released from class, Tom Merry and his chums fairly went on the war-path. They had expected to find Figgins & Co. lead in their wrath, but they were surprised and disappointed.

Figgins & Co. seemed to have been attacked by a new and phenomenal fit of industry, and increased in their study at work. Disappointed here, Tom Merry found plenty of work to do in other quarters, for the main body of the New House juniors were holding an indignation meeting in the quadrangle.

"This is where we come in," said Tom Merry.

His voice called the School House juniors together, and they broke down upon the indignation meeting, and their comings changed it into a battle.

The New House boys by no means "backed in coming forward," and they gave the School House pretty nearly as good as they received from them, and the uproar became terrific, till there on four prefects walked out with their canes, and the youthful heroes were dispersed.

But that day, except when lessons detained the boys, it was difficult to find a quiet corner about St. Jim's in which a couple of combatants were not fighting it out to their mutual satisfaction.

CHAPTER 11.

A Stormy Committee Meeting.

SIR JIM'S showed no sign of settling down into its old quiet. True, the fighting between the juniors came to an end, after a plentiful distribution of black eyes, swollen noses, and thick ears. But the feeling between the two Houses was more strained than it had ever been before in the history of St. Jim's.

The doctor's sentence seriously interfered with the life of the college on the site of the sports. There were a good many football fetters coming off shortly, and if the half-holidays were stopped, there was no recourse but to write and cancel the matches.

It may be imagined how the football committee and the school generally viewed this prospect.

What was to be done? That was a question the School House paragonists could not answer; but the New House were quite ready to answer it for them.

It was necessary for the culprit or culprits to confess.

The School House passionately maintained the innocence of their captain, and the New House just as passionately declared that there wasn't a shadow of doubt as to his guilt.

"Who had done it if Kildare hadn't? Wasn't it certain that it was a School House man, anyway? How the New House had the advantage, and they pressed it home. The School House felt that the offenders were most probably in their house. It was not probable that Monteth had been noticed so badly by the boys of his own side; but as to who the culprits were nobody hazarded even a guess.

Darrel and one or two others had been inclined to suspect Blake, whose feud with the head prefect of the New House was well known. But Monteth's positive declaration that a senior had been engaged in the business staggered them; and Blake, when questioned, asserted his innocence in a way that served conviction.

"I dare say we might have done it," said Blake modestly, "if we had thought of it; but we didn't, you see. We never knew that Monteth was out on his bike that night even."

"I hope you would not have done it, Blake," said Kildare quietly. "It was a cruel trick to leave him tied up there on a cold night."

"Yes, Kildare; but I've been thinking about that. The charge may not have meant to be so hard on the headmaster; but, having had him up, they were afraid to give themselves away by taking any steps to get him released before morning, because he is such a spirited beast."

"You seem inclined to defend their action, at all events, Blake."

"Oh, no, I don't! I'm sorry it happened, in a way. But I don't think there's any doubt that it was done by some chap whom that brute had been ragging, and if all was known, I dare say we should all think it served him right."

"That will do, Blake. You can go."

Kildare smiled when the junior was gone.

"I don't think Blake had a hand in it, Darrel. It's a mystery."

"I'm of your opinion," agreed Darrel. "But what's to be done? The Head seems to have made up his mind, and it's not the slightest use reconstraining with him. But the situation can't last much longer without open war between the two Houses. And then the matches!"

"I don't know what's to be done. It seems hopeless to try to discover who served Monteth like that. With certain suspicion hanging over the culprit, we can't expect him to confess."

"Well, it would be expecting a lot."

"It's Friday now. I shall have to write to Redcliffe concerning the match for to-morrow, unless something turns up. Darrel shook his head.

"Nothing can turn up in time. There will be a row in committee to-night, Kildare."

"I'm afraid so."

"Why not watch the meeting? The New House members are certain to make themselves obnoxious, and there's really nothing to discuss. We've got to cancel the match to-morrow, and it can't be helped."

"They would say I was afraid to face them."

"Well, perhaps they would."

Kildare compressed his lips.

"We'd better leave the meeting. I know there will be a row, but I can't see it."

The prospect was not a pleasant one to Kildare.

There was almost as many New House fellows as School House boys on the football committee, and they were certain to make things unpleasant, in their firm belief that Kildare was the cause of the present state of affairs.

Already the seniors of the two Houses were anxiously on quaking terms, and both sides expected the meeting that coming to bring matters to a head.

Their anticipations were realised.

The committee met in a room in the School House, and when the New House members came over, there were some bumps among the juniors who watched them come in.

"There would have been a greater demonstration had Mr. Tom Merry, who kept the youngsters of the School House within bounds."

"Remember the stranger that it is within the gates," he said severely. "You must not be rude to even a pig like Monteth, or say rude things to a hapless waster like Bolton, while they're, so to speak, our guests. Let there be peace—in other words, keep your heads shut, or I'll lam you!"

And there was peace, and the New House seniors passed on to the committee, scowling defiantly round them as they went.

Kildare came in a few moments after them, and as he entered the committee-room the New House members looked flushed, but remained perfectly composed.

He stood up and looked at Monteth and his companions.

"Before we get to business," he said, "I should like to say a few words. Monteth, I believe, is still under the impression that I had a hand in the affair of the other night. That impression is shared by a good many in the New House."

"By all!" interrupted Monteth.

"Kildare, sit up."

"Very well, all then. What I want to say is this. I have denied all knowledge of the affair. Now, I give you my word of honour that I am innocent. Has any one of you ever known me break my word, or tell a lie?"

"I don't know," drawled Monteth. "I haven't taken the trouble to note all your words; but in the instances I certainly believe you are telling 'a lie. Now, don't get excited. You asked for it, and that's my plain opinion."

Kildare controlled himself with an effort.

"Very well," he said, "I won't give you my opinion of you, Monteth; you wouldn't like to hear it. I can only say I am innocent, and that I should expect an honourable fellow to take my word."

"Your word is not good enough," replied the prefect indignantly. "The guests are against you, you see."

"It's no good arguing it," said Kildare. "I can say no more than I have said. Let us get to business."

"Certainly," he started the discussion.

"The question is," said Kildare, taking no further notice of the guest. "What are we to say to the Redcliffe fellows? The match cannot take place to-morrow."

"It will have to be cancelled," said Monteth, "and they will cross over us and say that we are afraid of them."

"Of course, they will," Bolton remarked. "That's only to be expected. It's no good asking them for another date, for, unless Kildare confesses, the Head's sentence will last to the end of the term."

Kildare flushed with anger, and there came a gleam into his eyes that made Bolton wish he had not spoken. The captain rapped upon the table.

"I have already said," he exclaimed, "that I have nothing to confess! That matter is closed so far as this meeting is concerned. Any further reference to it I shall take as a personal insult, and shall close the meeting."

Monteth shrugged his shoulders.

"You can do as you like, of course. I, for one, don't see what use the meeting is going to be, as there's nothing to be done. We can't meet Redcliffe, and it's useless, as Bolton says, to ask them to make another date, as we've not said that we shall be able to meet them then. The future will have to be scratched."

"That is my opinion, and if you are all agreed, I will write the letter to the Redcliffe skipper."

There was evidently nothing else to be done, and Kildare dove pen and paper towards him. But Monteth was not fished yet.

"What reason are you going to give?" he asked. "You can't say we are all kept in school like naughty infants, and sent to go on to play."

"It doesn't matter much what we say," remarked Bolton.

"In any case, they will set it down as an attack of funk."

"Crying to circumstances would do," suggested Redben. Kildare nodded.

"It is not necessary to go into particulars," he said. "It is impossible for us to keep the engagement, owing to unforeseen circumstances. Regrets, etc. I suppose that will do."

"I suppose it's as good as anything," said Monteth, significantly.

The letter was written.

Then Monteth, who had been exchanging whispers with Bolton and Wark, the New House fifth-former, rose to his feet.

"Kildare commenced by saying a few words," he said.

"I don't see why I shouldn't finish by doing the same. I

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want to make an appeal to you School House fellows, in the name of the school, as a whole." There was a grim silence. "Whoever it was did that dirty trick the other night, we all want him discovered," said Monteth. "There isn't much doubt that both the ruffians belonged to the School House. Why don't you find them out? You have had some days to do it in, and you haven't done it. You don't like the attitude the New House takes on the matter. Why don't you bring the guilty parties to light, then? You can't blame us if we think that you are shielding them, because you care less for the school than for the School House. That's what I want to say. You School House chaps get into the habit of talking as if you were specially concerned for the honour of St. Jim's. It's you who are unwrinking that honour now. Shut up, and let us finish! Some of your fellows did it, and are too cowardly to confess. You know that as well as I do. I needn't say more, but I have a rest from your talk about the good of the school, and the honour of the school, and the rest of it! It makes me tired."

Monteth was scoring, and the School House fellows had nothing to say.

"That's all," said Monteth, "except that, if it wasn't Kildare, it's his duty to find out who it was; and if his talk about standing together for the sake of the school isn't all gas, he'll do it."

"I have done my best," said Kildare quietly. "There is no else."

Monteth laughed.

"I don't know what you call a else," he said. "It doesn't require a Sherlock Holmes to find one here. What about the headmaster that was stuffed into my mouth? I fancy that was else enough."

Kildare rose to his feet.

"You are coming back to the old subject," he said. "I don't want a row with you, Monteth, as so there's nothing more to be done, the meeting may as well end. Good-night!"

He walked towards the door. Monteth burst into a taunting laugh.

He was too reckless to understand the captain of St. Jim's, or to appreciate his position, and he did not know what a slight wounded Kildare was keeping over himself.

"Wait a bit!" he exclaimed. "There's one more point to be applied. What about future meetings? Are we to keep up the solemn farce of committee meetings, to decide each time that there's only a letter of excuse to be written?"

"Have you anything else to suggest?"

"Yes."

"Go on, then."

"I suggest," said Monteth, emboldened by Kildare's questions, which he wholly misunderstood—"I suggest that you play the man, Kildare, and own up like a decent fellow, and have done with this humbug! Now—"

Kildare walked to the door again. The contemptuous indifference of his manner was too much for Monteth.

"And if you haven't the manliness to do it," he hinted, "I suggest that you shall be cut by every decent fellow in the school, and suggest what you do! I—"

He got no further. Kildare's patience might have held out, but the other School House fellows were not made of such stern stuff. A back-handed clap from Rowden across Monteth's fall upon the ceiling, and stopped his utterance abruptly. The perfect roared back in surprise and rage.

In a second everyone was on his feet, and School House and New House glared at each other like tigers about to spring.

Monteth, choking with fury, leaped at Rowden with clenched fist, and the School House senior was quite ready for him; but a sudden gasp upon the perfect's collar swung him back. It was the grip of Kildare's hand.

Monteth glared bitterly into the pale, calm face of the captain of St. Jim's.

"Let me go!" he yelled.

And, beside himself with rage, he struck Kildare full in the face.

The hot temper of the Irish lad, long, hard-headed, boiled over at last. His grip tightened upon Monteth like a vice, and the perfect was dragged to the door as helplessly as if he had been an infant, and flung bodily out into the corridor.

He went reeling and staggering along, till he fell with a crash, and lay gasping.

Kildare turned back into the room. His eyes were flashing fire.

"You'd better go, Nelson and Webb," he said, "and take

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Monteith will say! If he wants this to go any further he's only got to go! I've staid about as much as I intend to stand from him and from all of you!"

Wells was looking wistful, but Selton anxious to escape, dragged him away; and they joined the choral and engaged perfect in the corridor. Monteith was furious, and inclined to rush back into the committee-room and seek consolation on the spot. They forced him away, however, and the trio returned to the New House.

It was got likely that the happening at the committee meeting would long remain a secret. Before bed-time it was all over the School House, and most of the fellows—especially the juniors—agreed that Kildare had acted in the most self-defensive manner possible.

"There's only one way of shutting up a cat like Monteith," said Blake sagely. "That is by jumping on him! Kildare was quite right; I'd have done the same in his place."

This was a clamorous. Blake's audience were not inclined to disagree with him. On the contrary, the approval was hearty and unanimous.

"So would I," said Tom Merry; "so would we all!" "That's so," said Blake. "Oh Kildare is innocent as a baby, and we've got to back him up. The seniors are fond of acting on us, but I'd like to know where the glory of the School House would be if it wasn't for its youngsters, as they call us. Check!"

"That's so!" chorused the juniors. "We'll back old Kildare up; we'll stand by him!"

Exactly what faces the backing up was to take, or what good it would do Kildare, was not quite clear; but there was no doubt at all about the enthusiasm and determination of the juniors of the School House.

As when Tom Merry & Co. congregated with Blake & Co. in Study No. 4, four boys, other ones and eyes, the chief of the School House juniors had come round to say on the subject.

"The matter won't end here, chaps," he exclaimed. "Monteith's a pig; but he can't stand being singled about like a pack of pointers. The New House would rise up against him if he did."

"You think there will be a fight?"

"I do."

"Between a prefect and the captain of the school?" said Horrie, in an awed voice.

"Just that, my poppin! And when it comes off we are going to be there, just to see this play in Kildare, and for the sake of things generally. So keep your eyes open, kids, and take care that we don't miss the fun."

And his listeners declared that they would.

CHAPTER 12. Captain Against Prefect.

THE same evening a bag from the New House brought over a note from Monteith to Kildare. It was brief, but to the point:

"After what has happened, there are only two alternatives for you to choose from. You will either send me a written apology, or meet me at Newstead's Barn to-morrow at one."

"James Moorcrane."

Kildare lit his pipe. He had known the challenge was coming, and after what had happened, it was responsible for him to decline it. He wrote a still more laconic reply on the back of the note:

"I shall not apologise.—E. K."

The bag took the note back to Monteith, who was awaiting the reply in the study, with three or four other New House seniors. The bag was dismissed, and Monteith opened the envelope. He read the captain's reply aloud.

"That settles it," said Wells. "He will meet you."

Monteith nodded. He didn't particularly like the prospect of meeting the finest athlete at St. Jim's in single combat, but there was no getting out of it without showing the white feather. Kildare, he also believed, would never fight.

Public opinion in his House had forced him to send the challenge, but he had felt pretty certain, indeed had no doubt, that Kildare would stand upon his dignity, as captain of the school, and refuse to accept it. He had not done so, and the fight was bound to come off.

Well, there was a chance of a victory that would cover the prefect with glory and even at the worst the fight would be certain to get Kildare into hot water if it came off, as Monteith meant that it should.

For a captain of St. Jim's to fight a prefect was unheard of, and the doctor would be terribly annoyed when he heard.

"Yes, that settles it," agreed Monteith. "I'm not sorry it's come to this. Of course, it's a disgraceful affair, between the two head prefects of the school; but I've never had a chance of getting my own back for the trick Kildare played me that night."

"I suppose there's no doubt Kildare did it?" hesitated Wells.

"No, there isn't!" Monteith snapped.

"I mean, he looked unconsciously above when he said he knew nothing about it tonight; and that other thing he said was quite—none of us ever knew him tell a cross."

"But! Anyway, it was some School House cab, and he's shielding them."

"Yes, I suppose it comes to that."

"Of course it does!" growled Monteith. "Anyway, you're going to meet, and I shall do my best to lick him. If I get licked I can stand it."

"We shall have to be careful to keep it from the doctor's ears," remarked Wells. "There would be a beauty even if it came out."

"I don't see how it can come out."

At the same time Monteith fully intended that it should come out. A careless word dropped in the presence of his lag was sufficient. The fight would not be without witnesses.

The next day—Saturday—matters were worse instead of better at St. Jim's. The boys of the rival Houses did not speak—and usually scowled—when they met, either in class or out of it.

The masters took no notice, though they saw well enough what was going on. Even the doctor could not help noticing the bitterness that was rampant.

Perhaps it occurred to the Head then that his way of dealing with the matter had not been the most judicious possible; but if so, he could not very well retreat, and so he adhered to his course, and went his way, and made no sign.

After school, Tom Merry and Blake and their chums were loudly on the look-out. One of them kept watch without ceasing upon Kildare, taking the duty in turn. The usual half-holiday being restricted, it seems very to recommence in the afternoon. Now, Tom Merry was certain that the anticipated fight would not take place within the precincts of St. Jim's, and equally certain that the combatants would not go abroad after dark for the meeting.

He, therefore, sagely deduced that if they fought that day or at all, the fight would come off in the middle of the day. He was right; and he knew it when Digby came racing in with the news that he had seen Kildare and Darrel go down to the spin.

"They're off!" said Tom Merry, jumping up. "Here's Blake & Co.!" Come on!"

"Yes, wait!" cried in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was able to walk without much discomfort by now, his sprained ankle having improved wonderfully.

And the seven juniors were soon hot on the track. Blake spotted the two seniors just outside the gates, and the seven followed cautiously in the wake of Kildare and Darrel.

They took excellent care not to allow the seniors to see them, and this was not difficult for the captain and his chums were thinking of arguing but the juniors.

"They're going to Newstead's Barn," said Horrie indignantly at Kildare and Darrel left the lane by a stile. "What do you say to cutting across the fields and getting there first?"

"Jolly good idea!" said Tom Merry.

And the seven did so at once. They quickly arrived at the barn, and as it would not have been judicious to allow their presence to be known, they climbed upon the roof. From this vantage point of vantage they would be able to view all the proceedings, themselves unobserved.

Five minutes later Kildare arrived, with Darrel. The two stopped by the barn. It was a quiet and solitary place, shaded by trees—the ideal spot for such an occasion. The two seniors stood waiting. Kildare's face was clouded. Darrel looked at him curiously more than once.

"It is very unpolite but you, Kildare, I shouldn't know what to think," he said presently. "You look as if you were going to be injured."

Kildare smiled faintly.

"I don't feel very cheerful, Darrel. This is a beauty after."

"Monteith deserves all you can give him."

"I know he does, and more; but don't you see that this pleases me in his hands? This is really what he has aimed at. I have allowed him to provoke me into a row. I ought to have kept my temper."

"You kept it too long as it was. Any other fellow would have wiped up the ground with the old knag ago!"

"Still, it's different with the captain of the school. It's wrong for me to fight, but I couldn't refuse the challenge after throwing him out of the room. If it comes to the doctor's ears, what shall I have to say for myself?"

"But it won't. Even Monteith wouldn't be bold enough to tell, I suppose."

"These things have a way of getting out," said Kildare. "Well, never mind, it can't be helped now. Here comes Monteith!"

Monteith, with Selton and Wells, was coming through the spin. The greeting of the two parties was of the coldest.

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and they immediately came to business. Preliminaries were quickly arranged. Webb took out his watch to set as time-keeper.

"Three-minute rounds and one-minute rests," he said, "and fight till one is licked. Is that satisfactory? Then till to."

The combatants faced each other. Brave and stalwart Killdare looked as if he stepped up to the line. Monteth did not cut quite so fine a figure. However, he managed to make a pretty good show of spirit, and the fight commenced.

The first round was lacking in liveness; the fencers were taking each other's measure. In the second round Killdare began to press, and his boxing was seen to be superior to Monteth's. His blows came home again and again, while the perfect hardly touched him, and Monteth was looking dazed at the end of the round.

In the third, Monteth succeeded in getting home a right-hander which made Killdare stagger; but as he followed it up, Killdare countered, and put in a splendid upper-cut with his left, which sent the perfect flying.

"Bravo!" The group of onlookers bared their heads at the sudden shout, and cheered as the great of punners on the roof of the barn. It was Blisko who had thus unintentionally betrayed his presence, but he was by no means ashamed when he saw that he was discovered.

"It's all right!" he called out coolly. "We've only come to see fair play. You can get on, my pippeled Good old School House!"

"Yah!" came a counter-yell. "School House cede! New House is cock-brave!"

The School House juniors stared. The shout came from a tree near the barn, and now that their attention was drawn towards it they discerned three figures among the bare branches—the lively form of Figgins on a lower branch, and the "Co." on a higher one.

"Hallo! Are you there?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Come to see your captain boxed?"

"No, your'n!" replied Webb.

Killdare dressed at the first juncture.

"You'd better be off, all of you!" he exclaimed.

"Time!" said Webb.

And the fourth round commenced, and the juniors were forgotten. Both the sencers were warning to their work now, and heavy blows were given and received on both sides. But all along Killdare had the best of it.

Physically the two might be equal, but the captain's wind was sounder, and there was no question but that he was pluckier and more resolute.

When he really began to receive punishment, in fact, Monteth would gladly have thrown up the sponge, and it was only for the sake of appearance that he kept on.

His efforts were mainly devoted to self-defence, and his attacking was feeble, and such tactics could only end one way in the long run.

At last, in the sixth round, a tremendous drive from Killdare sent him with a crash to the ground, and at the call of "Time!" he only licked and groaned. Killdare stood waiting for him to get on his feet.

"Back up!" said Webb, in a whisper. "Look at those kids looking on and grinning! For the honour of the New House, you know!"

Monteth grinded his teeth. The honour of the New House did not seem so important to him just then as escaping from Killdare's knock-down blows; but it was the penalty of greatness. He was captain of the New House, and as such he was expected to fight till he dropped.

He rose, with Blisko's assistance, and faced Killdare again, with as good a grace as he could muster.

"Time!" said Webb.

At it again the sencers' woot, hammer and toge. Monteth, spitball and enraged, did his best, and he got in some stinging blows; but the round end-d in a right-hander from Killdare, and the perfect went down again with a crash. Blisko tried to raise him, but he pushed him away.

"Back up!" gasped Monteth. "I'm done! If you want any more, the it present the honour of the New House!"

"How the honour of the New House! Shut up!" Killdare looked at the fallen perfect steadily.

"I am quite satisfied, if you are, Monteth," he said, "and I am perfectly willing to take your hand in friendship, if you will admit that you were mistaken about that matter."

Monteth scowled savagely.

"I am not likely to admit that I am mistaken, when I know I am not," he snarled. "As for your friendship, keep it for those that want it!"

Killdare turned away. Darrel helped him on with his coat, and Blisko did the same for the perfect. Monteth had been licked—hopelessly licked—but the School House

leaders on the roof of the barn made no stand, out of a shrewd respect for a taller foe; and the New House youngsters in the tree looked at each other shyly.

"Those kids will chatter," said Darrel. "It is unlucky. The affair is bound to get out now."

Tom Merry heard the remark, and he flushed with indignation.

"Here, I say, Darrel, cheer it!" he exclaimed. "Who's certain to chatter, I'd like to know? You don't know what you are talking about!"

"Do you mean that you will be able to hold your tongue?"

"Why, of course! And so will Figgins & Co."

"It's no good," said Killdare quietly. "Look there!"

He nodded towards a row of heads, a dozen of them, all belonging to New House juniors.

Darrel's brow darkened.

"It looks to me as if all the New House had been let into the secret!" he exclaimed hotly.

"In that respect for me!" he exclaimed. "What about your own boys? These are at least seven of them on the spot, I believe."

"Don't argue," said Killdare. "Come along, old chap! It can't be helped now."

The chums walked away together. Killdare's face was gloomy, and Darrel's severely more cheerful.

"There will be a row over this, Killdare," the latter said abruptly. "It will be the talk of the school before evening."

"No doubt about that."

"The Head will hear of it by to-morrow."

"I suppose so."

"There will be a row."

"I'm certain of that. It's no use complaining, Darrel. I know what is afoot, and I can make up my mind to it."

"And what is that?" asked Darrel, with a deep breath.

"Dr. Holmes will ask me to resign my position."

Darrel gasped.

"Hear?"

"I expect so. And, as a matter of fact, I can't blame him. There's a stigma on the School House till the guilty party is discovered, and suspicion rests on me. He expects me to do something to clear it up."

"You have done all you can."

"Which is nothing. Now, this fight on top of my failure will be the last straw. Well, it's no good talking about it. I shall have to stand it, I suppose."

"Hang it!" said Darrel. "I wish I knew who played that trick on Monteth. I'd wring his money neck!"

"I dare say it will never be discovered now. The fellows, whoever they were, will keep close for their own sakes. Only there's one thing I am beginning to feel pretty sure about."

"What's that?"

"That they were not School House fellows at all."

Darrel looked thoughtful.

"I can't call to mind any claps it might have been," he said. "But it is likely that New House fellows would use their own captain like that!"

"It's no good saying that! They only back him up because it's the New House against the School House. He has suspicion on his own side."

"It's enough that we should stand all the odds if that's really the case."

"There seems to be no getting at the truth," said Killdare. "The only chance is that the fellows will coolen, and that's not likely. The affair has given Monteth a hand to play that he knows how to make the best of. Unless the unexpected happens, Darrel, I am afraid St. Jim's will be electing a new captain next week."

CHAPTER 13

The Captains Vanant.

THE School House juniors descended from the roof of the barn. Figgins & Co. had slid down from the tree.

The senior walked away from the spot without taking any notice of them, and the rival parties were left on the scene of the combat, eyeing each other very dubiously.

"I suppose you chaps won't deny," said Tom Merry severely, "that the School House is cock-brave of St. Jim's now?"

"Well, rather, I don't think!" said Figgins hotly. "Yah! School House kids!"

"Who licked your blessed perfect?" demanded Blisko.

"Who wiped up the ground with him?" boomed Marmion.

"Who could do it again, with one hand?" howled Piggy.

"Killdare! School House a cock-brave!" roared Hercules.

"Yess, washed!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Boss!" said Figgins. "Killdare may have licked Monteth, but there isn't a junior in the School House who could lick me!"

"Isn't there?" demanded Blake, with a wistful look.
"Hello," exclaimed Wynn, "there's the bell. Come along!"

The sound of the bell prevented the threatened outbreak of hostilities. The juniors escaped back to the school.
Now, Tom Merry and Blake and their friends, and perhaps Figgins & Co., might have kept the secret of what they had seen at Newcomb's Barn; but the dozen or so New House juniors who had also witnessed the fight had no idea of keeping it dark. They talked of it right and left, and spread the story of the fight through the length and breadth of St. Jim's.

If anyone had felt doubt as to its accuracy, the looks of Kildare and Monteth were sufficient to prove it.

Kildare had escaped the mere light of the two; but his face bore very visible signs of punishment, while Monteth's physiognomy was entirely red and heated.

Sooner or later the masters were bound to hear of it, and from then it was certain to pass to the ears of the doctor.

It was only a question of time, and the time was a most unpleasant one for Kildare. He knew that he would be called over the coals for it, and he would have been glad to have the expected interview with the doctor over and done with, whatever the result of it.

The next day was Sunday and a quiet one at St. Jim's. The storm held off. But on Monday it burst. Kildare received a message asking him early to come to the Headmaster's study.

"It's come," he said to Darrel. "Well, it's no use complaining."

And his head was very avert as he walked to the dreaded apartment. He had done nothing to be ashamed of; he was only the victim of unfortunate circumstances, and of the raising of an unscrupulous enemy, and he did not fear to look the doctor or any other person in the face with his fearless, bristling eyes.

"Come in!" said the doctor coldly. He looked at the captain of St. Jim's with a stern glance as he entered the room. "A very painful matter has come to my notice, Kildare," he went on, in the same uncompromising tone.

"I am informed that you have so far forgotten the dignity of your position in the school, and the confidence placed in you, as to enter into a fight, and with a prefect."

"Yes, sir."

The frank admission seemed to puzzle the doctor.

"It is true, then?"

"It is true that I have had a fight with Monteth."

"Why?"

"It was over that old affair, sir. He persists in believing me guilty. I do not mean to cast the blame upon him. Suffering as he does, it is natural, I suppose, that he should be so misled. That was the reason."

"But you should have refused to fight. With what justice can you stop the fighting among the juniors if you indulge in quarrels?"

"About that other affair?" resumed the doctor. "Nothing has come to light. I need not say that, as captain of the school, you should be better able to form an opinion, and to make an investigation among the boys, than myself. I have, in fact, relied upon you, and nothing has come of it."

"I have done my best."

"No doubt; but your father has given colour to the suspicion that you had a hand in it."

"Do you believe that, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Not at all. But the suspicion remains; and, as I have said, it gains ground. So long as it exists, you must see for yourself that the situation is awkward in the extreme, as you hold the position of captain of the school."

"I understand, sir," said Kildare quietly. "You wish me to resign?"

"I did not say so. I have pointed out the facts as they stand, and I leave you to act according to your judgment."

"Very well, sir, I will resign."

"I cannot deny that I consider it the wisest step you could take, Kildare. When your name is cleared of suspicion, the case will be altered. I have no more to say."

Kildare left the study in a very depressed mood. Darrel met him in the corridor.

"Well?"

"I have resigned."

"And the doctor has accepted it?"

"Yes."

"Better?" said Darrel.

Blake was coming along the corridor. He stopped, and stared open-mouthed at the two seniors.

"Hello! What's that?" he exclaimed. "Are you off your rookers, Kildare? Resigned! What do you mean by it?"

"Shut up!" said Darrel.
But Kildare gave the boy a nod and a smile. Blake's sudden reprovers rather touched him, and he could forgive the junior's way of expressing himself.

"Yes, I have resigned the captaincy," he said. "All St. Jim's will know it soon, as I am going to put it on the notice-board."

"But you'll tell us why, Kildare, won't you?"

"That's no secret. It's because the chaps haven't been found one who would do with that night in the bickering. The New House believe me guilty, and will send the right parties as discovered, which may be severe. Things will go on more sensibly under a new captain."

And Kildare walked away, leaving Blake dumbfounded. The rumor hurried off to Study No. 1. He burst into it like a whirlwind, making Horsey and Digby jump in alarm.

"I tell you, boys, what do you think?"

"What's the news, our hero, with Indian?"

"Kildare's resigned!"

"Done what?"

"Resigned the captaincy. And now, you mark my words, I feel Monteth doesn't have a try for it!" said Blake.

"We must stop that!" said Horsey decidedly.

"Rather!" agreed Digby. "Fancy that and an captain of St. Jim's!"

The two left their study. They found a crowd round the notice-board in the hall. There was a brief notice on it, in Kildare's handwriting, on a sheet of paper. It stated that, owing to the mystery still surrounding the affair of the bickering, and the suspensions entertained by a section of the school,

the captain of St. Jim's had deemed it advisable to resign his post. A new election for captain would be held at some date and time to be specified by the Head.

The School House read the notice with dismay. A new election! Then, as likely or not, some New House cad would get in as captain.

That would be a New House which the college of St. Jim's would never recognize—at least, so declared the youngsters of the School House.

Very different views were held in the rival House. The news was received "over the way" with unminuted satisfaction.

Monteth's eyes glared when he heard it. This was what he had been working for for a long time, and now success more complete than he had dared to hope for, and he was proportionately jaded.

"Now's our chance," he said to Belfon. "Now's our chance to run a candidate, and get the post of captain for the New House. That will be a headache for them, Belfon, you simply must get me in as captain when the election comes on."

"Right you are, Monty! We'll work it. I hardly expected the thing to pan out like this, though. We are in luck!"

The other New House seniors were of the same mind. Monteth would be their candidate, and they were determined, by hook or by crook, to carry the election of the head prefect of the New House when the date came round for appointing the new captain of St. Jim's.

It would be a heavy blow to the prestige of the School House, and a signal triumph over their rivals, if they could succeed in carrying their point.

The juniors of the New House were still more enthusiastic about the matter than the seniors. A mass meeting was held in the common-room, and speeches were made, and a great deal of excitement followed; but the meeting was not complete, for Figgins & Co. were absent. The three leaders of the New House juniors had been a good deal less in the public eye of late than was their custom, and their house-fellows were beginning to wonder what was the matter with them.

They had not usually been backward in coming forward. After an excited discussion, a deputation of the Lower Fourth went to the study where the trio were doing, or pretending to do, their preparation, to interview them upon the subject.

"Hello!" said Figgins ungraciously. "What do you kids want?"

"We want you," said Pease. "What are you hiding yourself for? Why don't you attend the meeting?"

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"Get something better to do," said Figgins. "How your old printing?"

"But it's about the election."

"What election?"

"For a new captain."

"Why, the date ain't fixed yet?"

"Nothing like being ready."

"Oh, you're too nervous! Travel!"

"But I say, Figgins, what's the matter with you? We're got to get in our candidates, you know, against the old the School House put up. They're sure to put up Davrel. We're going to get Monteith in as captain, by hook or by crook."

Figgins gave a jump.

"Monteith?"

"Yes."

"An ex-plain of St. Jim's?"

"Yes, of course. Why not?"

"That chap?" exclaimed Figgins. "Why, he is about fit to be captain of a convict prison, that's what he's fit for. It's bad enough to have him for our prefect, without making him captain of St. Jim's."

"I don't say he's an angel," replied Pratt "but he's our man. It's up against the School House, you know."

"Bain! Besides, how do you know Kildare's going to lose the post?"

"He's resigned, ain't he?"

"Only because they haven't found out who tied up Monteith."

"Oh, Kildare did that, right enough?"

"You're a silly one!" answered Figgins pointedly. "Kildare didn't; and if the truth comes out in time, he'll withdraw his resignation."

"Oh, that's all rot, you know! It won't!"

"That's all you know, young Pratt. Anyway, we're not going to attend any of your blessed kid's meetings. Get out of my study, do!"

The deputation retired crestfallen.

"You can go and join them, Wynn," said Figgins. "I see you want to."

"Oh, sir, Figgins; it's just as you like. I—"

"Oh, go, sir."

"You're hardly ready to-night, Figgins?"

"Bain! Get along!"

Wynn followed the deputation. Figgins and Kerr were left alone in the study. There was a long silence, and the two stared at each other across the table. Kerr was fidgety and nervous; Figgins was pale, and looked stunned.

"What are you going to do?" said Figgins.

"I don't know," said Kerr helplessly.

"What a precious fool I was!" went on Figgins thoughtfully. "Not that I'm sorry for what I did, the least! But it was a fool's trick!"

"It was I as rough as you."

"I suggested it."

"I helped to do it."

"It was my idea."

"It's no good, Figgins. One and both, we're in it together," said Kerr. "I can see what's in your mind."

"Look here, you shut up! I'm going to think."

Figgins leaned his head on his hands. Kerr watched him anxiously. Presently he looked up wearily.

"I think I'll take a turn in the quad," he said. "I can't think here."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Kerr timidly.

"No."

And Figgins left the study, leaving his chair looking very depressed. But it was not merely for a stroll in the quadrangle that Figgins had gone. Straight down the path he went, with a steady, unobtrusive stride, toward the School House.

CHAPTER 14.
Figgins Owns Up!

MONTEITH! Jack Blake calmly put his head in at the door of the study where Monteith sat in consultation with half a dozen New House members, discussing the pros and cons of his candidature for the captaincy. Monteith looked at him with a frown.

"What do you want here, you cheeky hool!"

"He reached for a case."

"Keep your wool sh, old fellow!" said Blake. "I didn't want to come into your measly old casual ward of a house; but the House has sent you with a note."

"Give it to me." Blake handed it over. Monteith looked at it in wonder. "What on earth can the Head want with me? It can't be about the fight at this time of day!" His expression deepened when he read the note. "He wants me to go over on an important matter. So long, you chaps! I don't say I shall be back soon."

THE NEW LIBRARY.—No. 261.

Blake had already gone. The prefect walked across the quadrangle, wondering. He entered the School House, and went straight to the doctor's study. He passed a group of patients, and caught a word or two that puzzled him.

"I don't know what's the matter with old Figgins," Blake was saying. "He looked as pale as a ghost when he came in. I don't know what he can want with the doctor; but if he's in Quaker Street, you chaps, we've got to back him up. He's a good sort, old Figgins it, though he does belong to that measly New House; and if anybody don't agree with me, I'm ready to fight him at once!"

As this generous offer was not accepted, it seemed to be unanimously agreed that Figgins was a good sort, and should be backed up, if necessary.

Somewhat puzzled, Monteith passed on and knocked at the doctor's door. The deep voice of the principal bade him enter, and he started on seeing that two others were already present—Kildare and Figgins.

Figgins was looking white and stretched, but there was an unusual firmness about his face, and his form was held very erect.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Monteith, wonderingly.

"Yes, said the doctor. "I have heard a very strange story, and I have sent for you and Kildare in order that it may be cleared up in your presence."

Kildare and Monteith exchanged glances. It was evident that neither knew what was coming. The doctor, looking very troubled, made a sign to Figgins.

"This unhappy boy has made a startling confession," he said. "Proceed, Figgins. You adhere to your statement?"

"Yes, sir. It was I who attacked Monteith in the basketball that night."

Monteith gave a jump, and Kildare started. The doctor's keen eye was upon the prefect's face.

"You had no suspicion of this, Monteith?"

"Absolutely none, sir."

The doctor gave a breath of relief.

"The doctor gave a breath of relief."

"I am glad of that. I was sure that you would not shield a boy of your own House at the expense of making suspicious upon an innocent person. Proceed, Figgins."

"I did it," said Figgins dogmatically. "I'm not sorry for it; only as it turned out, I know you're going to expel me, sir, so I may as well speak out. I never had any idea that my surprise would fall upon anybody in particular. I never intended it, you. I meant to use a dagger, or something, for a gag, and, feeling about in the dark, I must have picked up Kildare's handkerchief. I didn't know it was his, and never knew it till the next day, when all the boys were talking about it."

"I am sure he is speaking the truth, sir," said Kildare.

Figgins gave him a grateful look.

"Thank you, Kildare," he said quietly. "That's good of you, seeing what a beastly mess I got you into, though I didn't mean to. I thought it would never be known who had done it, and I was struck all of a heap when I heard about the handkerchief, and that Kildare was suspected. I know I ought to have covered up them; but I hadn't the pluck. And then, sir, before I had time to do it, you said that the chap who did it should be expelled, and that meant of course I couldn't speak out. I've had a rotten time since. I never knew much what it was before to have a conscience, somehow, but the last week or two I've been having a rotten time. I'm glad it's all out!"

"And I'm glad to hear you say that," said the doctor, very gravely. "But you were not slow in this matter, Figgins!"

"No, sir."

"Who was your companion?"

Figgins was silent.

"I will not press that question," said Dr. Holmes, kindly enough. "But I must have a little further explanation, Figgins. I understand that you have kept silent all this time, in spite of a pecking conscience. Why have you spoken out now?"

"Because I couldn't stand it. It was Kildare being the captaincy through me that helped me to make up my mind. I hope that's all over now?"

"Yes," said the Head quietly; "that's all over now. Kildare will, I am sure, accede to my request, and resign captain of St. Jim's."

"If you wish it, sir," said Kildare.

"I do wish it."

"Then I withdraw my resignation, sir."

Monteith's lips came together in a tight line.

"And now, Figgins, resumed the doctor, "since you have told me so much, you may as well tell the rest. What caused your motives for this unparalelled outrage? What caused you to inflict such a cruel trick upon your prefect?"

Figgins hesitated to speak.

"Speak freely," said Dr. Holmes. "Had your guilt been discovered by another, Figgins, I should have expelled you at once. Your voluntary confession places the matter on a

different footing. I shall consider the matter very carefully, and show you as much mercy as is consistent with my duty as a reward for taking this honorable course. I hope it will say be necessary for me to expel you."

Figgins brightened up.

"Thank you, sir!" he muttered, with tears glittering on his eyelashes. "If—if you would let me off this, I could stand the rest."

"We shall see. Why did you attack Monteth?"

Still the junior hesitated. Precarious as his position was, whodley blunder and custom were strong, and he could not bring himself to "smack" upon his prefect.

"Come, come!" said the doctor, not unkindly. "I must leave upon an answer. You do not wish me to believe that your soling was approved?"

"No, sir!" said Figgins.

And thus he stopped again. The Head looked at Monteth.

"Have you any explanation to offer, Monteth?"

The prefect's brain had worked rapidly during this strange interview. He had been utterly taken by surprise at first, but now he had had time to think, he realized that his position was worse than Kildare's had been before the revelation.

If Figgins chose to speak out, and to call witnesses to prove his words, the doctor would lose a rate of thorough loyalty, and Monteth would not long retain his position as head prefect of the New House.

Figgins's hesitation gave the prefect a chance, and he took it.

"Yes, sir," he said quietly. "I think I can explain it. I had occasion to speak Figgins shortly before that occurrence somewhat severely. I may have been too severe, though this was not my intention. I don't know how you will receive what I am going to say, sir, but I should like to make an appeal to you."

"Make it, by all means."

"I should like you to pardon Figgins. As the party who suffered by his action, sir," said the prefect, "I have a sort of right to ask it. I am sure he never meant to set as badly as he did."

"We didn't mean to," said Figgins. "We meant to tell someone, and here you released, but we couldn't without giving ourselves away, and—"

"So I think so," went on Monteth, "a good thrashing will mean the same, if you are willing to concede the sentence of expulsion."

"Quite so," said the doctor. "I—Come in!" He broke off at a timid tap come at the door.

The door opened, and Kerr entered. He was looking very pale and nervous, but there was a sort of quivering determination in his face.

"What do you want, Kerr?"

"If you please, sir, I—I—Figgis has given the game away—I know he would—and I want to tell you I—"

"Speak up!" said Figgins.

"No!" said Kerr quickly. "I was in it, too, sir. You can't make me shut up now, Figgis. I told you I would if you did."

"So you were in it, too?" said the doctor severely. "Very well, as you shared Figgins's fault, you shall share his punishment. I leave you both in the hands of your prefect, and I trust that he will thrash you both tomorrow in the way you deserve. You may go."

"We—we're not to be expelled, sir!" gasped the two together.

"No."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

And Figgins and Kerr left the study.

"And now," said the doctor, "I cannot say how glad I am this affair is cleared up. You will acknowledge, Monteth, that you were very unjust to Kildare. You see that it was a very tall junior, whom you were certain was a senior, and the culprit belonged to your own House, and not to the School House at all. I think you will see that you should apologise to Kildare for your unjust suspicion."

Monteth coloured.

"I am sorry, Kildare," he said, in a low voice.

Kildare nodded.

"That's all right," he said, cordially enough. "This has cleared the air a bit, and I hope no shall pull together hence in future."

"I hope so, too," said the doctor. "One word more, Monteth. The affair you have been too severe with your juniors, and I hope you will make it a point to temper justice with a little more mercy in future. Good-night!"

The two prefects left the Head's study together. There was a strange world of unspoken questions in Kildare's breast as his mind flashed back over the events of the last quarter of an hour. Figgins, the boy he had lately been so "down on," and had treated with so much injustice, had refused to give him away even in the hour of his own

extremity! Then there was Kildare, whom he, Monteth, had so unjustly, but to do him justice, honestly suspected of an outrage which he should have known was utterly foreign to Eric Kildare's whole nature! Yet Kildare bore no malice and had been willing to shake hands just now, as if nothing had happened.

It began to be borne in upon Monteth, who was by no means wholly bad, that the part he had been playing was a very mean and mistaken one indeed; and he actually found himself wishing that he had paid less attention to the counsel of fellows like Barton, and more to those of fellows like the stalwart, manly captain at his side.

Monteth's brief dream of becoming captain of St. Jim's was over, and Kildare's position in the school was stronger than ever. As he reflected upon this, Monteth felt less sorry that it was so, than he would have believed possible only a quarter of an hour before. Though he would hardly have admitted it, even to himself, the feeling was creeping in at the back of his mind, that Kildare was actually more worthy than himself of filling the honorable position of captain of St. Jim's.

Though he hardly realized it himself yet, Monteth had had a lesson, and thus it was that something impelled him to turn suddenly and hold out his hand to Kildare, who had been keeping a grave silence, as if he guessed something of the turmoil of thoughts that was passing through the New House prefect's mind.

"Will you shake hands, Kildare?" exclaimed Monteth impulsively. "I hardly like to ask you after what's happened, but—but things will be different in future. I've been a fool!"

Kildare grasped the proffered hand, and gave it a hearty shake.

"My dear chap," he said cheerily, "don't say another word about it! It's New House and School House together, in future, as far as we're concerned."

"You're a good chap, Kildare!" said Monteth, a little hastily.

Figgins and Kerr were called into Monteth's study next day, and each received a very severe thrashing, which they bore almost without a murmur. After the awful anticipation of expulsion, a thrashing, however severe, seemed cheap in comparison.

When it was all over, Monteth attended the juniors beyond measure by asking their pardon for the way in which he had been persecuting them lately.

"I have been unjust, I know," finished Monteth gravely, "but I think you will find things a bit different after this. I've shook matters up with Kildare, and we're going to pull together in future. That's all!"

"We're jolly glad to hear it, Monteth!" exclaimed Figgins and Kerr together. And still and now as they were from the thrashing he had just given them, the two juniors shook hands heartily enough with their head prefect.

The clearing of Kildare's name from all suspicion was rather a blow to the New House fellows, who had so loudly and confidently asserted his guilt. But, upon reflection, the best of them went over to the School House and asked the captain's pardon.

Figgins's revelation had come like a bombshell to the juniors of his own House, and they were inclined to rag him pretty severely. But the long-limbed chief of the New House was quite able to defend himself, and the "Co." stood by him loyally, and so the symptoms of ragging were stamped out. And, at the same time, Figgins had jumped into popularity in the great House.

The rumour of his feud with the head prefect of his House was well known, and his coming forward to clear Kildare was an action the School House boys could admire and appreciate.

But Figgins did not allow his head to be turned by the congratulations that were showered upon him in the School House. He and Kerr had a lesson, as well as Monteth; and it was a long time before either of the New House chaps forgot the trouble that was caused at St. Jim's by Figgins & Co.'s Feud.

THE END.

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WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

Nelson Lee, the world-famous detective, is denouncing all his energies to the task of breaking the power of a gigantic criminal organization, known as the Order of the King. The infamous secret society is under the leadership of a man who is known to all the members as "The Chief," but who also passes under the name of Mr. Stephen Meredith. His principal lieutenants are known as "The Squire," "The Doctor," and "Lady Ursula"—a beautiful young girl with the heart of a tiger.

With the intention of forcing him to join the Order, the Chief kidnaped Jack Langley, a young engineer, and Miss Aylmer, his fiancée. Jack proved obstinate, and so the two young people remain the captives of the Order. Their only hope of release comes from Nelson Lee, who is hot on the track of the Chief and his associates.

By a stroke of good luck Nelson Lee manages once more to get on the track of the infamous leader, and across the Chief

and the Doctor. During the trial which takes place at Sheffield, the detective is taken seriously ill, and on his recovery learns that the prisoners have escaped.

On the doctor's advice the detective goes to stay at a quiet farmhouse at Totley. Whilst out for a "walk" or, as it really was, a search, he discovers the house where Jack Langley and Miss Aylmer are being kept as prisoners. Whilst attempting to enter the house, Nelson Lee is pushed into a pit by his attackers, but manages to get out by means of an underground passage, which leads into a room where he finds Ethel Aylmer all alone. After a short time, however, the Squire, who is drunk, enters suddenly, and Nelson Lee hides behind a curtain. The Squire tells Ethel that he has murdered Nelson Lee. "Now," he says, with a drunken leer, "what do you think of that?"

(Now go on with the story.)

The Tightening of the Net.

"I think you're a hard!" said Ethel Aylmer striving her best to assume an air of horror-stricken indignation. "Have you any regard for the well-being of human life?"

"None whatever," the Squire replied. "When an individual crosses my path that individual has got to be removed. And Nelson Lee had crossed my path in more ways than one. He was not only a danger to the Order of the King, but he stood between you and me."

"Between you and me?" gasped Ethel. "What on earth do you mean?"

He answered her question with another.

"Do you know who's coming here next week?"

"How should I know?"

"The Chief and the Doctor."

"Well?"

"And can you guess who is coming with them?"

"My uncle, perhaps."

"Oh dear me! Your uncle is a very estimable man, and has been very useful to us; but we're not such fools as to entrust him with the secret of this house. No, my dear. When the Chief and the Doctor arrive there'll be somebody with them who is denser to you than your wits."

"Jack Langley?"

"Yes. And you know what you're going to happen when Jack Langley comes!"

"I ought to. You've told me often enough."

"I had an object. I wanted to impress it on your mind. But I've a different object to-night. So long as Nelson Lee was alive I dare say you were dabbling yourself with the hope that some day he would rescue you. But that hope's gone."

THE SQUIRE.—No. 263.

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now. Nelson Lee is dead. The police have practically thrown up the sponge; Jack Langley is on his way to the gallows; and the whole world there isn't a single soul who is able or willing to help you. You are absolutely and completely at our mercy. Isn't that so?"

"I suppose it is," said Ethel, with downcast eyes.

He drew his chair a little closer, and strove in vain to catch hold of her hand.

"Well, look here, my dear," he said, in a husky, mendacious tone. "I'll help you. I'll be your friend. I'll pay to the Chief, 'I refuse to allow you to torture the girl; I insist that she shall be set at liberty.' The Doctor will back me up, I know, so that we shall have two to one; and, according to the rules of the Order of the King, the Chief will have to give in to us."

Ethel stared at him in bewildering amazement.

"This is some ill-considered joke!" she exclaimed. "You do not mean what you say."

"Upon my life I do!" he replied. "I will do all this and more for you, but only on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"That you promise to marry me," said the Squire. "Ever since you came to my house the fever of love has been steadily—"

"Enough!" cried Ethel, starting to her feet, and receding from him with a gesture of loathing. "Your words are as trash to me! Marry me! Heaven forbid! Sooner than purchase my freedom by marrying a disappointed member of the Inquisition like yourself, I would gladly suffer for all the tortures of the Inquisition—ay, and death itself, a thousand times!"

The Squire's face grew black with rage. He dragged himself unsteadily to his feet.

"I'll have a him, at any rate!" he growled, and he caught her in his arms.

Crack! Like a lightning flash the open hand of the indignant girl smacked through the air, and left its scarlet imprint on his face.

"Touch me if you dare, you cowardly cur!" she panted, freeing herself from his embrace, and backing towards the window.

"Hang you! You shall wear for this!" he snarled. And, clanking his hat, he made a sudden drunken lurch towards her.

"Back, or I fire!"

The words rang through the room like the silver notes of a chime. The curtains parted as if by magic. Nelson Lee strode forward into the light, and levelled his revolver at the Squire's head.

Thoughtlessly sobbing, the Squire pulled up, and dropped his arm. For one brief instant he stared at Nelson Lee in speechless consternation. Then he opened his mouth to yell for help, but ere the cry could cross his lips the detective had him by the throat.

Slipping one foot behind the Squire's ankle, he tripped him up and flung him on his back. Then he planted one knee on the wretched's chest, and dealt him a blow between the eyes that momentarily stunned him.

"Quick! Tear off a strip of that tablecloth, and roll it into a ball!" gasped Nelson Lee, turning to Ethel.

With trembling fingers the terrified girl obeyed. The detective thrusting the ball into the Squire's mouth, and secured the gag by means of a pocket-handkerchief. Then he sprang to his feet, darted across the room, and took down one of the pictures. Whipping out his pocket-knife, he cut off the cord, and lashed the Squire's wrists behind his back. With a second length of cord he pinioned his captive's arms to his sides; with a third he secured his ankles.

"So far so good!" he said, regarding his handiwork with an air of justifiable satisfaction.

"Though I say it who shouldn't, that was neatly, quickly, and quietly done!"

"But what are you going to do with him?" asked Ethel, who was trembling like an aspen leaf.

"I'm going to hide him where his friends won't find him in a hurry," said Nelson Lee.

He dragged the Squire across the room, and opened the door which gave admittance to the underground passage. He dropped him up in a huddled heap at the top of the steps, then he closed the panel, and turned to Ethel.

"I am now going to put your courage to a pretty severe test," he said. "I am going to ask you to allow me to leave you here whilst I go for the police."

"Leave me here!" cried Ethel, in dismay. "But why may I not come with you?"

"You may, if you wish, of course," said Nelson Lee. "I'm not going to insist upon your remaining here; but, at the same time, I tell you frankly that I should very much prefer that you don't come with me."

"But why?"

"For two reasons. In the first place, although I have secured the Squire, I have still to make my escape from the house. It is only just gone ten. It is hardly likely that Lady Ursula and the servants have gone to bed yet, is it?"

"No; half-past eleven is their usual hour for retiring."

"Exactly! You will readily understand, therefore, that it will be by no means an easy task for me to get out of the house without their seeing me. It is quite possible that I may have to climb one of the bed-room windows and scramble down the water-pipe. And you could hardly do that, could you?"

Ethel shook her head.

"If I am alone," continued the detective, "I feel pretty confident that I can get away without being seen. If you are with me, however, you will hamper my movements to a very considerable extent, and the upshot would probably be that we should neither of us escape. That is one of my reasons for wishing you to remain here."

"My second reason is this. Suppose I take you with me, and suppose we both get clear away. Then perhaps the Squire is missed, or is wanted, and Lady Ursula, or one of the servants, comes up here to look for him. They find this door is locked, even when the Squire is in the room. They knock at the door, and receive no answer. That does astonish them. They burst the door open, and discover that you have fled. What will happen then, do you suppose? Without a doubt every eye in the house will instantly take to flight."

"On the other hand, if you are here, and anybody knocks at the door and asks for the Squire, you will simply answer that he isn't here. That won't be a lie, because he isn't

here. He's in the space between the two walls. If they ask if he has been here, you will answer yes. If they ask if you know where he has gone, you will say that he didn't condescend to tell you where he was going, which will also be true. Even if they grow suspicious, and burst open the door, they will find nothing to implicate you—nothing to show that anything unusual has happened. And the time they will waste in searching for the Squire, and wondering what has become of him, will enable me to get back here with a posse of police, and arrest every man and woman in the house, including Lady Ursula.

"Those are my reasons for asking you to remain here. Are you willing to take the risk?"

"Of course you do think you'll be before you come back?" asked Ethel.

"About a couple of hours, if all goes well," said Nelson Lee.

"Very well," said Ethel. "Since you wish it I will stay."

"You're a brick!" said the detective gratefully. "If I thought that you were exposing yourself to any greater danger by remaining here than by coming with me, I would not ask you to stay. But I have no hesitation in saying that you will be far safer here than you would be if—"

In the midst of his sentence he paused, for at that moment his quick ears caught the sound of a light footstep in the passage outside.

"Somebody's coming!" he whispered. "Heaven grant that my plans are not doomed to be nipped in the bud, just when I was beginning to feel confident of success!"

He had scarcely finished speaking ere the footstep ceased, and the door remained with a sharp, reverberant knock.

"May I come in, please?" said the voice of Lady Ursula.

Quick as thought, the detective turned to Ethel, and held up his hand.

"Leave her to me!" he whispered.

He shuffled his feet on the floor to make believe that he was rising from a chair.

He lushed towards the door exactly as the Squire would have done, and whilst he was fumbling with the key he quietly placed one foot against the lower edge of the door to such a way as to prevent it being opened.

Then he turned the key, and made a great pretence of tugging at the handle.

"Continued the thing, it's stuck!" he growled, mimicking the Squire's drunken tones. "Push!"

Lady Ursula pushed, but the door still "stuck."

"Harder, can't you?" growled the detective, still wrestling with the handle. "Get your shoulder to it!"

Lady Ursula began to lose her temper. She placed her shoulder against the door and pushed again, suddenly, violently, and with all her might.

At the same instant the detective removed his foot, and hastily stepped back a yard or two, with the natural result that the door flew open to its widest extent, and Lady Ursula stumbled forward into the room, and literally fell into his arms.

In the twinkling of an eye one of his hands was over her mouth, and one of his arms was round her waist. He hated the thought of being violent towards a woman, even though that woman was the madhouse of Inspector Webb, and the chief-killer, would-be-murderer of himself.

But he could not afford to be over-scrupulous. In the interest of Ethel Aylmer, in the interest of himself, and in the interest of the sacred name of law and order, it was a little imperative that Lady Ursula should be prevented from issuing an alarm.

Despite her frantic struggles, he lifted her off her feet as easily as though she had been a child.

"The door!" he exclaimed in a low, intense whisper. "Close it, and lock it on the inside!"

Ethel flew to obey, and at the same time the detective carried his struggling captive across the room—his hand still over her mouth—and dropped her into an easy-chair.

With a swift and sudden movement, he slipped his hand down over her chin, and tightened his slender fingers round her thy-white throat.

For nearly five minutes he held her thus, and then, when her struggles had almost ceased, he bound and gagged her in the same way that he had bound and gagged the Squire.

Finally, he raised her gently in his arms, opened the secret panel, and set her down by the side of her confederate.

"Two out of four—not a bad night's work," he said, as he closed the panel. "The set is tightening fast. The Dolphin and the Firefly are lying at the bottom of the sea; the villa at Blotter is a shattered ruin; Deadwood House and the house in Belgrave Square are both in the hands of the police. In a few more hours, if all goes well, this house and the underground room will also be in the hands of the police, and the Squire and Lady Ursula, together with all their servants, will be safely lodged in goal. All that will remain to be done

to complete my task will be to arrest Sir Philip Arlson, by capturing the Chief and the Doctor.

"And to release Jack Langley," said Ethel earnestly.
 "And to release Jack Langley," said Nelson Lee.

The events of the next few hours do not call for lengthy description. For once in a way, Dame Fortune declared on the side of Nelson Lee, and nothing untoward occurred to mar the success of the best night's work he had done for years.

Leaving Ethel behind him, he contrived to make his escape from the house without attracting observation. At Abbeville he procured a supply horse, and rode post-haste to Sheffield, where he knocked up the Chief Constable, and told his startling tale.

Two hours later he returned to Abbeville Hall, accompanied by a miniature army of constables.

By that time the servants had all gone to bed, but one by one they were roused and ordered from their stables and taken into custody.

Ethel was then released, and handed over to Nelson Lee, along whom the Squire and Lady Ursula were removed from behind the secret panel, formally arrested, and sent to Sheffield, along with the servants, in charge of a mounted escort.

From beginning to end the detective's plans were carried out without the slightest hitch, and when at last the sun rose over the trees at Abbeville Park, it looked down on a silent and deserted-looking house, whose only inmates were a couple of plain-clothed constables, who had been left behind to mount guard on the underground man.

Truly, as Nelson Lee had said, the net was tightening fast!

An Unexpected Meeting.

"Where am I going?" asked Ethel, as she and the detective drove away through the rapidly brightening dawn.

"To Sheffield," said Nelson Lee. "I have engaged a suite of private apartments for you at the Wharfedale Hotel."

"But I have no money!" protested Ethel.

"That's all right," said the detective cheerfully. "I've told the manager that he's to supply you with everything you require—insisting, of course—and to send the bill to me."

"Oh, but I cannot think—"

"Fiddlesticks! It's only a loan, you know. You can repay me when we've settled accounts with your uncle."

"You are very good. How can I thank you?"

"By saying no more about it. According to your present arrangements, you will remain at the Wharfedale until the Squire and Lady Ursula have been brought before the magistrate, and you have given your evidence. By that time, I hope, you'll be treated in Penzance to give evidence against your uncle."

"Then you are bent upon arresting him?"

"Most certainly!"

"On whose charge?"

"First, for conspiring with the Doctor to procure your death; and, secondly, to defraud the ends of justice by assisting the Chief and the Doctor to escape. If I should have arrested him before, but I hadn't any witness to bring forward to support the charge. He knew that, and in his own house on the night after the wreck of the Dolphin, he openly confessed his crime, and dared me to do my worst. I shall remind him of that to-night!"

"To-night?"

"Yes. As soon as I've seen you comfortably installed at the Wharfedale, I'm going to drive back to my lodgings for a bath, a change of clothes, and some breakfast. I shall then return to Sheffield and catch the half-past nine express, which will find me in Penzance at 8:30 to-night. In another hour I shall be at Penzance Grange, accompanied by a constable, and armed with a warrant for the Philip's arrest. By eleven o'clock, if all goes well, your uncle will be in custody."

"You don't believe in letting the grass grow under your feet, I see!"

"I can't afford to in this particular instance. After the Squire and Lady Ursula had been arrested, and you had been set at liberty, the police would consider the detective's message to the Press in order that the news might be published in all the morning's papers. What would have happened do you think, if they had done? Your uncle would have learned that you were at liberty, he would have realized that the game was up, and he would have taken to flight before I could have got down to the Grange to arrest him."

"But won't that happen now?"

"No. I have persuaded the police to keep the news back for an hour or two, so that it won't be made known to the public until the evening papers come out. There are no evening papers in Penzance, I believe!"

Ethel shook her head.

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"THE HARBET" LIBRARY, Every Monday.

"So there you are," said Nelson Lee, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders. "The news of your release will not be known in Penzance until to-morrow morning, and by that time your uncle will be cooling his heels in the police-cells at Penzance."

It was half-past ten. The wind of these had laid her hand on Penzance Cove, and lashed it into a gale. The tide was at the fall, and the sea was like a millpond.

The moon was playing hide-and-seek with the slowly drifting masses of cloud which veiled the starry heavens, was lately driving across the sky.

Now the moon, both land and sea, was plunged into ink darkness. Now the moon burst through the clouds and flooded it with silvery light, bringing into bold relief the straggling line of cottages which fringed the curving beach and the two piers, towering cliffs that stood like sentinels on each side of the entrance to the bay.

Two men were standing at the door of Penzance Grange, which was perched as the reader may remember, on the summit of one of these cliffs. One of the men was Nelson Lee. The other was an inspector of the Penzance Police, who had been told of the detective's intention to visit the Grange, in order to assist him to arrest Sir Philip Arlson.

"They must have gone to bed," said the inspector. "Bring again!"

The detective raised his head, then he lowered it again and nodded to his companion.

"It's all right," he said. "I hear someone coming. You do the talking."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere the door was opened, and the butler appeared. The moon had retired behind the clouds, and the two men were all but invisible.

"Who is it?" said the butler, peering out into the darkness.

"Inspector Pollock, from Penzance," said the inspector.

"Is Sir Philip at home?"

"He isn't," replied the butler; "but we are expecting him back every minute."

"Do you know where he has gone?" asked the inspector.

"Yes. He and a couple of gentlemen, who are staying here, went out about eight o'clock for an evening's fishing in the bay. They said they would be back about half-past ten, so that in all probability they won't be very long now. Will you stop inside and wait!"

The inspector held a whispered consultation with Nelson Lee.

"I vote for going and awaiting him," said the detective. "If we go inside it's possible that the butler might send one of the servants to inform Sir Philip that Nelson Lee and a policeman are here, and are waiting for him up at the house; and you can guess what would happen then!"

"Quite so," said the inspector. "Sir Philip would, of course, come here the house at all. He would sleepily out and ran."

"Then you agree with me that we'd better go and meet him?"

"Certainly!"

The detective stepped forward into the light, and addressed the butler:

"Is there anybody with Sir Philip except his two friends?"

"No, sir."

"Not even a fisherman?"

"No, sir."

"They have gone in a boat, I presume?"

"Yes; they've gone in a little four-oared boat belonging to Sir Philip."

"Where will they land?"

"Here you ever been down this cliff?"

"Yes."

"Then you probably know that there's a narrow, zigzag path starting just outside the gates of the Grange and running down the face of the cliffs?"

"Yes; I know it well."

This was perfectly true. As the reader may remember, the detective had explored the cliff in the morning after the Chief had ascertained the constable who had discovered the sleeping party in the cave.

"When the tide is out," continued the butler, "the path runs right down on to the beach. When the tide is up—as it is to-night—the sea comes up to the foot of the cliff, and the last few yards of the path are under water. Just about high-water mark there's a little cave."

"I understand it," said Nelson Lee.

"Well, they'll run their boat up that way," said the butler. "There's an iron ring on the side of the cave, to which they'll fasten the boat, and then they'll scramble out and walk up the cliff. When the tide goes out the boat will be high and dry in the cave, and will have no reason there until it is high-water again."

"Think you!" said Nelson Lee. "Our business will not be more than a moment or two to transact, so I don't think we will come inside. We'll go and meet him."

With these words he turned on his heel and led the way down the zigzag path on the face of the cliff.

Half-way down, the detectives halted, and held up his hand.

"Command the darkness," he growled. "I wish the moon would come out. I thought I heard them then."

They continued their descent feet another twenty or thirty yards. Then the detective once more halted, and turned to his companions to do the same.

"Do you hear them?" he whispered.

The inspector nodded his head. Above the low, misty barrier of the plain, he had distinctly heard the clang of some thing and the hum of human voices.

"That was it in the case," said Nelson Lee. "They're coming just by the head. We'll wait for them here, where the rock is fairly level."

A moment or two later the voices grew suddenly more distinct and were accompanied by the sound of footsteps.

"They're in the cleft," whispered Nelson Lee. "They're coming on the path. Get out your handkerchiefs, and be ready to snuff snuffing, in case no show light."

The inspector drew his trousers, and whipped out the two handkerchiefs which were designed for Sir Philip's wrists.

Heavier and heavier came the footsteps. Louder and more distinct became the three men's voices. Then all at once to the inspector's surprise, the detective gave a violent start and stretched him by the arm.

"These voices!" he gasped, in a low, excited voice, "surely I cannot be mistaken! They are the voices of—"

He had no need to complete his sentence, for at that moment the moon burst nobly through the clouds, and bathed the rugged cliff in a flood of silvery splendor.

And there, not half a dozen yards away, stood Philip Ashbur, covered of Paulsen Grange, with the Chief on his left hand and the Doctor on his right.

The first instant the clouds closed over the moon again, and deepened the cliff in a sea of impenetrable darkness.

The reader may possibly remember that the Squire had told Edith Ashbur and Ethel had told Nelson Lee, that he had seen the Chief and the Doctor in a place of safety in the South. Strange to say, it had never occurred to Nelson Lee to suspect that this "place of safety in the South" might be Paulsen Grange. Even when the latter had informed him that Sir Philip had gone "riding with" a couple of gentlemen who are staying here, the detective had still no suspicion that these "gentlemen" were the Doctor and the Chief. In fact, it was not until he actually heard their voices that he first began to suspect the truth, and before he had time to decide what was best to be done, the moon flashed out—as already described—and revealed him to his foes.

It would be hard to say which of the four was the most surprised by this unexpected meeting, Nelson Lee and the inspector, or Sir Philip and his two companions. It would have equally hard to say whether Nelson Lee or the Chief was the first to regain his possession of mind. For the brief had found that the moon remained in view they both stood rooted in the spot in stupefied bewilderment. The moment the moon disappeared behind the clouds they both awoke from their stupor. The detective might have been first, but it was the Chief who was a very good second.

Reveries in hand, the detective started towards the spot where he had last seen the three men standing. At the same instant the Chief snatched up the handbook, which had fallen from Sir Philip's trembling hand, and looked out like the darkness. It was a random blow, but, as luck would have it, the handbook struck Nelson Lee on the top of the head, and felled him to the ground.

So he could scramble to his feet, the Chief sprang towards him, and lunged at his heart with the sharp end of his weapon.

Quick as thought, the detective dropped his revolver, and grasped the handbook with both hands. For a second or two more he was in doubt, the Chief making furious efforts to drive the weapon home, the detective holding it at bay as much as he could from his heart. Then the Chief began to gain the upper hand.

Such by such he forced the weapon farther down, and drove to his victim's heart. At last the gleaming loss point was piercing the detective's side, and his state appeared to be altered, when all at once with a sharp, sharp crack, the wooden cover of the handbook snapped in twain, and the Chief fell bounding at full length on the top of Nelson Lee.

Another thrilling installment of this exciting new serial in our Wednesday's issue of "THE GEM."

Next Wednesday: "THE MASKED ENTERTAINERS!"

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A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns will be from their readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonies sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must give what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice ten coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of the companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for advertisements can be sent in these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertiser direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Storeway House, Paternoster Street, London, E.C."

G. Beale, 222, Oak Street, Toronto, Canada, wishes to correspond with other Colonial readers with a view to exchanging stamps.

Miss M. Scoble, Rhine Cottage, Ash Street, Concord, via Southfield, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in England or America.

Miss G. E. Bruden, care of Union Electric Co. of Australia, Margaret Lane, Sydney, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader, about 19 years of age, living in the British Isles.

Miss I. Batten, care of F.O. Geylson, West Australia, wishes to correspond with a few readers of about 16-17 years of age.

R. Hancock, Finner Street, Maryborough, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England, age about 15; one interested in stamp-collecting preferred.

F. Mitchell, Eldon Hill, Singapore, Straits Settlements, wishes to correspond with a reader living in England.

E. McMillan, Marvel Look, Southern Cross, West Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 14.

J. Bell, and B. Nieland, 12, Fritchard Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 14-15.

R. Lettis, 25, St. Marys Street, Geelong, Victoria, Australia, wishes to exchange postcards with fellow-readers of about 15 or 16 years of age.

Miss M. Power, 224, Brunswick Street, North Fitzroy, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader living in England, age 23-18.

Miss C. Bromhall, 5, Barlow Street, Mount Lawley, Perth, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in England, age 16 or 17.

C. Redford, 22, Woodman Street, Toronto, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England or Scotland, age 13-14.

J. A. Finny, 26, Francis Street, Yzerfontein, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader.

F. B. Richardson, 74, Collier Street, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader in England or Ireland.

W. Stuart, Glenview, P.O. G. M. Co., Lovedale, Germiston, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 13, living in the Isle of Bute, Scotland.

G. R. Dore, care of South & Cado, Box 1068, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with an English girl reader, about 16 years of age.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"THE MASKED ENTERTAINERS."

by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The grand, long, complete short story for next week, which will appear under the above title, is one of Martin Clifford's best efforts, and abounds in humorous incidents and unexpected developments.

The Fifth-Formers at St. John's, seeing an opportunity of holding the Fench of their football club, and incidentally, of scoring over their rivals of the Sixth and Fourth Forms, decide to give a grand entertainment, and hire a troupe of masked Pierrots, who have been performing at the local theatre.

Tom Merry & Co., however, in a process of deliberation, manage to make some changes in the programme which are by no means to the taste of Carter & Co. of the Fifth, Higgins & Co., in their tails, take a hand in the game, and the fun continues merrily to the grand finale, which simply brings down the house.

"THE MASKED ENTERTAINERS"

is a story, that is bound to gain many new adherents for the Gem Library, so please circulate next week's issue among your friends who are not already Gemmen, and thus give your Editor a helping hand.

A Correction.

Commenting on a paragraph that appeared on this page a few weeks ago, one of my Manchester readers is kind enough to correct me in one small particular.

The paragraph referred to a record feat once performed by Charles Williams, the well-known goalkeeper, who once sensibly kicked a goal from goal. According to my correspondent, Williams was playing for Manchester City at the time, and not for Liverpool, as stated.

Epistles in Brief.

L. Buchanan (Melbourne, Australia).—Thank you for your letter. I was very pleased to hear how well you enjoy reading the stories contained in the "Gem."

Wm. Newport (Birmingham).—No, without the lady's permission I am not at liberty to disclose her address.

D. S. S. (Buses).—There is no special standing, but any business or private will be taken at a very low rate.

"Hammy" (Aldershot).—The rule is simply one of will power. Make up your mind you will keep spright when you walk.

C. Tinsley (Canada).—We are forwarding you the copy.

Readwell Ross (Kewick).—Harry Wharton's portrait appeared in No. 40 of the "Gem." I will consider your proposal.

An Edinburgh Reader.—"No, You it is said to come in to fall out. If taken it constitutes a life for better than un-answered too."

J. Miller (Dunbar).—You should write to Messrs. Gamage, of Hilliers.

A Constant Reader (Chilworth).—Keep a look-out in the "Gem" for him.

George Dibb (Birmingham).—Very sorry to hear of your illness, which I am sorry lack of space prevents me from printing.

W. Wainwright (Woodford).—Thanks for letter. You cannot do more than ask your friends who smoke to save them for you.

"Dandy Legs."—Don't smoke. If you see a non-smoker, remain so. Keep off pipes, and take plenty of exercise.

Fred G. Wilson (Dunbar).—Try Gamage's, of Hilliers.

R. Johnson (New Ham).—I will consider your proposal.

Geo. Moss (Stoke).—Write to H. Bingham, Westminster.

S. H.

F. W. Nolan (London).—Sorry, you're out.

L. S. M. (London).—If I could find time I would like to give you special permission. (2) Miss Locke is still abroad.

E. Bishop (Barn).—He has left.

H. O'Brien (Barnham).—Owing to lack of space I cannot comply with your request.

L. Smith (Chilworth).—See reply to H. O'Brien.

A Special Acknowledgment.

I have lately received many fine letters containing help, suggestions and ideas, which I should like to return as far as I can in this column. Unfortunately the lack of space will not lately preclude this, so that I must content myself with a brief acknowledgment of some of the best of those letters. To the following readers my best thanks are due for the interesting and welcome contributions:

"An Indignant Girl Reader," (M. T.) "Dishwater," "A G. Supporter," (F. R.) Liverpool; "Steel," Malvern; "F. A. Andrews, Notts; E. R. C. Balon; Miss C. David, Kent; Maribee, Bristol; "A York Girl Reader," (B. P.), York.

FIRST-CLASS EDUCATION FREE.

How Clever Readers May Win a School and University Career Free.

At one time or another I have received many letters from readers who, being unable to afford the usual fees, had ambitions to go to a good school, and afterwards to one of the "Oxford or Cambridge" University. Such ambitions are never very feasible, and by no means impossible of achievement by any lad, however poor his circumstances, provided he is hardy, clever, and, above all, is prepared to work hard.

There are a number of good schools in this country which offer excellent arrangements for the hard-working but poor scholar, in the shape of scholarships, some providing for free maintenance at the school, while others help to pay the expenses at the University.

There is Walsford Grammar School, where the fees are so low that a boy can pass a year, and having about 20 school boys to it of one kind or another, which will give a boy a whole year's education there. Then, if he gets all his work done well, this fine old school has no fewer than 100 scholarships of its own to Oxford and Cambridge, worth about £40 to £50 each.

There is Eborac School, with only 100 boys, but several free entrance scholarships to it, and has over 50 "Oxford" scholarships from £30 to £50 for its boys who remain at school till eighteen, and show special promise. There is Christ College, Brecon, with 150 boys and 10 entrance scholarships, which has no fewer than 100 "Oxford" scholarships, worth anything from £25 to £50 each, at its disposal. And there is Durham School, and the noted Merchant Taylor School in Ulverston (Lancashire) and the noted Merchant Taylor School in Manchester (Lancashire) and best of all, Christ Hospital, at Hockley, the Eborac School, knows all of the world.

There a boy will be kept from eight to eighteen, well fed, well clothed, well educated, and given every advantage, all likely free of expense to his parents with the certainty, if he can get to be a Graduate of the school, of his being sent to Oxford or Cambridge with anything from £20 to £100 to help him yearly till he gets his degree.

And from such schools as these, then, the poor boy in his foundation for a free course at Oxford or Cambridge.

Next week's article will show how the best-working of any nation's history of the University free of all expense to his parents.)

YOUR EDITOR.