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The FIGHTING FORM of ST. FRANKS.



A Magnificent Story of School Life at
St. Frank's, introducing the Famous
Fourth.

—*—

By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

CHAPTER I.

Cricket Under Difficulties.

CLACK!
Willy Handforth brought off a beautiful late cut, and the leather slipped away across the green, settling playing fields of St. Frank's.
"Come on!" shouted Willy.

He and Chubby Heath ran, and added two runs to the score before the ball was returned, neatly thrown in by Jimmy Head. The wicket performed one or two juggling tricks with the ball, and prepared for his next run, which consisted of a series of weird hops and skips.

Third-Form cricket was not taken very seriously at St. Frank's, except by the Third. It was a House match, and it had just started. Willy Handforth had won the toss, and he and Chubby Heath were opening the Ancient House innings. The total score stood at 3.

There were practically no spectators. Only one or two lads loitered about in the grass, taking a hild form of interest in the game. There was never anything very startling to witness in a Third-Form match.

Farther along Little Side, Reginald Pua and his merry men were at practice. Jerry Dush was batting, and the Australian junior was slipping well. Still farther on, right away on Big Side, the seniors were busy at the nets. Everybody was taking advantage of the fine evening.

Nobody but the Third would have started a match after tea, but as the lads were generally all out in something under an hour a side, there was every hope that the game would be concluded before well over. And if it wasn't finished it wouldn't matter, because the Third could carry on the next evening.

Mr. Smeddille was acting as one of the umpires, and a good-natured prefect had consented to be another. The Third

Form master was rather irritable, for he had been witnessing some very bad fielding, and it always annoyed him when his boys displayed weak form.

"Look alive, Tripp!" he said sharply. "You could have stopped that ball easily just now! Why don't you watch the game instead of star-gazing!"

"I was watching that butterfly, sir," retorted Tripp.

"You are old enough to know, Tripp, that your duty is to catch the ball, and not butterflies!" snapped Mr. Sundlife. "Unless you improve, I shall not let you play in the team again!"

Clark!

Mr. Sundlife, in his argument with Tripp, at the Modern House, almost forgot the game. Willy Handforth had hit another boundary, and the leather sang past Mr. Sundlife's ear like a huge red bomb.

"Good gracious!" gasped the Form-master.

Willy and Chubby were running again, for the ball had just stopped short of the boundary, and Fanny minor was dashing after it, after complacently hiding himself that a Fourth-Former would throw it in.

Mr. Sundlife was more annoyed than ever. Only by chance he had escaped being hit by that stripe, and he blamed Tommy Tripp entirely. It must be recorded, however, that Mr. Sundlife was notoriously careless on the cricket field.

Even now he had a considerable bruise on his arm from the previous week, and it was frequently whispered in the Third that one day "Old Sunny" would get properly laid out. Certain inscriptions flags were waiting eagerly for that great day to arrive.

"Over!" snapped Mr. Sundlife curtly.

"Not this ball, sir," said Sullivan, who was howling. "I've only sent down five."

"Don't argue with me, Sullivan!" retorted Mr. Sundlife. "All right! Have your own way! Perhaps I was mistaken. Tripp disturbed me—the careless young rascal!"

Chubby Heath was out from Sullivan's last ball of the over, and his place was taken in about ten seconds by Joey Lemon. There was not much time lost in Third-Form matches. One batsman dashed out and another dashed in, as though they were playing football.

"If you don't make ten runs, my lad, I'll have a word to say to you later on!" remarked Willy as Lemon passed him. "And be careful of Sullivan. The young fat-head's getting quite tricky."

Willy had the howling, and he proceeded to lash out with all his usual energy. For a lag, he was a surprisingly good cricketer. His only fault was recklessness. Nine times out of ten he was caught out.

"Hi! Look out there, sir!"

"Off the field, sir!"

Willy, who was preparing to deal with the next ball, relaxed. Then he grinned. Professor Tucker was placidly wandering on to the cricket pitch, all unconscious of his act of trespassing. The absent-minded science master was deep in a mental problem, and he hadn't the faintest idea where he was going.

Chubby Heath ran up to him and pulled his sleeve.

"Go away!" said Professor Tucker testily. "I won't be bothered now! Go away, and close the door after you! All my papers will be blowing about with this draught!"

"You're on the cricket field, sir," grinned Chubby Heath. "Wake up, sir! You're running up the game!"

"The game!" repeated Professor Sylvester Tucker, giving a start, and coming to himself. "Good gracious me! How on earth did I get here! Ah, splendid! So you are playing cricket, eh?"

"We were until you came, sir," said Chubby Heath. "But you're standing nearly in the dips, and we can't do anything until you've gone. You're holding up the game, sir."

Professor Tucker patted Chubby on the shoulder.

"Go ahead, little man," he said kindly. "I'll stand here and watch!"

CHAPTER 2

The Unconscious Intruder.

CHUBBY HEATH looked round despairingly.

He rather enjoyed ragging the absent-minded professor at any ordinary time, but in the middle of a cricket match it didn't seem quite so funny. And once the professor wandered on to the

pitch, he took a bit of getting off. This was not the first time he had transgressed.

"You can't understand, sir," said Chubby Dogersdale. "You can't stand here and watch."

"Eh? Yes, of course," said the professor. "Naturally I've got my watch! Ah, you want to know the time? Dear me! Nearly five o'clock! Now, who was I going to meet at five o'clock? I have a distinct impression of making an appointment—"

"Back up, Chubby!"

"We can't wait all the evening!"

"The chaps are yelling at us, sir," said Heath. "We're playing cricket—and you're in the way!"

The professor's stress hat blew off at this moment, and he turned round and stared.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured. "I had no idea the wind was so strong! My hat has already vanished into the distance! There must be a gale—"

"It's hanging on your guard, sir," growled Chubby.

He handed the dangling hat to the professor, and it was once more restored to its proper place. Mr. Suncliffe thought it about time to come up, and his temper was no sweeter than before.

"Really, professor, this is too bad!" he exclaimed, aggravated. "For over three minutes we have been waiting to continue our game. Do you realise, sir, that you are completely holding us up!"

"Good-evening, Mr. Suncliffe—good-evening!" said the professor genially. "I am glad to find that you are taking advantage of the excellent weather. The ground is remarkably hard after this morning's heavy rain."

The heavy rain had been on the previous day, but Mr. Suncliffe didn't think it worth while to mention it. He took the professor's arm, and gently but firmly led him off the field. Unfortunately, there were no rings round the Third-Eleven pitch.

"Then, sir," said Mr. Suncliffe, "if you were to watch the game, we shall all be delighted."

"The game, Mr. Suncliffe? What game?"

"We are playing cricket, professor."

"Indeed?" said Professor Tucker, surprised. "Splendid! I shall have to come back with you and watch—"

"No, no!" shouted Mr. Suncliffe, exasperated. "If you wish to watch the game, please stay where you are. The sun is at

your back, so you have a splendid view of the field—"

"Ah, the sun!" interrupted the professor excitedly. "I knew there was something that I wanted to talk about! Do you realise, Mr. Suncliffe, that no less than four sunspots have made their appearance during the past few days? No less than four, sir," repeated the professor impressively.

"Yes, yes, but—"

"You may, of course, discredit all stories regarding sunspots affecting the weather," continued the science master. "Stuff and nonsense, sir! The weather is entirely controlled by— Dear me! I had a distinct impression that I was speaking to somebody! Most extraordinary!"

Mr. Suncliffe had walked off—not because he was rude, but he had learned from previous experiences that it was almost impossible to stop the professor once he had started on the subject of astronomy. The only course was to go away and leave him talking to himself.

Mr. Suncliffe returned to the wicket.

"All serene now, sir?" asked Willy.

"Yes—you can go ahead!" said the Form-master. "These interruptions are most annoying. Well, young man, why don't you bowl? There is a suggestion, I believe, of finishing this game tonight."

The game continued, and Willy distinguished himself by hitting three 4's and two 6's in succession—much to the disgust of the Modern House lads who were in the field. Cricket of this kind was altogether too much of a good thing.

But Willy was not next ball, smartly caught by Simms minor in the long field. Having scored 36 altogether, Willy was a considerable hero, for this was a magnificent total for a lag. He was the first to admit, however, that the bowling, on the whole, had been worse than rotten.

Dicky Jones was the next man in, and he had hardly got settled down before Mr. Suncliffe stopped the game. The expression on the Form-master's face was, as Chubby Heath whispered, worth a guinea a lot.

"This is altogether too bad!" said Mr. Suncliffe angrily.

There was Professor Tucker on the field again, and this time he was making a bow-lum for the playing-pitch, completely unconscious of his surroundings, and reading a book. The youthful cricketers looked on, and grinned.

"Shall I take him off, sir?" sang out Willy.

"Yes, certainly," replied Mr. Suncliffe. "And I think you had better lead the professor straight indoors, Handforth minor. We shall never get on at all at this rate!"

Willy approached the professor, and took his arm.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Suncliffe!" said the professor. "I was quite sure you had gone. Now here, you see, I have a most interesting book on the remarkable phenomenon——"

"I'm not Mr. Suncliffe, sir," said Willy. "And if you'll come indoors with me I'll——"

"Certainly not!" interrupted the professor. "I have no desire to go indoors. In referring to these examples, this book distinctly tells us that—— Good gracious! Why should I be telling you all this, Handforth minor! I had no idea you were here!"

"Of course not, sir," said Willy gently. "That's only a detail. Great Scott! What was that?"

"What was what?" asked Professor Tucker, startled.

"Didn't you see something fall into the Triangle, sir?" asked Willy excitedly. "Didn't you see something shoot out of the sky, with a lot of fire behind it? I wonder if it was a meteor, sir?"

"Good heavens!" gasped the professor. "A meteor! In the Triangle?"

He dropped his book, his hat flew off, and he dashed for the Triangle as though he were being chased by a bull. The field, knowing nothing of what Willy had said, stared in amazement.

"It needs a chap like me to do a thing properly!" said Willy complacently.

CHAPTER 2.

Looking for the Meteor.

MR. SUNCLIFFE beckoned Willy to him.

"You're stopping the game, sir," remarked Willy innocently.

"Never mind that, Handforth minor," scolded Mr. Suncliffe. "What did you say to Professor Tucker to make him dash off like that?"

"I asked him if he saw something fall into the Triangle, sir," said Willy. "I wondered if it was a meteor."

"A meteor!" said the Form-master. "In the Triangle?"

"Not at all, sir."

"But you just distinctly said——"

"That was only a trick—to get rid of the professor, sir," sighed Willy patiently. "You can always rely on me to go at a job in a straightforward manner. I'm a hustler, sir."

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Suncliffe. "You mustn't do that sort of thing, Handforth minor. You mustn't tell the professor that a meteor fell in the Triangle when it didn't fall in the Triangle! I can't countenance a falsehood of that kind——"

"It wasn't a falsehood, sir."

"Don't contradict me, Handforth minor!"

"I've got to, sir, when you say something that isn't true!" retorted Willy. "I asked the professor if he saw something fall. I didn't say that something DID fall. Somehow, his hat at it like a rabbit after a piece of lettuce, and then dashed off——"

"That is a mere quibble, young man!" interrupted Mr. Suncliffe. "And I don't like you comparing Professor Tucker to a rabbit! Understand me, Handforth minor, I won't have it!"

"All right, sir," said Willy. "Just as you like."

"The next time you see the professor, you will explain to him that you deliberately tricked him," went on the Form-master.

"That'll take me about four hours, sir," said Willy. "If I try to explain anything to Professor Tucker, he keeps interrupting. But everybody's waiting to go on with the game, sir."

"It is no business of yours!" snapped Mr. Suncliffe.

"All right, sir—but I thought it was," said Willy. "We want to win this game, you know. If only you'll let the chaps get on with the job, we'll wipe these silly Monks into the middle of next week!"

"Your slang is getting worse and worse every day!" said Mr. Suncliffe. "I shall have seriously to take you in hand."

"They're still waiting, sir," said Willy, glancing at the field. "Sullivan and Tripp look like having a fight, and I believe PARRY minor has buzzed off to the pavilion for a drink of pop. We can't play cricket with all these silly delays!"

Mr. Suncliffe turned on his heel, realising that Willy was more than hopeless. And Willy returned to Chubby Heath, and sat down on the grass with a grunt.

"Old misery!" he said tartly. "Ragged

can like the dickens just because I spoofed the professor! Next time the old boy wanders on the field I'll sit here and do nothing!"

At last the game got going again, and in the meantime, Professor Sylvester Tucker was dashing about the Triangle, like a bound on the scent, searching in every nook and cranny for something which wasn't there.

"Lost something, sir?" inquired Buster Banks politely.

"Yes—a meteor!"

"A what, sir?" gasped Boots.

"A meteor!" said the professor. "It fell in the Triangle, and must be here somewhere. A most extraordinary occurrence! One of the boys distinctly saw it fall——"

"Which boy, sir?" asked Buster.

"Which boy? What does it matter which boy?" demanded the professor, as he danced round the chestnuts. "It was Handforth minor, I believe. Yes, I am quite certain. If you have nothing better to do, help me——"

Buster Banks grinned.

"You mustn't take any notice of Willy, sir," he said. "He was only pulling your leg."

Professor Tucker started, and gazed down at his legs, as though he expected to find one longer than the other.

"Pelling my leg!" he repeated. "Good gracious! What put such an absurd idea into your head? Handforth minor did nothing of the sort! I believe he touched my arm, but nothing more! The parson is here, young man—it must be here!"

The professor bounded off into the shrubbery, and Buster Banks stood grinning. He had no inclination to join in this search for a purely mythical object.

The professor, having dashed into the shrubbery, collided violently with a soft, but solid, object which was stretched between two trees, in the shade. As a matter of fact, it was a hammock, and in the hammock resided William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth.

Browne's magazine went in one direction, a bag of caramels went in another, and he was nearly pitched out of the hammock.

"Without wishing to be inquisitive, sir, may I inquire if you have any particular grudge against me?" inquired the imperturbable skipper of the Fifth. "Pray proceed with the good work. One good house, and I can assure you I shall drive completely overboard!"

CHAPTER 4.

SIM Looking.

PROFESSOR TUCKER blinked at Browne through his thick glasses.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. "Have you seen that meteor? It is most ridiculous to bring your bed out into the open in this fashion."

"A hammock, sir," corrected Browne. "But you were referring to a meteor? I take it that you mean one of those dainty little things which sometimes dash across the sky, chased by its own tail?"

"Yes, yes, exactly!"

"It saddens me to disappoint you, sir, but there has been no such visitor in this neighbourhood," said Browne. "You may, if you wish, search beneath my cushion, and I will even hoist myself out of the hammock if you expressly desire it."

"Do so at once," commanded the professor.

"I am here but to obey," sighed Browne. "At the same time, I should like to point out that if I sat on a freshly arrived meteor, I should probably bid good-bye to sitting for the rest of my days. However, you shall have your wish, sir. I was never one to deny a fellow-being his slightest whim."

The professor searched the hammock, the ground, and the immediate surroundings, with an eagle eye, and Browne watched with mild interest. He wasn't at practice with the other seniors because he had sprained his wrist slightly in a recent match, and was officially crooked.

"Possibly the meteor was so small that it will require a great deal of feeling," murmured the professor. "Meteors are very deceptive. Whilst appearing of immense size in the night sky, they are, in reality, no bigger than a mere marble."

"Very instructive, sir, and I cannot express my keen appreciation of these remarkable facts," said Browne, recovering his magazine. "If you should, by chance, care to nibble a caramel, they are fully at your disposal, sir. At the moment, your left foot is placed squarely in the middle of the packet."

"Caramels!" said Professor Tucker. "Stuff and nonsense, sir! I was talking about the meteor! I have no time to waste on your frivolities, young man!"

He pushed his way through the shrubbery, the pocket of caramels sticking to his

foot affectionately. Browne watched them go, and mournfully shook his head.

"Alas, another of life's little troubles!" he murmured. "I can only set down the entire incident as delivered in the extreme. It will possibly be a hot scheme to sling my hatcock somewhere on the roof."

He tumbled into the hammock again, and went on with his reading. And the professor, passing through the shrubbery, got back into the Triangle. His search had proved quite futile, so he paused, and mopped his heated brow with a table napkin, which he had absently thrust into his pocket at lunch-time.

Then he strode off to Little Side again, determined to find Willy, and to extract full details as to the falling of the meteor.

Professor Tucker was an ardent astronomer, and anything in the nature of stars, comets, or meteors attracted him like a magnet. He arrived on Little Side, but there was no sign of Willy.

That youngster had gone off with Chubby Heath to the pavilion. The cricket proving rather slow, Willy had decided to improve the shining hour by partaking of ginger pop.

Twice he had lost a solitary sixpence in the game, and he and Chubby had been at great pains to recover it. So he thought it would be far safer to convert it into something liquid, and place it securely out of reach.

Professor Tucker wandered on to the cricket-pitch for the third time, having decided that one of the batsmen was Willy. This time Mr. Suncliffe stopped the game with a shout which sounded like a bark, and ran up to the professor.

"Really, professor, this is too bad!" he exclaimed testily.

"Oh? You are referring to the meteor?"

"No, sir, I am not referring to the meteor!" interrupted Mr. Suncliffe. "The meteor is a mere myth. The boy was tricking you. Will you please understand that we are playing cricket on this ground."

"I must have a word with Handforth minor," said the professor firmly. "I think he is standing there, with a gymnasium club in his hand. I shall only keep him a moment, Mr. Suncliffe. You need not fear that I shall interrupt your drilling for long."

"Selling!" retorted Mr. Suncliffe. "The

boy's holding a cricket bat, and he is not Handforth minor. I think I saw Handforth minor go across to the pavilion——"

"Indeed?" interrupted the professor. "I am much obliged to you, sir. It is imperative that I should find the boy without delay."

He toddled off in the direction of the pavilion, making a direct line across the Fourth Form wickets. Mr. Suncliffe watched him go with a slight frown.

Kilward Oswald Handforth was batting at the moment, and the leader of Study D was slogging away with all his accustomed force. Handforth seemed to have an idea that he was playing golf, and the way he swung his bat round was startling.

He was a good specialist batsman, but he could never be relied upon to play cautiously. His one idea when he got to the wicket was to slash at everything with every ounce of his strength. He was slashing now, and as there were no bats at the Fourth Form wickets, the fieldmen were kept busy. Pitt, in fact, was purposefully giving some field practice.

"The man is positively dangerous!" muttered Mr. Suncliffe angrily. "Good gracious! He's walking right across——"

He broke off, and ran after the professor urgently. Nobody had noticed the science master, and some of Handforth's smashes were perilous to anybody within range.

Click!

Handforth leapt out of his crouch to a short ball, and caught it a terrific slam with the very centre of his bat. The leather shot across the green like a projectile from a gun.

"Hi! Look out, Professor!" yelled a dozen voices.

The professor took no notice, but Mr. Suncliffe, running up behind, didn't even see the ball. It struck him with shattering force in the centre of his forehead, and he toppled over backwards and lay still.

CHAPTER 2.

A Serious Casualty.

"O H!"

A shout of horror went up from all sides. Those who were nearest felt sick with apprehension. They had never seen such an appallingly direct hit before. The standing teacher had

reached against Mr. Sunciliffe's head with such force that it seemed that he must be killed.

Fellows ran up from all sides. The Third Form match, already stopped, was abandoned. The fags, scared stiff, ran up to their fallen Form-master. Now that Mr. Sunciliffe had actually suffered the fate that had long been foretold, the Third was struck dumb with acute fear.

The accident was nobody's fault. Even the professor was not to blame, for he was so absent-minded that he had walked into danger quite unwittingly. Mr. Sunciliffe's action had been exceedingly courageous, for he had rushed forward to drag the professor out of danger, only to fall a victim to it himself.

Handforth dropped his hat, pale to the lips.

"I say, it wasn't my fault!" he exclaimed huskily. "I—I didn't see—"

"That's all right, Handy. Nobody blames you," said Reggie Pitt quickly. "It was a sheer accident—and I believe it's pretty serious. That ball caught old Sunny with the force of a sledge-hammer."

"My only hat!" muttered Handforth.

He ran after the crowd with deep concern. Professor Tocker, seeing the juniors rushing all round him, wondered what on earth was the matter. But nobody took the slightest notice of him. He was forgotten.

Lemon and Hobbs and Kerrigan were the first to reach Mr. Sunciliffe's side. They halted, panting and breathless. The Form-master was lying in a sprawling position, flat on his back, with one leg under him.

He was obviously quite unconscious—knocked clean out. Close by lay the offending cricket ball, red and shiny in the green grass. There was a livid, ugly patch on Mr. Sunciliffe's forehead, and a trickle of blood was beginning to appear.

"He's dead!" choked Kerrigan. "Oh, he's killed!"

Hobbs knelt by the fallen man's side.

"Get some water—quick!" he gasped. "He may come round!"

The Fourth-Formers rushed up, but not before Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath were on the spot. They had dashed across from the partition like horses, having witnessed the entire accident.

"Poor old Sunny!" gasped Willy as he knelt down. "I say, what a rotten chance!"

"Your major did it——" began somebody.

"Hats!" snapped Willy. "Ted couldn't help it. He was only baiting. But let's carry him indoors—quick! Jusy, rush for your bike, and dash for the doctor!"

"Right-ho!" said Lemon breathlessly.

"Hold on!" shouted Willy. "You better tell Mr. Stokes, and get him to ring up. It'll be quicker! Come on, you claps! Grab hold!"

Roggie Pitt and Watson and Nipper and many others were on the scene now, and willing heads lifted Mr. Sunciliffe from the grass; then commenced a slow procession indoors, with the crowd gathering every minute.

The news had spread like wildfire, and in some quarters it was reported that Mr. Sunciliffe had been instantaneously killed. By the time the Triangle was reached, a luncheon throng was waiting for the procession.

The stricken Form-master was carried indoors, and taken into his own study, where he was laid on the couch. Nelson Lee had arrived by this time, and the famous detective lost not a minute in making an examination. He was as skilled as any medical practitioner.

The juniors waited with bated breath. Others crowded in the corridor, anxious to hear the report. It was obvious that cricket for the day was over. Mr. Sunciliffe had never been very popular, but now that he was badly disabled there was an overwhelming amount of sympathy for him.

Mr. Beverley Stokes, the House-master, watched Lee anxiously while the latter made his examination.

"I'm afraid it is rather serious," said Lee at last. "The skull may be fractured, but I hope not. It will probably be an hour or two before Mr. Sunciliffe recovers consciousness, and even then his condition will be grave."

"You—you think there is a possibility of death?" muttered Mr. Stokes.

"It is always possible, of course, but there is very little likelihood of such a tragic end," replied Nelson Lee. "There is undoubtedly concussion, but we cannot tell how serious it may be at the moment."

The news got out, and everybody was startled. Fellows went about the Ancient House almost in tiptoe, and voices were raised no higher than a whisper. Later—

when Dr. Brett came, his report was almost exactly similar to Nelson Lee's.

One thing, at all events, was certain—the unfortunate Mr. Sundcliffe was out of action for four or five weeks, at the very least.

CHAPTER 2.

News for the Third.

EARLY the next day there was a better report.

Mr. Sundcliffe had recovered consciousness, and was out of danger. This was cheering news indeed, and the Third was delighted. They found all sorts of fine qualities in Mr. Sundcliffe which they had never suspected hitherto.

At any ordinary time it was quite usual for the lads to refer to their Form-master as "a beast," "a mean old rotter," and such-like terms. But now Mr. Sundcliffe was practically an angel in human form.

The latest report was that, though conscious, he was more or less delirious, and would need constant attention. By this he had been removed to the school sanatorium, and it was generally understood that he would stay there for a full two weeks.

And even when he came out he would not be able to resume his duties. Another fortnight's rest would be necessary, and it was quite likely that he would go away for this period. In the meantime, the Third would be without a master.

And now that the anxiety regarding Mr. Sundcliffe was over, the lads gave their attention to this other important matter.

"I shouldn't be surprised if we have old Crowell," suggested Chubby Heath, as he stood chatting with a host of other Third-Formers in the Triangle. "I expect they'll do a bit of juggling, and move the masters about a bit."

"We might even get old Pyecraft!" said Lesson, with a grimace.

"Help! We don't want him!" said Willy Handforth. "Why, those Modern Fourth chaps are nearly going grey because of old Pyecraft. He's an awful beast. I should think it's more likely we'll have a new master."

"I say, that'll be a rag, if you like!"

"Anything for a little sport," said Willy. *You mean for old Pycraft, of course, but

as long as he gets well, we wouldn't worry. I wonder who's going to take us in class this morning!"

"Perhaps there won't be any lessons," suggested Owen minor excitedly.

"Perhaps the moon'll perch itself on the top of the clock tower!" retorted Willy, with huge sarcasm. "Fathend! Do you think we're going to be excused lessons because old Sunny's in the wussy!"

The point was soon settled for when nine o'clock came and the Third went into its class-room for roll-over. Morrow, of the Sixth, was seated in Mr. Sundcliffe's chair. The Third felt relieved. Morrow was a decent sort, and the morning would probably be free and easy.

"I say, Morrow, are you going to take us until Mr. Sundcliffe gets well?" asked Chubby Heath eagerly.

"I don't know. I'm going to take you for this morning, anyhow," said the prefect. "And you needn't think you're going to have a soft time, because you're not. Any larking about, and I'll tan you till you're black and blue! Jones, what are you doing with that catapult?"

"Catapult!" said Dicky Jones innocently.

"Come on! You can't fool me!" retorted Morrow. "Out with it, my lad—and put it on this desk!"

The Third settled itself down with a feeling that it had been swindled. Morrow was evidently going to be just as severe as an ordinary Form-master. Call-over was taken, and then the Third was marched into Big Hall for prayers.

Dr. Stafford made a few remarks after prayers, and he referred to Mr. Sundcliffe's accident. He verified the report that the Form-master was out of danger, but added that Mr. Sundcliffe would not be fit for duty for a month, at the very least. He made no intimation as to what was to happen to the Third.

And the Third found that lessons, under Morrow, were just as thoroughly unpleasant as they had been under Mr. Sundcliffe. The lads were all heartily relieved when the interval arrived, and they were allowed a breathing spell in the Triangle.

"Morrow's as hard as nails—the rotter!" growled Chubby Heath. "I only said two words to Juicy, and he gave me fifty lines!"

"It's all right. He'll get better," said Willy confidently. "He's just showing his authority this morning. In a couple

of days' time he'll ease down, and we'll be able to do just what we like."

But Morrow had an item of news for the Third when the Form re-assembled.

"I've just heard from the Head," said Morrow. "You're going to have a new Form-master. Only a temporary man, of course—just until Mr. Sandcliffe gets well. I expect you'll see him grey before he's finished."

"We'll do our best," said Willy hopefully.

"Ed?"

"We're great triers," replied Willy, nodding. "I think old Sunny must be using dye, or something, because his hair keeps a fine colour in spite of all our efforts—"

"You've got too much to say, young man!" interrupted Morrow severely. "Thank goodness I'm only here for to-day!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed the Third heartily. Morrow frowned.

"You needn't kid yourselves," he retorted. "This new master comes from Redcliffe—they're making some big alterations there. I hear—re-building two or three of the Houses—and some of the masters are at a loose end. So Mr. Muggles has agreed to come to the rescue here."

"Mr. Muggles?" repeated Willy politely.

"Yes."

"Is that his real name, or just a pet name?"

"Mr. Muggles will tell you all about that himself to-morrow," replied Morrow tartly. "Anyhow, I'm jolly glad the Head's fixed up with somebody. I wouldn't be a school-master if they offered me five thousand a year."

"You needn't worry!" grinned Willy. "You'll never have the temptation."

CHAPTER 2.

Mr. Marmaduke Muggles.

IT was certainly very obliging of Mr. Marmaduke Muggles to step into the breach, and Dr. Stafford was duly grateful. The usual routine of St. Frank's would hardly suffer any interruption as the result of Mr. Sandcliffe's accident.

Mr. Muggles was really one of the House-masters of Redcliffe College, and it had cost him a little dignity to consent to take the St. Frank's Third Form for a few weeks.

It had also improved his financial position—and this it must be admitted was the crux of the matter.

Schoolmasters—even at our famous public schools—are paid none too lavishly, and as Mr. Muggles preferred work to idleness, and as the financial side of the offer had been satisfactory, he came to St. Frank's with a feeling of contentment.

His own boys were away from Redcliffe, owing to the fact that Mr. Muggles' House was undergoing rebuilding. Incidentally, it may as well be stated that Mr. Muggles was the most unpopular Housemaster at Redcliffe, and that he was known throughout the school as "that beast Muggy." If a Redcliffe boy ever succeeded in transferring from Muggles' House he was regarded by the school as a kind of escaped convict.

Mr. Muggles had been further induced to come to St. Frank's by the fact that his lifelong friend resided there. He and Mr. Pyecraft, the unpopular master of the Modern Fourth, had been boys together, and they had always been more or less "thick." It was Mr. Pyecraft, in fact, who had suggested Mr. Muggles' name to the Head. And a few telephone conversations had resulted in the master being arranged.

Fortunately, the Third knew nothing of Mr. Muggles' character as yet. The very fact that he was a bosom friend of Mr. Pyecraft would have given them an inkling of the truth. But the Third were more or less indifferent. It would be quite time enough to size up the new master when he arrived.

Mr. Marmaduke Muggles arrived that evening.

The sun was still shining when the Redcliffe master stepped out of the train at Belton Station. He was a thin, waddy man, with a fixed expression of unpleasantness, and a wily, drooping mouthache. In his own way, Mr. Muggles was a dandy. He dressed with extreme care, and took an enormous pride in his clothing. To appear in public without a crease in his trousers was, in Mr. Muggles' opinion, practically as bad as appearing without any trousers at all.

This dapper gentleman was just as fastidious in every other way. He was a maniac for neatness. His own legs at Redcliffe were commonly known as the "tailors' dummies," owing to their immediate appearance. It was a risky thing to be anywhere but immediate.

And Mr. Muggles was a fidget. The slightest noise upset him; the slightest movement in class made him nervous. He was so touchy that Redcliffe boys had been known to fight to the bitter end in order to escape going into his House.

It was this gentleman, therefore, who walked sedately through Bellon on his way to St. Frank's that evening. He carried nothing but a tiny valise. His trunk was at the station, and would come on later.

Mr. Muggles was rather disappointed because Mr. Pycraft had not met him. He had hoped to have a chat with his old friend on the way to the school. But as he had not given any intimation of his time of arrival, Mr. Pycraft had an excellent excuse.

Strolling over the bridge, Mr. Muggles paused for a moment to look at the river. It was a pleasant scene, in the quietness of the spring evening. One or two boats were visible up the clear stretch of water. And one, containing Handforth & Co., was quite near by. The elums of Study D looked up at Mr. Muggles, and Mr. Muggles smiled.

"Look at that rude boulder!" whispered Handforth, in a voice that could be heard a hundred yards away. "Standing up there and making faces at us! Did you see the way he sneered?"

"Shush!" breathed Church. "I believe he was only smiling!"

"Well, he's got a face like a gargoyle!" said Handforth.

Mr. Muggles, hearing these remarks, withdrew himself from the bridge in confusion. He was frowning, too. He had smiled at the juniors with the intention of making a good impression—and he had heard himself referred to as a gargoyle.

And Mr. Muggles decided that the St. Frank's juniors were a low-bred lot. Still thinking in this way, he walked round the bend of the lane, keeping fastidiously to the middle of the road.

This was quite all right in one way, for there was not so much dust in the centre. But, on the whole, it is never exactly wise to walk round corners in the middle of the road.

The tinkle of a bicycle bell startled Mr. Muggles out of his reverie. He halted, glanced up, and saw three cyclists bearing down upon him at some speed. He vaguely noticed that they were young ladies, but there was scarcely time for anything else.

Mr. Muggles dodged, but in his confusion he dodged the wrong way. Doris Berkeley applied her brakes hard, but nothing could avert the disaster. Her front wheel took Mr. Muggles fairly in the centre, and the next moment he rolled over in the dust, to the complete destruction of his dapper appearance and his sedate dignity.

CHAPTER I.

Keeping Up His Reputation.

DORIS BERKELEY escaped fairly lightly.

Her bicycle crashed over, but she managed to land on her own feet, being a very active little person. Irene Manners and Marjorie Temple had both ridden clear, and had dismounted. The three girls from the Moor View School were looking very attractive in their summery attire.

"Oh, I say!" gasped Doris. "I'm awfully sorry, you know! But, really, it was your own fault—you walked right into me!"

Mr. Muggles sat up, unhurt, but smothered with dust from head to foot. He took one glance at himself, and flew into a passion. It was one of Mr. Muggles' characteristics to jump into sudden rages with very slight provocation. In this case the provocation could scarcely be called slight—although, in all truth, Mr. Muggles had only himself to blame.

He picked himself up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Look at me!" he shouted hoarsely. "Look at me! You careless young folk! How dare you come rushing round a corner at that breakneck speed! You're a danger to the community—that's what you are!"

Doris flushed, and the other two girls looked surprised.

"Really?" protested Doris. "It was quite an accident——"

"An accident, be hanged!" stormed Mr. Muggles, dusting himself down. "You had no right to come round the corner at such speed! You girls are beyond all control nowadays! This is what comes of trying to ape the boys! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

Doris felt that politeness was wasted on this springer.

"Look here, you'd better change your tone!" she said angrily. "You've got no right to insult me like that, you under-sized little wretch! You know as well as I do that the accident was entirely your own fault. Why can't you be a gentleman, and apologise to me for getting in the way?"

Mr. Muggles gasped. There was every justification for Doris' hot retort, but Mr. Muggles didn't appreciate it in the least.

"Look at me!" he shouted. "I'm unharmed!"

"And serve you right, too!" retorted Doris. "You were walking right in the middle of the road, and when you jumped aside, you ran right into me! You've no right to be so insulting."

"Bah! Don't talk to me!" shouted Mr. Muggles. "You're all the same—you're all a frivolous, worthless lot! It's a waste of my time to argue with such brainless young nineties!"

The girls were more indignant than ever. And Willy Handforth, who had turned the head grin-in-arm with Chubby Heath, paused in astonishment as he heard Mr. Muggles' scathing remark.

"Looks like trouble!" he confided to Chubby. "If that chap's deliberately insulting Irene & Co., we'll chuck him in the dust! He's only as big as a worm, anyhow!"

The two Third-Formers arrived just as Doris was about to make a hot retort. She paused, and looked at Willy and Chubby with such a blaze in her eyes that they backed away.

"I say, what have WE done?" asked Willy.

"Oh, I wish your brother and Rensie Pitt and some of the others were here!" exclaimed Doris. "They'd teach this man not to be so insulting! The accident was entirely his own fault."

"Leave him to us, Doris," said Willy promptly. "Now then, you, take my tip and clear off while you're safe," he added, turning to Mr. Muggles and pushing back his sleeves. "I'll give you ten seconds!"

Mr. Marmaduke Muggles nearly choked.

"These girls knocked me down——" he began.

"Then you ought to be ashamed to admit it," interrupted Willy fairly. "I'd rather take their word than yours, and——"

"Do you know who I am?" yelled Mr. Muggles angrily.

"No, I don't, and I don't care!" retorted Willy.

"Then, by George, you WILL care!" shouted the Redcliffe master. "I do not need telling that you are a St. Frank's boy—and by your age I should judge you to be a Third-Former."

"Marvelous!"

"Then you are a member of the Third Form?"

"Yes," said Willy, "but I don't see——"

"Ah!" interrupted Mr. Muggles triumphantly. "Then I demand to know your name—both your names! Come along—come along! I intend to deal with this matter summarily."

Irene Manners looked at him scornfully.

"Anybody might think you were a St. Frank's master by the way you're talking," she said with some heat. "Don't take any notice of him, Willy——"

"But he shall take notice," interrupted the other. "Yes, he certainly shall! Boy, do you realise that I am Mr. Marmaduke Muggles, and that I am the master of the St. Frank's Third Form?"

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CHAPTER 5.

A Lively Prospect.

WILLY HANDFORTH didn't move a hair.
 "Mr. Muggles, eh?" he said coolly.

Willy was by no means as calm as he looked. He needed no telling that Mr. Muggles was a decidedly unpleasant gentleman. But the hero of the Third was full of resource, and if he couldn't slip out of this little corner, it would be a pity.

Chubby Heath was thoroughly startled, and showed it. And the Moor View girls looked at Mr. Muggles with a new interest.

"Master of the St. Frank's Third Form!" repeated Doris in astonishment. "But—but Mr. Sandcliffe—"

"Didn't you hear about the accident?" interrupted Willy. "Poor old Sam was rushed on the head with a cricket ball last night. He's in the 'sunny' now, and this bright specimen—I mean, Mr. Muggles—has come along to fill the breach for a week or two, until Mr. Sandcliffe's better."

"Oh!" said the girls.
 Mr. Muggles drew himself up and looked round viciously.

"Now, perhaps, you will realise what you have done," he said sourly. "I am no mere stranger, who can be insulted and subjected to any and every form of insolence! I shall make it my duty to find out where you girls belong, and report your grossly unladylike conduct."

Irene & Co. flushed deeply with indignation.

"But that's just true," explained Irene. "We haven't been insolent at all—you were the first one to blame. After involving Doris in an accident, you flew into a passion and acted like a hooligan!"

"And you can jolly well report as much as you like!" said Doris. "Do you think we care?"

"You can go to the dickens!" added Marjorie hotly.

Mr. Muggles felt, somehow, that these girls were one too many for him. But the fags offered an outlet for his spleen. He turned upon them with an unpleasant glare in his eyes.

"You boys will write me five hundred lines each for an exhibition of studied insubordination," he said curtly. "I shall not report you on this occasion, but let it be a lesson to you."

"Hold on, sir!" interrupted Willy. "We know who you are now, and whatever we think, we've got to be respectful. But if you'll pardon me, sir, I don't think we'll write any lines."

"Good gracious! You—you dare to defy me!"

Mr. Muggles pained and gulped. Chubby Heath clutched at Willy's coat in order to restrain him, but Willy refused to be restrained. The leader of the Third wasn't going to submit tamely to this insult. The girls watched the scene with great interest.

"It's not a question of defying you, sir," went on Willy respectfully. "When we decided the chuck you in the ditch, and when we gave you ten seconds to clear off, we didn't know who you were. So you can't give us any lines. And, anyhow, you're not our Form master until you're got to the school. You haven't taken on your duties yet!"

"I shall report you for this impertinence!" snapped Mr. Muggles, confused.

"Take my advice, sir, and don't!" said Willy calmly. "You'll only make yourself look ridiculous, and that wouldn't be a very good start, would it? The Head's one of the best, and he wouldn't take any notice of your tarradiddles. Take my tip, and keep mum."

Mr. Muggles swallowed something with difficulty. In his heart he knew that Willy Handforth was right. The fags couldn't be punished for talking to him in a familiar way while they were still ignorant of his identity. And Mr. Muggles suddenly realised that the less said of this affair, the better.

"I will think it over—and make my decision later!" he muttered.

Without another word he strode on, his quick temper having subsided, and his normal common sense having returned. The fags watched him go, and Willy uttered a characteristic sniff.

"It's all right—he won't say anything!" he exclaimed. "I know his sort—all giddy bark! My only hat! And we're booked to have that race over us for four or five weeks! What a lively prospect!"

"You're in for a terrible time!" said Doris sympathetically. "I say, I hope he won't have his knife into you—"

"No good hoping that now," interrupted Willy. "He's got it in already, and at the first chance he'll give it a turn. I

don't care! Rats to him! The Third's capable of losing a host of his sort!"

Chubby Heath shook his head.

"He can make things jolly unpleasant, all the same," he remarked.

"Let him!" said Willy. "If he tries any tricks on with the Third, he'll find himself up against a snag."

The girls couldn't help smiling.

"I'm sorry to hear about Mr. Sutcliffe," said Doris. "It's a pity you've got such a host of a substitute. It's a wonder Doris wasn't hurt, the way he walked right into her machine!"

"It was all his own silly fault!" said Doris, examining her bicycle for the first time. "I thought, so! Forks are bent a bit, and the steering's all stiff."

"Make him pay damages," suggested Willy.

"I think we'd better leave the matter alone," said Doris, with a sniff. "But if ever I get a chance of nailing him back, I'll do it. If he had the decency of a worm, he'd have offered to foot the bill."

Irons & Co. went off after a few minutes, thoroughly disgusted with St. Frank's latest acquisition. And Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath continued their way to the village on foot in a rather thoughtful mood.

"Somehow," said Willy, "I think we're going to have some thunder and lightning."

But as the evening was delightfully clear, it was fairly obvious that Willy was not referring to the weather.

CHAPTER 15.

Rupert is Indisposed.

"SHUT that thing off, for goodness' sake!" said Owen minor irritably.

The leading lights of the Third were busy at prep. in their little study. At least, Owen minor and Chubby Heath were at prep. Willy Handforth was testing his new loud speaker.

Willy was proud of his wireless set.

It was a home-made contrivance, but by no means inefficient. He had it fixed on a kind of bench. A stranger would have failed to appreciate the ingenuity of Willy's handiwork, for the bench was filled with coils, batteries, baskets of wires and other

apparatus made, apparently, from old cigar boxes, bicycle spokes and similar odds and ends.

Extraordinarily enough, the contrivance worked.

Willy got quite good results from his wireless set. His new loud speaker was mostly home-made, the horn being cunningly contrived from three ply wood, made in sections by fretsaw, and glued together. And, of course, the thing was boundlessly interesting on the subject of the Solomon Islands.

"Cut it out, there's a good chap," said Chubby Heath, sucking the end of his pencil. "How the dickens can I do this rotten algebra with you messing about."

"Shut up!" interrupted Willy. "He's talking about cannibals."

"Then get on with your giddy work!"

"How can I work with that thing howling!" roared Chubby exasperated. "If you want to listen in, why can't you use the headphones?"

"I've lent 'em to Dicky Jones," said Willy. "He's trying a new crystal set."

"We want to work!" yelled Owen minor.

"All right—work!" snapped Willy. "This lecture is jolly interesting, and it's by a famous explorer who's been all over the South Seas. You fatheads! You've made me miss some now."

Fortunately, the lecture came to an end a couple of minutes afterwards, and soon classical music followed. With a mark of disdain, Willy turned off the valve.

"Who wants to hear that rubbish?" he growled. "Music, eh? More like a lot of cats howling!" He glanced at his watch. "Hallo! Time to feed Septimus and Marmaduke."

Chubby Heath and Owen minor went on with their work with some measure of peace. For Willy was busy with his pet monkey and his tame squirrel. It was their feeding hour. Rupert the rat and Ferdinand the ferret had had their supper earlier.

Willy's study—strictly against all orders—was more like a menagerie than anything else. His chums had complained again and again, but all to no purpose. More than once the housemaster had compelled Willy to remove his pets outside. But Willy had always smuggled them back.

Certainly he was a very painstaking master. He gave the little animals every

care, and kept them scrupulously clean. Of late his interest in insects had somewhat waned—much to the secret joy of Chubby Heath and Owen minor.

At one time it had been no uncommon thing to find spiders and beetles making their homes in a football boot, or in the pocket of a blazer. Squirrels and ferrets could, at least, be seen at a distance.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Willy abruptly.

His tone was so stifled that his chums looked up.

"What's the matter?" asked Chuldey.

"You're made me make a blot!"

"Rupert hasn't eaten his supper!" said Willy frantically.

"Blow Rupert!"

"He hasn't touched a bite!" went on Willy. "And he's peevish, too! He won't even move when I touch him! He just sits there, looking at me with a bleary look in his eyes. I believe he's ill!"

"He'll be dead by the morning," said Owen minor loudly.

"You unfeeling rotter!" roared Willy.

"How would you like to go off your feed? How would you like to look at everybody with bleary eyes? I believe poor old Rupert has got tummy-ache!"

"Serve him right!" said Chuldey Heath.

"I've never known such a glutton. He eats all day——"

"Perhaps he'd like some milk!" interrupted Willy. "Burr along the passage, Chuldey, and see if you can borrow some. Buck up! Don't sit there gaping at me!"

"I'm doing my algebra!" snarled Chubby Heath.

"My white rat's more important than your fatheaded algebra!" roared Willy. "Are you going or not? I can't leave Rupert like this! He might have a seizure as soon as my back's turned!"

"My algebra——" began Chubby weakly.

But he caught the glint of Willy's eyes, and scooted off on the errand. In the Third Form Willy was a sort of autocrat, and none of the other lads dared to disobey him. Usually, Willy ruled the Third with a good-natured leniency, but if it ever came to a pinch he enforced his authority by the aid of his capable fists.

But when Chubby returned with the milk, it was useless. Rupert was certainly in a bad way. He wouldn't eat, and he wouldn't drink, and all Willy's coaxing was of no avail. Rupert was decidedly ill.

CHAPTER VI.

Looking After the Patient.

ARCHIE GLENTHORPE, of the Fourth, peered in the Assistant House lobby, and adjusted his monocle. With his eyesight thus aided, he gazed at Willy Handforth with interest.

The leader of the Third was leaning against the foot of the stairs in the attitude of mournful dejection. It was nearly bedtime, and the bell was due to clang out at any minute.

"What-oh! Something on the good old mind!" asked Archie sympathetically.

"Eh? Oh, that you, Archie?" said Willy, with a start. "What did you say?"

"Something worrying you, dear old cauliflower?"

"Rupert's taken ill," said Willy sadly.

"Good gad!"

"Fever, I believe," said Willy. "Or it might be even worse."

"I say, I'm most frightfully sorry," exclaimed Archie, with concern. "I mean to say, it's somewhat near the old edge when a cove gets down with fever, and all that sort of thing. Sundry yards of sympathy, old chestnut. If there's anything I can do, just chirp the good word, and I'll have Phipps rallying round in no dashed time!"

Willy shook his head.

"Thanks all the same, Archie, but I'm afraid your valet can't do much," he replied. "You see, Rupert's too weak to stand, and Phipps wouldn't know what to do, anyhow."

"Oldlife!" said Archie. "I mean, what absolute rot! Absolutely! Why, the other day, when I was feeling about as used up as an empty fountain-pen, old Phipps loomed round the young master and absolutely set him on his feet in a couple of shakes. Laddie, it was a dashed miracle! Trust old Phipps, and he'll——"

"But you're not a rat!" interrupted Willy.

"A rat! Good gad!" said Archie, aghast. "I mean—— Look here, dash it, have you been talking about one of your frightful pets?"

"Yes, Rupert's my rat."

"Then," said Archie frigidly, "I absolutely decline to discuss the old sub. any further. I thought you were referring to one of your relatives, you young dunder! If it's only your rat, that's ill, the frightful

thing will probably be gnawing his cage to pieces by the morning."

Archie strolled on stiffly, feeling that he had been wasting a good deal of first-class sympathy. He believed in being kind to animals, but he couldn't quite bring himself to the point of weeping over the news that a white rat was indisposed.

But Willy was very attached to his pets. He had taught them all sorts of clever tricks, and Rupert was particularly brainy. For a white rat, he displayed an almost human intelligence. It would have been a sad blow to Willy if Rupert had passed away.

In order to keep his eye on the patient, Willy smuggled Rupert up into the Third Form dormitory that night. The other Third-Formers were hotly opposed to the scheme, but it made no difference.

Willy had his own way, and he went to bed with Rupert close by, confined in a little box. After lights-out Willy had a final look at the patient, and found that Rupert was in precisely the same condition. As he didn't seem any worse, Willy went to sleep fairly easy in mind.

He woke up twice during the night, and satisfied himself that Rupert was still in the land of the living. And in the morning a decided change was noticeable in the patient's condition.

His eyes were now completely closed, and, although his heart was beating fairly rapidly and regularly, he seemed to be in a bad way. He crouched in his box, sublimely indifferent to everything that went on.

"Poor old Roper!" muttered Willy feelingly.

"He's dying!" said Chubby Heath, taking one glance. "The best thing you can do, old man, is to put him out of his misery. But don't drown him in the bath-room, wait until you go downstairs."

"You ratter! I'm not going to drown him at all!"

"Perhaps you'd better bury him alive," suggested Hobbs. "He won't know anything about it, he's practically gone already."

"You wait till you're ill," interrupted Willy darkly. "You ratter bounders! A fat lot you'll care if Rupert dies. Poor little chap, he's in mortal agony, I believe. Look at the way his legs are twitching!"

The other Third-Formers backed away.

Willy's glare was ferocious. As a matter of fact, Handforth minor was indeed worried and concerned. He hated to see suffering, particularly in a dumb animal. And, when the sufferer was one of his own pets, he was ready to fight anybody who opposed him.

To his great relief, Rupert responded to a little coaxing, and consented to open his eyes once or twice. But he was evidently a very sick rat. It seemed any odds that he was on his deathbed.

Willy was so worried that he made an unusually careless toilet, and not only went downstairs with hair unbrushed, but he was also wearing a crumpled collar.

Mr. Muggles had not yet appeared. Officially, he had not shown himself, and the Third was still waiting to see its new master, although Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath had told the lags what to expect.

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Muggles Takes the Third.

MR. BEVERLEY STOKES strode briskly into the Third Form classroom, accompanied by Mr. Marmaduke Muggles.

It was just nine o'clock, and the Third had assembled for morning call-over, Marrow being in charge. All the lags were present, Dicky Jones and Tommy Hobbs just managing to scramble in a minute before the Housemaster and Mr. Muggles came along the passage.

"All right, Marrow," said Mr. Stokes. "You may consider yourself relieved of your duties now."

"Thank you, sir," said Marrow. "But, as Mr. Muggles is new to the Third, I thought he'd like me to take call-over this morning."

"Quite a good idea, Marrow," said the Housemaster. "Thank you. I've no doubt that Mr. Muggles will appreciate your thoughtfulness." He turned to the class. "Boys, let me introduce your new Form-master—Mr. Marmaduke Muggles. It will be his pleasure to instruct you until Mr. Sundcliffe is ready to return."

"Good-morning, Mr. Muggles," said the Third in one voice.

This was a little prearrangement of Willy's, and both the masters smiled. It

was rather surprising to hear the whole Form exclaim the same words in the same breath. And they exclaimed them, moreover, in loud voices.

"Good-morning, boys!" said Mr. Muggles, when he had recovered.

"I rely upon you to be on your very best behaviour," went on the Housemaster. "As you probably know, Mr. Muggles is a senior Housemaster of Redcliffe College, and he has only consented to accept this temporary appointment out of a spirit of sympathy."

"Thank you, Mr. Muggles!" roared the Third.

This was, in a way of speaking, a farce. Willy had instructed the Third to shout these words at a signal from him. The signal was the scratching of Willy's head. Unfortunately, Willy unconsciously stroked his hair at that moment, and the Third rose to it.

"There is no need to make so much noise about it, boys," said Mr. Stokes, looking at the Form suspiciously. "Of course, Mr. Muggles has full authority, and I shall be very sorry if he is compelled to bring me any unsatisfactory reports. I rely upon you to assist Mr. Muggles in every possible way until he is accustomed to our routine."

Mr. Stokes departed, leaving Morrow to take call-over. After that there was only just time to get into Big Hall for morning prayers. After those were over, the Head briefly announced that Mr. Sutcliffe was slightly improved, and was getting on as well as could be expected.

Then the Third was marched back to its Form-room, now in sole charge of Mr. Muggles. Morrow had gone off on other duties, heartily glad to be relieved of his responsibility. Taking the Third, in Morrow's opinion, was something akin to torture.

Back in the Third Form Class-room, Willy Handforth's first care was to take a furtive glance inside his desk. Rupert was tucked away in one corner, and at first glance Willy had a shock. He thought Rupert was dead. But a second glance showed him that the rat was only asleep.

"What is that boy doing with his desk open?" demanded Muggles, from his raised d-d. "Close that lid at once!"

Willy received a jab from Chubbly Heath. "He's talking to you, fathoed!" hissed Chubbly.

"Eh? Oh?" said Willy, closing the desk. "Sorry, sir!"

Mr. Muggles looked at him disbelievably. "I have no doubt, young man, that you opened your desk with the deliberate intention of affronting me," he exclaimed. "I have excellent reason for supposing that you are an insolent lay. What is your name?"

"Handforth, sir. I've got a brother in the Fourth, so I'm generally called Handforth minor."

"That will do," interrupted Mr. Muggles. "Stand up!"

Willy stood up, aching. He had an idea that Mr. Muggles was going to pick on him as a first victim, chiefly on account of that incident in the lane the previous evening.

"Well, I'm standing up, sir," said Willy. "What's the idea? I haven't done anything wrong, have I?"

The New Form-master looked round the class with an expression of scorn. He was even more dapper than usual this morning—neat, snappy, with well-oiled trousers and gleaming shoes. His linen was spotless.

"You heard?" asked Mr. Muggles. "This boy comes in the class with his collar crumpled, his hair like a mop, and he asks if he has done anything wrong! Come down here, sir," he added, pointing to Willy. "Come down here in front of the class!"

Willy went, inwardly boiling.

"Now, Handforth minor, what have you got to say for yourself?" demanded Mr. Muggles. "What possible excuse can you offer for coming into morning school with your collar in that disgraceful condition?"

"I forgot to change it this morning, sir," growled Willy. "I was worried about Rupert."

"Rupert?"

"My white rat, sir."

The Form tilted, and Mr. Muggles frowned.

"Your white rat!" he suggested. "If you think that is any excuse—"

"It was Marmaduke who crumpled the collar, sir," went on Willy. "He did it last night, when I was going to feed him—"

"Marmaduke!" thundered Mr. Muggles.

"Yes, sir—same name as yourself," replied Willy solemnly. "Funny thing, he looks a bit like— Marmaduke's my pet monkey, sir."

This time the Form giggled with great audibility, and Mr. Marmaduke Muggles quivered from head to foot.

CHAPTER II.

A Perfect Beast.

"SILENCE!" shouted the Form-master, his voice rising to a shrill pitch.

The Third instantly subsided.

"Now, Handforth minor, finish what you were going to say!" commanded Mr. Muggles, in a dangerous voice. "You were telling me that your pet monkey looks like—like what?"

"Like a monkey, sir," replied Willy innocently.

"Don't prevaricate, sir!" shouted Mr. Muggles. "You have the impertinence to suggest that he looked like me."

"Oh, sir!" said Willy, shocked. "What gave you that impression? I didn't say it, did I? But if you think so—"

"You will write me two hundred lines for disgraceful impertinence!" interrupted Mr. Muggles. "And unless you change your collar during the interval, I will give you a further two hundred lines for slovenliness. Get back to your place!"

Willy went back to his place, fairly content. He felt that it had been worth two hundred lines, anyhow. Mr. Muggles proceeded to go through the rest of the Form, boy by boy.

He demanded their names, and having got them, subjected his victims to a cross-examination and a lecture on the Importance of Being Neat. By the time he had finished the Third was solidly of the opinion that Mr. Muggles was a beast of the very first quality.

"Old Sunny's an angel compared to him," whispered Owen minor.

"An angel with nugs!" agreed Chubby Heath feelingly.

Mr. Muggles rapped his desk.

"You two boys stand up!" he shouted. "Write me fifty lines each for talking in class!"

Chubby Heath and Owen minor sat down rebelliously.

"I may as well tell you, first and foremost, that I intend to have order in this class," went on Mr. Muggles grimly. "I have heard from many quarters that this Form is unruly and untidy. While I am here there must be a change. Do you understand me—a change. I will allow no boy under my authority to go about with a dirty face or dirty hands and unkempt hair. I will allow no boy to appear in public with

crumpled collars or inkstains. I insist upon neatness and tidiness—and I will have them both."

The Third glowered.

Mr. Sturcliffe had sometimes verbally chastised them for being untidy, but his lectures had generally been mild. Their old Form-master had had the sense to realise that Third Formers could not help being more or less grubby. It was second nature to them.

"I will inflict no punishment this morning regarding appearance," continued Mr. Muggles. "But I have warned you, and I shall expect a great change this afternoon. All boys who fail to make themselves tidy will be kept in detention for two hours this evening. I hope you will clearly understand that I am serious."

After that Mr. Muggles proceeded with the morning's work.

And the Third knew all about it. Their new Form-master was a terror. He was super-critical, he picked a fellow up for the slightest slip, and generally made himself as unpleasant as possible.

There was nothing really criminal about Mr. Muggles, although the Third were already looking upon him with less favour than they would have regarded a professional burglar. He was simply and purely a fidget—a man of petty irritation and nervous temperament. As a Housemaster he may have been fairly successful, but to place him in control of a class of lads was a big mistake. Dr. Stafford, the Head, however, had acted from the best motives.

"Only twenty minutes to the interval!" murmured Chubby, at length.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Willy. "I think old Rupert's a bit better. I took a peep at him just now, and he's beginning to run about. I think he's passed the crisis."

"Shush!" warned Chubby.

Mr. Muggles turned suspiciously from the blackboard.

"Who was talking?" he demanded. "If there is any more of it, I shall have no alternative but to keep you in during interval."

The Third was mum. All the lads were longing for the welcome morning break—mainly so that they could openly discuss Mr. Muggles between themselves.

They were all bursting with particularly scathing comments to which they wished to

give rise. The threat of detaining them during interval was enough.

Mr. Muggles turned to the blackboard again, and Willy took another surreptitious peep under his desk-lid. The white rat was slowly crawling about, and the little silent looked at its master with an almost intelligent light in its bright, bead-like eyes.

"Feeling better, old man?" whispered Willy.

"Handforth minor—what are you doing?"

Willy dropped his desk-lid with a slam, and looked up with a red face.

"Sorry, sir. Just having a look at something."

"So I can believe, Handforth minor," retorted Mr. Muggles. "And you were not looking at anything connected with your work, I'll be bound. I have repeatedly seen you looking into your desk. What have you got there?"

"Books and papers, sir," replied Willy promptly.

"Anything else?"

"There's an old ink pot and two broken pencils—"

"I'm afraid I cannot accept your word, Handforth minor," interrupted the Form-master, striding up to Willy's desk. "I will look into this myself. I have a clear suspicion that you are up to mischief."

Mr. Muggles grasped the desk lid, and the Third wailed heartlessly.

CHAPTER 14.

Rough on Rupert.

WILLY held the lid down firmly.

"Hold on, sir!" he said, with a grin into his voice. "Please don't open this. I gave you my word I haven't any secrets, or anything like that in there. I haven't got a—"

"Release your grip at once, boy!" cut in Mr. Muggles.

"But wait a minute, sir!"

"I shall not wait a minute!" snapped Mr. Muggles. "Take your hands away! Do you hear me?" he demanded angrily. "You impudent young rascal! There! I won't be defied in this way!"

He wrenched open the lid and gave a little gasp. Rupert was looking up at him with beady eyes. Willy sat there, quiet and outwardly calm. And the Third waited for the storm to break.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Muggles. "What—what is this?"

Willy thought it unnecessary to answer.

"A rat!" shouted the Form-master. "A dirty, unclean rat!"

"He isn't dirty, sir!" retorted Willy.

"Rup—it's as clean as any of your silly kittens—and just as affectionate, too!"

"What is he doing in your desk?" roared Mr. Muggles.

"He's been ill, sir," growled Willy.

"The poor little beggar was nearly dying during the night, and I wanted to keep him under my eye. He hasn't been doing any harm, sir—"

"Handforth minor, you know as well as I do that you are not allowed to keep white rats in your desk!" broke in Mr. Muggles harshly. "What possible explanation can you give?"

"I've given it, sir," said Willy defiantly. "I don't mind if you give me lines—I'll admit I'm wrong. It's against the rules to keep pets in the Form-room, and I know it. But old Rupert was awfully ill, and under the circumstances I think you might overlook it. I'll take him back in his cage during the interval. Be a sport, sir."

Mr. Sandliffe, in similar circumstances, would undoubtedly have responded to an appeal of this kind—uttered, as it was, in a purely innocent fashion. But Mr. Muggles was made of different stuff.

"I shall certainly not overlook this unwarrantable breach of school rules!" he retorted curtly. "Take that rat at once, and fling it in the cupboard—and lock the door! You can remove it during the interval. I shall detain you for two hours this evening!"

"Oh, I say, sir!" protested Willy.

"We're playing the Madmen House—"

"That is your own concern," interrupted Mr. Muggles. "Take that rat and put it in the cupboard!"

"But he's ill, sir, and the cupboard's full of rubbish," said Willy. "There's only about ten minutes—"

"Confound you, Handforth minor!" belated Mr. Muggles, flying into one of his quick tempers. "You can do nothing but deliberately incense me! I'll show you whether I'm in earnest or not!"

With one grab, he seized the rat, and flung it clean through the nearest open window. During the tense silence which followed, a distinct thud sounded, faint but audible, followed by a pitiful little squeak.

"There!" said Mr. Muggles triumphantly.

He marched back to his desk. His quick temper subsiding. Willy was still sitting in his place, but he had gone rather pale. He suddenly stood up, his eyes glittering fiercely.

"You'd no right to do that, sir!" he said with cold fury.

"How dare you!" said Mr. Muggles. "Sit down!"

"I'm going out to get my rat, sir," said Willy, striding down the Form-room towards the door. "You've probably half-killed the poor little chap. He may be only a dirty rat to you, but he's one of my pals."

The Form sat half-frozen.

"Handforth minor, go back in your place!" roared Mr. Muggles, red to the neck with anger. "How dare you defy me in this way!"

"Go back to your place this very instant!"

Willy reached the door.

"I'll go back to my place when I've attended to that poor little beast of a rat!" he replied deliberately. "And if I find one of its legs broken, or anything like that, I'll—I'll—"

Willy didn't trust himself to say any more, but the very manner in which he spoke off was significant. He vanished through the door. Mr. Muggles was absolutely staggered by this exhibition of sheer insubordination.

"Good for Willy!"

"Rather!"

"Good luck to him!"

The Third buzzed with excited comment, for the departure of Willy had broken the tension. Mr. Muggles rapped his desk so hard that he smashed his ruler in two.

"Silence!" he stormed. "Another sound, and I'll desert every boy the whole evening!" He strode towards the door. "Remain in your places, and keep order!" he added curtly.

"If I find the slightest commotion when I return, the Headmaster himself shall know of this disgraceful affair."

He wrenched open the door, and strode out. By a piece of luck, he nearly ran into Conroy major at the Sixth. Conroy major looked at Mr. Muggles' angry face in surprise.

"Ah!" said Mr. Muggles. "You are a perfect!"

"Why, yes, sir—"

"Then be good enough to go into this room, and take charge of the Third until

I return!" snapped Mr. Muggles. "One of my boys has grossly disobeyed my orders, and I must deal with him summarily."

And the Third Form-master rushed off, leaving Conroy major without any further explanation. But he found plenty of willing tongues, eager enough to enlighten him, as soon as he entered the class-room.

CHAPTER 15.

Hauled Before the Head.

OUTSIDE in the Triangle, Willy Haral- forth raved with great fury at the windows of the Third Form class-room. He was filled with alarm. And a burning indignation shone in his eyes.

He hated any kind of cruelty to animals, and if he should find Rupert with a broken leg, or some other injury, he hardly knew what he would do. At the moment, Mr. Muggles was a kind of murderer in his eyes.

As for his action in disobeying orders, he thought nothing of that whatever. He didn't even realise that he was deliberately defying his Form-master's authority. His only thoughts were for the unfortunate rat.

The Triangle was deserted except for himself. He looked round eagerly, but the gravel was deserted. Rupert, evidently, had crawled away somewhere—and this was a hopeful sign. It proved, at all events, that the little beggar had some life left in him.

Halting there in the morning sunshine, Willy hardly knew what to do. If Rupert was lost, the situation would be just as bad—for the white rat would never survive a night in the open. He was not bred to an open-air life.

Willy gave a shrill, peculiar whistle.

It was a last desperate effort, for he expected Mr. Muggles to appear at any moment. The result was astonishing. A white spot appeared from behind a little bush near the wall. Rupert had heard his master's signal, and came out as usual.

"Good old Rupert!" muttered Willy gladly.

He dashed up and seized the rat, and made a swift examination. Rupert had received the usual scolding. He may have been hurt, but there was no sign of injury. And his overgrown shadow was a

thing of the past. The little chap was almost himself again.

"Handforth minor!"

The shout came shrilly, and Willy quickly turned his head. Mr. Marmaduke Muggles, his gown flying, was speeding across the Triangle. His face was suffused with anger.

"Rupert, old son, this is where we do a pretty little lark," whispered Willy. "Old Muggles can feel himself!"

And, regardless of the consequences, Willy dashed off.

"Stop! Stop at once!" roared Mr. Muggles.

Willy turned his head as he ran.

"Shan't be two minutes, sir!" he called.

With Mr. Muggles in full chase, he whizzed round the chestnuts, doubled back, and flew into the Ancient House again. Within a minute he was in his own little study in the Third Form passage. Rupert was swiftly dropped into his cage, and Willy paused a moment to give him some food. To his satisfaction, the rat commenced eating.

"Good enough!" said Willy. "If you can eat, you are O.K."

He didn't pass out through the door—for he thought he might run into Mr. Muggles. Instead, he slipped out of the window and made his way round until he was in the Triangle once again. He was just in time to see Mr. Muggles come to the Ancient House door, panting. The Third master, having failed in his search, was really exhausted.

"Handforth minor!" he croaked, as he caught sight of the lag. "Good gracious! How did you get out here? Come to my study at once!"

Willy went, nimbly enough.

"You young rascal!" shouted Mr. Muggles, grasping his shoulder. "What do you mean by deliberately defying me?"

"You chucked old Rupert out of the window, sir," growled Willy.

"You—you—you—"

"I couldn't leave him there, sir," went on Willy. "He's none too well, and there's a sharp nip in the air this morning. Besides, you might have broken his spine, or something. I suppose you'll take me to Mr. Stokes now!"

"I shall take you straight to the headmaster!" snapped Mr. Muggles.

"All right—go ahead!" sighed Willy.

"It's all in a lifetime, I suppose, sir. We must expect these little troubles."

"You unprincipled young scamp!" roared Mr. Muggles, dragging Willy with him. "I intend to see that you are soundly flogged! Never in my whole career at Redcliffe have I met a boy so vicious as you!"

"They must be a poor lot at Redcliffe, sir," remarked Willy.

"Don't dare to answer me!" panted the Form-master as he dragged Willy along. "Another word, and I'll box your ears! Do you hear me?"

"I'm not supposed to answer, sir," said Willy gruffly. "I don't want my giddy ears boxed. I once read that it's dangerous to box a chap's ears. It injured the drums."

"Silence!" booted Mr. Muggles.

"There's no pleasing some people!" murmured Willy resignedly.

CHAPTER 16.

Trouble for Two.

DR. MALCOLM STAFFORD, the headmaster of St. Frank's, was considerably surprised when the school's latest master burst in, dragging a lag by the scruff of his neck. The Head's butler had announced Mr. Muggles, but this was the first the Head knew of any second visitor.

"What is this, Mr. Muggles?" asked Dr. Stafford, adjusting his glasses.

"I have brought this insubordinate boy to you for punishment, sir," panted Mr. Muggles, releasing Willy and trying to look dignified.

"Indeed!" said the Head, frowning. "This is most distressing—particularly on your first morning, Mr. Muggles. What has the boy been doing that you should take this—er—somewhat extreme measure?"

"I'll explain in two ticks, sir—" began Willy.

"You will be silent, Handforth minor!" commanded the Head. "I am pained to see you in this unfortunate position. Although high-spirited, I never suspected you of being insolent."

"It was all because of old Rupert, sir," said Willy.

"Old Rupert?" repeated the Head, with a start.

"My tame rat, sir."

"Good gracious me! What on earth—"

"He was ill all last night, sir, and looked a bit rucky this morning," went on Willy.

knowing the value of getting his own story out first. "So I took him into the Form-room and put him in my desk, so that I could keep my eye on him—"

"A perfectly disgraceful proceeding!" chimed in Mr. Muggles.

"It was against all rules, I know, sir," went on Willy. "But there's an exception to every rule. Rupert wasn't doing any harm. Mr. Muggles found my rat in the desk, sir, and he picked it up and threw it out of the window."

"I appeal to you, sir—" spluttered Mr. Muggles.

"Right out of the window!" went on Willy grimly, and with a glare at Mr. Muggles. "The poor little chap landed on the gravel with an awful thud. Mr. Muggles told me to keep in my seat, but I disobeyed him."

"You disobeyed your Form-master?" repeated the Head, who had been listening to this swift story with mixed feelings.

"I couldn't help it, sir. I'm sorry," went on Willy. "I didn't mean to be insolent, or anything like that, but that little chap was lying out in the Triangle, ill and probably injured. So I just walked out and snatched Mr. Muggles, and put old Rupert back in his cage."

"Oh," said the Head, "you admit all this?"

"Of course I do, sir. I'm not going to tell any fibs," replied Willy simply. "I was in the wrong, I suppose, and I'll take my gruel, sir. That's all, sir."

Mr. Muggles had been fuming like an exhaust pipe during Willy's story. Everything had gone wrong. Mr. Muggles had intended to do all the talking, and to suppress Willy completely, but he was at a disadvantage. If he had been at St. Frank's longer, he would have known that Willy was irrepresable.

As for the Head, he had listened to the story with considerable attachment—particularly the incident of Rupert being thrown headlong out of the window.

"I wish to tell you what happened, sir—" began Mr. Muggles.

"Quite all! Quite all!" interrupted the Head. "But Handforth minor has already gone into a few details. Am I to understand, Mr. Muggles, that his story is substantially true?"

"In a way, yes," agreed Mr. Muggles. "I found the rat in the boy's desk, and lost no time in snuffling it from the Form-room.

Handforth minor was both insolent and disobedient."

"The boy has already admitted his guilt," said the Head coolly.

Willy's frank admission that he was in the wrong had impressed the Head, and the fog's readiness to "take his gruel" only supported the Head's conviction that Willy was, on the whole, nothing worse than high-spirited.

"I can do nothing, Handforth minor, but punish you for this breach of discipline," said the Head sternly. "As you have admitted yourself in the wrong, I will say nothing further. You will remain in detention from five o'clock till seven this evening. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir," said Willy quietly. "But one moment!" shouted Mr. Muggles. "The boy should be flogged!"

He broke off as the Head bestowed a cold glare upon him. Willy left the room and closed the door.

"I punished the boy as he deserved. Mr. Muggles," said the Head acidly. "I exceedingly regret that you should have thought it necessary to bring him to me at all. It is true that you snatched the whole rat and

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flung it out of the window into the Triangle!"

"I was enraged at the boy's disobedience—"

"Perhaps so—perhaps so," interrupted the Head. "But I can only conclude, Mr. Muggles, that he acted under extreme provocation. I am sorry that you should have given way to temper on your first morning with the Third Form."

"But, really—"

"It was a lamentable example to set your boys," went on the Head sternly. "I cannot possibly condone your action, Mr. Muggles, in throwing the rat out of the window. It was both uncalled for, and, indeed, an act of real cruelty. I only punished the boy because it is necessary to maintain discipline. I shall expect you to set him a very tight task for his detention."

Mr. Muggles nearly had a fit.

"But the young rascal was—was—"

"Nothing can be gained by any further discussion," interrupted the Head. "In future, Mr. Muggles, I trust you will conduct your Form with a greater sense of propriety. Good-morning, sir."

Mr. Muggles went out of the Head's study, sorely aware of the humiliation which had been placed upon him. And if he had disliked Willy previously, he now regarded the leader of the Third with positive hatred.

CHAPTER 17. In Detention.

CLACK! Willy looked up with a little sigh as he heard the welcome sound floating in through the open window of the Third Form classroom. It was evening now, and the Third-Formers were playing cricket on Little Nile.

The House match was being finished, but Willy was absent.

In detention, he was constantly under Mr. Muggles' eye, and the Ancient House boys were obliged to play a subsidiary, which was seriously prejudicing their chances of a win.

"Get on with your work, boy!" said Mr. Muggles curtly. "It's no good listening to the sounds from outside."

"I've got ears, sir," growled Willy. "I can't help listening!"

"Don't be impudent!"

Willy gritted his teeth, and went on with his work. Contrary to the Head's injunction, Mr. Muggles had set the boy an exceedingly hard task, and it was only by concentrated grinding that Willy was able to keep his attention on the work.

It was past six already, so the work was over.

He had to keep in until seven. But what was the good of going out then? The match would be finished, and in all probability the Ancient House would have lost. Mr. Muggles took a secret delight in Willy's dilemma. He didn't mind remaining in the Form-room, at duty.

For he hated Willy so thoroughly that any task was not too arduous for him. He only regretted that he couldn't keep the unfortunate boy in right until supper-time.

Clack!

The game continued outside, and Mr. Muggles smiled grimly to himself as he watched Willy at work. The new Form master was not exactly uncomfortable, for he bounced back in his chair, reading a novel. He might just as well be here, he told himself, as in his study. He, himself, was breaking a school rule by smoking.

The time went by slowly.

Soon after half-past-six the sound of cheering attracted Willy's attention for a moment. He knew that it meant the end of the match. He looked up, wondering if he dare go to the window. The price would be too high, he decided. Mr. Muggles would certainly make it an excuse for keeping him in another hour.

"Don't let your thoughts stray, young man!" said Mr. Muggles, as he turned a page. "If you are not doing that work properly I shall have no alternative but to keep you in longer."

"I'm doing my best, sir," said Willy fiercely.

"Don't bark at me, Handforth minor!" snapped Mr. Muggles.

The work went on, and Willy felt better. Only twenty minutes longer now, and—

The door opened, and Mr. Stokes looked in.

"Oh, the Head asked me to inquire about Handforth minor," said the House-master. "Has he been behaving himself in detention, Mr. Muggles?"

Mr. Muggles hastily pocketed his paper.

"Er—yes—quite so," he replied, rather confused.

"Then Handforth must have the Head's permission to leave detention straight off," said Mr. Stokes, smiling at Willy. "All right, young 'un, you can slip away now."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Willy gratefully.

Mr. Muggles rose to his feet.

"But, really, Mr. Stokes—" he began.

"Head's instructions," smiled the House-master. "If you don't like it, you can easily go along and have a word with the Old Man. Just as you please."

"Bah!" muttered Mr. Muggles, under his breath.

He stalked out of the room, disgusted. That interview with the Head was still painfully fresh in his mind, and he had no desire to have another chat with Dr. Scatford.

It could hardly be said that the Redcliffe Master was having a good first day at St. Frank's. His control of the Third was rather uncertain so far, and he was hated like poison.

Willy, glad to be free, met his major in the lobby.

"Oh, so there you are!" said Edward Oswald, frowning. "Hi, you young ass! I'm talking to you!" he added, as Willy walked past him. "Grab him, Church!"

Church kindly grinned.

"Leggo!" roared Willy. "I want to find out who won."

"We did!" said Handforth promptly.

"Blow your fat-headed match!" snapped Willy. "I mean the Told game!"

"Oh, that!" smiled Handforth. "That imitation cricket! My hat! You don't call that a game, do you? You fags can only mess about on the field like a lot of kids playing leap-frog."

"Go and eat coko!" said Willy tartly. "I'll bet the Told could beat you asses any day! As for your hatting, Ted, it's more like a nappy with a pickaxe!"

"You cheeky young—"

"Hi, Chubby!" roared Willy suddenly.

"Who won?"

"We did!" panted Chubby happily, as he came running up. "Just managed to scrape up enough runs without you, old chap. But it was a close shave, I can give you my word! What are you doing out here? I thought you were detained until seven o'clock!"

"Blow that!" said Willy. "We've won—so what else matters?"

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Muggles On the Warpath.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH
Bounced.

"What's this?" he said, with a magisterial air. "What's this? Detained until seven o'clock? So that's why we haven't seen you since tea-time! What have you been up to, my lad?"

"Oh, for goodness sake dry up!" retorted Willy. "Can't I have some good old-fashioned detention without you hindering an inquest? By the way, I'm a bit short. How about five bob?"

Handforth laughed sarcastically.

"Do you know any more jokes?" he asked tartly.

"Five bob!" repeated Willy. "It's no good you saying you can't manage it, because I know for a fact that you've got a couple of quid. I'll save you from squandering some of it—"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth, diving a hand into his pocket. "Here you are—take the giddy five bob! It's worth it to get rid of you!"

Willy grinned, and tripped off, vanishing round the angle of the passage in an inverted position. It was one of Willy's favourite pastimes to turn catshoops in the corridor—much to the peril of nursery nurses who turned corners without looking.

"That's what comes of stopping your minor!" grinned McClure. "It's not you're bob, old son. If I were you, I'd leave him severely alone. He's a young terror."

"I won't give him a farthing!" said Handforth sternly. "He can ask all he likes, but there's nothing soft about me! You won't catch me giving in to his fat-headed demands."

"But you whacked out five bob just now," grinned Church.

"If you're going to start arguing, Walter Church, I'll wipe up the giddy lobby with you!" roared Handforth. "Are we going out in Little-Side, or not? I'm going to show you that new style of bowling. I can get such a break on the ball that it'll turn nearly at right angles!"

"Why not make it come back after going half way down the pitch?" suggested Church. "That'll test the batsman, won't it?"

"Lousie!" said Handforth coldly.

In the meantime, Willy had retired to his own study, and was busy with his pen. J

was past their feeding time already, and he found them clamouring for food.

Marmaduke, the monkey, was chattering away gaily. He was a smart little chap, agile, active, with twinkling black eyes. He knew his rooming master well, but Willy wasn't quite satisfied with Marmaduke. He was a fairly recent acquisition, and disobedience was one of his greatest crimes.

When Marmaduke was hungry, he was all right—in'd he do anything. But as soon as he had had his fill he developed a kind of independence which Willy regarded with the utmost severity. The little monkey would boldly ignore his master's instructions, and would positively refuse to walk back into his cage when ordered.

But Willy was patient—he was curing Marmaduke of these inordinate traits. Within a month, Willy reckoned, he would have Marmaduke so finely trained that he would obey on the instant.

"You sit there, my lad," said Willy sternly. "Have a go at that banana. It's a bit squilly, but you like 'em squilly. I've got some nuts later on, if you're a good boy. But remember—any of your lanky-janky, and you'll only get a popper instead!"

Marmaduke grunted, and chattered. He seemed to receive the remark with lofty indifference. He was sitting on the table, peeling his banana.

It didn't seem to suit his taste, for after having half skinned the fruit, he sniffed at it, took a bite, and contemptuously spat it out. Then he threw the banana over his head, and looked at Willy expectantly.

But Willy was attending to Rupert. He was glad to find that Rupert had recovered so much that he was performing a few of his tricks without being told to do so. He probably felt as happy at being well that his spirits were of the highest order.

"That's the way, Rupert, old son," said Willy. "You don't seem to be hurt much, anyhow—"

"Good heavens!"

Willy spun round as the exclamation sounded from the doorway. Then he frowned, and gave a sigh of deep resentment. Mr. Marmaduke Muggles was framed in the doorway. It seemed that the new Form-master was haunting Willy like a ghost.

"Oh!" said Mr. Muggles. "Indeed!"

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Willy.

"Yes, you young rascal, there is something wrong!" shouted Mr. Muggles, dy-

ing into a temper at the very sight of his youthful enemy. "How dare you keep your pets in this study? It is disgraceful! Disgusting! Take them out at once!"

"But look here, sir," interrupted Willy. "They're not doing any harm here! I keep 'em clean and tidy. What do you think of Marmaduke, sir? Your name-sake, you know."

"Take the infernal beast away!" hinted Mr. Muggles.

At this moment Marmaduke decided that Mr. Muggles needed investigating. He gave a couple of hops, reached a little shelf near the Form-master's head, and clung there, peering into Mr. Muggles' face.

"It's all right, sir—he isn't like!" grinned Willy.

Mr. Muggles swept his hand up, and knocked Marmaduke down from his perch with a vicious strength. Marmaduke squealed with sudden fright, and raced into a corner, where he crouched, shivering.

"Steady on, sir," said Willy quietly. "You seem to have made a dead set against my pets—"

"Another word from you, boy, and I'll have the whole lot of them destroyed!" shouted Mr. Muggles furiously. "I shall come back here within ten minutes, and if these animals are not removed, I'll have them thrown out!"

He turned on his heel and walked away—and Marmaduke, from his corner, revealed his teeth, and chattered in his own peculiar lingo. Without doubt, he already hated Mr. Muggles as much as Mr. Muggles hated Willy. And Marmaduke had an extraordinary memory.

CHAPTER 12.

Another Disaster.

CHURRY HEATH came into the study, whistling. It was a singularly discordant noise, but Clubbey wasn't aware of it. He was just congratulating himself upon the fact that he had got the time right at last.

"Don't make that row here!" said Willy. "Marmaduke's had our fright—he doesn't want another! And perhaps you'd better keep your face turned the other way. I shouldn't be surprised if Rupert's illness —"

"You leave my face alone!" growled Clubbey. "My hat! Your giddy pets over the room again! He! That's a

monkey is tearing up one of my exercise books!" he added, in a roar. "Drop it, you young fathead! Look at him, Willy!"

"Let him play!" said Willy kindly. "All this fuss over a giddy exercise book! I'll buy you another one!"

"But it's full of my algebra!" howled Chubby.

"Your what?" asked Willy, with sarcasm. "Old Suncliffe used to call it a different name from that!"

"I shall have to do it all over again!" groaned Chubby, his freckled face alight with concern. "I say, Willy—be a sport! That monkey of yours is a bit too thick, you know. Shore him back in his cage!"

But Willy went on with his work unperturbed. Chubby, left to his own devices, rescued his exercise book, and found that it wasn't hurt much, after all.

Deprived of the exercise book, Marmaduke scented round for further playthings. Finding nothing to suit his artistic taste, he hopped on to the window-sill, and had a look outside.

The view was not exactly cheering.

The Third Form studies were, to be quite frank, box-rooms. It had been Willy's idea to convert these box-rooms into studies, and they overlooked a little corner of shrub-covered ground in the rear of the Ancient House.

"Now then, Marmaduke, how about those nuts?" asked Willy, shutting Ferdinand's cage with a click—Ferdinand was the ferret. "Just hop on the table here, and—Hello! Hi, Marmy!"

Willy looked round blankly. Marmaduke was nowhere to be seen. The door was closed, and Chubby Heath was industriously smoothing out the pages of his exercise book, hoping that Mr. Muggles would ask an awkward question on the morrow.

"Where's that giddy monkey?" asked Willy, in alarm.

"How do I know?" asked Chubby. "I haven't got him in my pocket!"

"Great pip!" He must have jumped out of the window!" roared Willy, leaping to the window. "I'd forgotten it was open! It's your fault for coming in and disturbing me!"

"I like that!" snorted Chubby indignantly. "You ought to think yourself jolly lucky that we allow you to keep your pets in here! Over mine and I have an awful time!"

"You allow it!" thundered Willy. "Look here, my lad—"

"Oh, all right—have your own way!" said Chubby pacifically.

Willy was at the window, gazing out at the bushy vista. There was no sign of Marmaduke whatever. Willy whistled and chirruped, but all to no purpose. The monkey, still untrained in the art of obedience, was loftily ignoring his young master's calls. He was probably hiding behind one of the bushes.

"Look here, Chubby, I'd better go and have a search!" said Willy, with concern. "Monkeys are funny things—they do all sorts of mischief once they get loose!"

"Go on!" said Chubby, in mock surprise.

"If old Marmaduke gets into the Head's study, or something like that, there'll be the dickens to pay, went on Willy, climbing out of the window. "Somewhere, these masters don't understand my pets at all. The Head's a decent old bird, but I'd bet he'd cut up rusty if Marmaduke suddenly jumped in his study window, and landed on his head!"

"Whom head—Marmaduke's?"

"No, fathead!" snapped Willy. "I say, keep your eye open, and if old Muggles comes, get rid of him!"

Willy vanished, leaving Chubby Heath staring. Willy hadn't explained how Chubby was to perform the miracle of getting rid of Mr. Muggles, and Chubby scratched his head in dismay. He decided to do his best, although he hadn't many hopes.

In the meantime, Willy searched the shrubs, and even penetrated into the Head's garden—a decidedly risky thing to do, considering that daylight was still fair.

But Marmaduke had vanished completely.

It was a perfectly hateful thing to admit, but Willy was compelled to do so. Marmaduke, the monkey, had escaped from captivity, and was at large!

CHAPTER XL SILK AT LARGE.

"FOUND him!" asked Chubby Heath, as Willy climbed in through the window again.

"Don't ask dotty questions!" snorted Willy. "Can't you see I haven't found him, fathead? Look here, this is

serious! Goodness knows where Marmaduke's got to, and there might be awful trouble!"

"Well, I warned you about taking him out of his cage," said Chubby. "Don't blame me for it. You ought to have closed the window——"

"I know that!" growled Willy. "It's easy enough to be wise after the event! We'd better take these cages and things out at once—old Muggles is bound to be on the track in two or three minutes. And there'll be a fearful row if he finds that Marmaduke's escaped."

"My hat! You'll be sacked, or something," said Chubby cheerfully. "Either that, or Marmaduke will be confiscated."

This was what Willy was so concerned about. If Marmaduke happened to startle one of the masters, the Head would certainly hear all about it, and there would be an inquiry. Marmaduke's fate would be sealed. Without a minute's delay, he would be dispatched elsewhere, and Willy would be deprived of his favourite pet. It was a gloomy prospect.

Luckily, the other pets were smuggled outside before Mr. Muggles came round again. And the master of the Third did not have the satisfaction of punishing Willy again. School pets were usually kept in a big shed at the back, and Willy and Chubby passed as they came out.

"Look here—keep mum about this!" warned Willy. "Don't breathe a word to a soul—not even to young Orvis. The less said the better. Some of those young ones have got tongues like reels of cotton! We've got to find Marmaduke before anybody knows!"

"That'll be easy," said Chubby. "Of course, it doesn't matter about the darkness now——"

"Don't growl—it's got to be done!" said Willy gruffly. "You don't seem to realize that he's in danger. My goodness! This is one of my unlucky days, if you like!"

"Yes, you've had a lot of a roasting," admitted Chubby. "It's all Muggles' fault, the old sinner! I've never known such an interesting hunt to all my life! Old Sonny's as mild as milk compared to Muggles."

"Never mind Muggles now—we've got to find Marmaduke!" said Willy. "The worst of it is we don't know where the dickens to look. He may be in the shabbyery, or he may be in the Head's garden, or he may

have popped indoors somewhere. I'm afraid he'll get into somebody's study, and play old Harry. That's one of his little habits."

Chubby nodded feelingly.

"Remember the way he tore up your exam papers, two or three weeks ago?" he asked. "It took you a whole evening to do 'em again——"

"Don't remind me of that!" growled Willy. "Look here, you scout through the shabbyery, and I'll scout about round the back of the house. If you find him, put him in his cage. We'll meet in the lobby ten minutes before bedtime. And remember—not a word!"

"All right."

"Promise!"

"Honour bright," said Chubby.

They parted, and went on their respective searches. There was about as much chance of finding Marmaduke as finding a needle in a haystack. This was the first time the monkey had gained his full liberty, and it was a moral certainty that he would take full advantage of it.

Willy had every reason to be alarmed.

There were so many things that Marmaduke could do—and the more Willy thought of them, the more he got the wind up. Any one of these things would be quite sufficient to sentence Marmaduke to instant expulsion. There would be no reprieve—he would be barred for good.

And to avoid this catastrophe, Willy was ready to do or die. He had just become attached to Marmaduke, and the little monkey was just getting to know his master thoroughly and to learn his tricks with ever-increasing skill. It would be a downright pity to lose him now.

The time passed, and Willy's anxiety increased.

At last, despondent and intensely worried, he made his way to the Ancient House lobby, vaguely hoping that Chubby might have something good to report. He was also fearful of hearing rumours that any remarkable things had been happening. There was no telling when Marmaduke was abroad.

Chubby Heath was not in the lobby, but William Napoleon Browne was. He gazed benevolently upon Willy as the latter appeared.

"Ah, and what is the meaning of this worried frown, little man?" inquired Browne kindly. "It distresses my fine

feelings to see these indications of age. Confide in me, Brother William, and all will be well. I've never yet been known to fail in the graceful art of evading a fellow being."

"Oh, dry up, old gashag!" growled Willy.

"Alas, that youth should thus address old age," sighed Browne. "I fear me that things are coming in a blistered pass these days. Brother William, let me impress upon you the importance of—"

"Have you seen Chubby about here?" interrupted Willy.

"The importance of showing respect for your elders—"

"He was due five minutes ago," said Willy.

"Of course, I realize that in these swift and boisterous times, our youth is inclined to overstep the mark," pursued Browne generously. "But you must always remember—"

"Have you seen Chubby?" roared Willy, glaring.

CHAPTER 21.

SUN AT 11.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE shook his head.

"Brother Chubby!" he repeated, giving up his intellectual discourse with a sigh of regret. "I may be wrong, of course, but is Brother Chubby the sprightly young gentleman with a freckled visage, a ripe water-mark round his neck, and a perfect host of rents in his attire?"

"You've described him exactly," said Willy.

"In that event, Brother William, I must report complete failure," said the Fifth Former. "Much as it disarms me to tell you this news, I have not the slightest idea where Brother Chubby may be at this moment."

"All you can do is to jaw!" said Willy shortly.

"A painfully frank remark, but we must forgive you," said Browne, shaking his head. "If I may be allowed to suggest a trouble field of search, there is the school shop shining like a beacon across the Trough. It has been said that Mrs. Hake's windows are more attractive to fags than any goodnight is fatal to moths."

Alas, Mrs. Hake's till is even now bulging to overflowing with Third-Form cash."

"I can't make out where he is!" muttered Willy, looking up and down.

"I fear you have been turning a deaf ear to my intellectual remarks," said Browne regretfully. "Here I am, with my cornucopia bulging with great thoughts, and—"

"Hallo! Any luck?"

Chubby Heath came hurrying in, breathless.

"No," replied Willy. "What about you?"

"Drawn blank!"

"Oh, lor!"

The fags looked at one another with sheep concern.

"Stop me if I am intruding upon any private matter," put in Browne. "Have no hesitation in confiding your secrets to me. If you have lost something, consult Browne. If you are in need of advice, also consult Browne. If you have lost your peg-top, or one of your marbles—"

"Come on—let's get away from here!" interrupted Willy, taking Chubby's arm. "This dotty ass keeps interrupting my thoughts."

The fags went down the lobby, leaving Browne alone.

"A painful, but by no means surprising scene," observed Browne, addressing the empty space. "I have no limitation in declaring that these Third Formers are lacking in every—"

"Hallo! You talking to yourself?" asked Nipper, coming indoors with Tommy Watson and Tregellis-Wat.

"And to whom better, Brother Nipper?" inquired Browne. "When I have any particular wise thoughts to utter, I cannot find a better listener than my father's hopeful son."

Nipper grinned.

"Well, you're certain of an attentive audience, anyhow," he remarked. "I was going to ask you about Stevens. He's not doing so badly in the Second Class, is he?"

"Brother Stevens is improving by leaps and bounds," replied the captain of the Fifth. "I may even say that he is now capable of distinguishing a ball from a cricket bat."

They went off, discussing the great summer game, and Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath came wandering back into the lobby, restless, uneasy, and grim.

They stood looking out into the dark Triangle. A clanging suddenly broke the stillness.

"My hat! Bedtime!" said Chubby, with alarm.

"And old Marmy's still prowling about somewhere," muttered Willy. "I hope to goodness he hasn't got into the Head's study!"

"You'd better give it up, old man," said Chubby, shaking his head. "It's all up now. By the morning, old Marmaduke will either be dead, or he'll have escaped into the next county."

"That's you believe it," growled Willy. "He'll stick round here somewhere. I think I spotted the little beggar once, but I can't be sure. I saw something in the gloom, and it shot away when I went near. It might have been a rat, but I believe it was Marmy."

"Now then, my lady—up to bed!" said Handforth briskly, as he stride into the lobby, with Church and McClure. "Didn't you hear the bell?"

"Oh, don't start now, Ted!" said Willy, wearily.

"Hallo! Anything wrong?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Lads!" said Willy. "Your face, for one thing!"

And with this insult, the Third-Formers went up to bed. Chubby was heartily glad that a strenuous day had come to an end. But Willy had totally different ideas. As far as he was concerned, the day was by no means finished.

Mr. Muggles himself came into the Third Form dormitory to put lights out, feeling, probably, that it was an excellent idea to show his fare in the Third for a final reminder of good behaviour.

"I am not altogether satisfied with you, boys," he exclaimed severely. "Let us hope you will be more manageable to-morrow. But make no mistake—I shall deal severely with any insubordination."

He went out, leaving the room in darkness.

Outside he passed, frowning. He wasn't quite sure, but it seemed to him that various catches sounded on the night air—to say nothing of other youthful expressions of disdain. Very wisely, Mr. Muggles decided not to investigate, and went his way.

Within the dormitory Mr. Muggles' character was forthwith mangled, ripped

to pieces, and torn to shreds. He was compared unfavourably to a chimpanzee, a Polar bear, and a toad. These creatures were, it seemed, respectable members of society in comparison to Mr. Muggles.

Having thus relieved themselves, the Third-Formers went off to sleep. But one member, at least, remained wakeful. And at ten o'clock exactly, an active form slipped silently out of bed.

CHAPTER 21.

After Lights Out.

"BUCK up, lads!"

Chubby Heath, who had just gone off into a sound sleep, and was dreaming about Mr. Muggles, stirred himself. It seemed to him that Mr. Muggles had suddenly developed a visage which was an exact replica of Marmaduke's. And Mr. Muggles, in the Form-room, was squatting on his desk, eating nuts, and lecturing on geography between bites.

"Eh? Hallo! What the——"

"My hat, you sleep like a giddy log!" came a whispered voice near Chubby's ear. "Look out! Don't perch!"

"Is that you, Willy?" murmured Chubby Heath. "Thank goodness! I thought you were old Muggles, with a face like a monkey! I've been dreaming about him."

"I can't help your dream," whispered Willy. "Get up!"

"Get up!"

"We're going out!"

"Out!"

"Out!" said Willy firmly. "In case you don't know what that means, we're going outside, into the cold and chilly night!"

Chubby sat up, startled.

"But, look here——" he began.

"I don't want to look there, and I'm not taking any excuses!" interrupted the leader of the Third. "It's just a bit moonlight, and we've got to find Marmaduke. It's our only chance. If we leave it till the morning, we'll be too late."

"But somebody might spot us——"

"Remember, me more grumble and—hiff!" warned Willy.

Chubby knew that grim tone, and he unaccountably slid out of bed and started dressing himself. Until he was girted into his shirt, he didn't realise that he was

putting on Dicky Jones' clothes. This meant another delay, and Willy hurried.

At last, however, they crept out of the dormitory, and made their way downstairs as silent as shadows. They were both wearing slippers, and this precaution was necessary.

The school was by no means asleep. Not only prefects were abroad, but masters would occasionally pass up and down stairs, or even venture out into the Triangle for a final smoke.

The two lads got out of doors through a window of their study. It was the safest way. For one thing, it let out on to a piece of ground which was not overlooked by other windows, and there was a chance that Marmaduke would be skulking in the near vicinity.

"Of all the mad ideas, this is the dot-tiest!" grumbled Chubby. "Dash it all, I don't mind giving you a hand, old son, but we shall only get ourselves into a mess. Why can't you give Marmaduke up?"

"Because I don't mean to," replied Willy. "Look here, we may as well understand one another. Are you going to join in this search amiably and cheerfully, or are we going to have a scrap first? It's immaterial to me—just say the word."

"Oh, all right—I'm game!" said Chubby. And, thus resigned, he buckled up and began to enjoy himself. After all, there was something rather daring about this night prow. It was more or less thrilling, and the prospect of being collared gave the whole adventure an added spice.

But whether Marmaduke was to be found or not remained an unanswerable problem. It would, in any event, be purely a matter of luck. Now and again Willy let out a cautious whistle, but he was afraid to sound his usual hand call. And in this way half an hour passed.

The two lads were just creeping across the Triangle when Willy clutched at Chubby's sleeve. Something was moving near the fountain—a kind of dim, black smudge.

"It's Marmaduke! We've got him!" whispered Willy exultantly.

But he was slightly previous. The smudge was undoubtedly Marmaduke. But Marmaduke was decidedly frisky. He was revelling in his liberty, and goodness knew where his explorations had taken him up to this point.

Willy made one dash, but Marmaduke

vanished. With a little chatter of glee, the monkey skipped across the Triangle like a hare, and vanished in the gloom. In the chase Willy lost one of his slippers, and he came to a halt at last, breathing hard.

"I'll tan him for this!" he muttered fiercely. "The little wretch! He's doing it deliberately, too! Making fun of me, Chubby!"

"You!" repeated Chubby bitterly.

They went back and searched for Willy's missing slipper. Strangely enough, this, too, had vanished. Willy had felt it come off not far from the fountain, and he knew the exact spot. But it wasn't there now. In some extraordinary way it had utterly disappeared.

Was it possible that Marmaduke had doubled back and taken the slipper off to some secret lair? Exaggerated as Willy was, he felt a faint trace of hope. Marmaduke, at all events, was not far off.

But the night's tragedies were only just beginning!

CHAPTER 23.

Marmaduke in His Element.

MARMADUKE felt exceedingly pleased with himself.

He crouched near the wall of the Ancient House, snugly hidden behind a shrub. He was sitting back with his furry coat against the wall, and in his hand he held his master's missing slipper.

He turned this up and down, felt inside it, sniffed at it, took a bite or two, and decided that it was a poor thing at the best. Now and again he purred, and glanced sharply up and down.

Willy and Chubby were only just on the other side of the Triangle, and a movement by them in Marmaduke's direction caused him to seek a fresh hiding-place. He didn't feel any too secure.

A waste-pipe ran up the wall near by, to say nothing of ivy. Apparently without any effort, Marmaduke skinned up the pipe, and perched himself on one of the upper window-sills. He still clung to Willy's slipper, evidently regarding this as a prize of war.

At this point Marmaduke made a discovery.

The window was open, and there was a light gleaming within the room. For a full

minute Marmaduke sat there, gazing in, ready to leap wildly into space at the first sign of alarm.

But everything was quiet within the bedroom, except for a steady sound of breathing. Marmaduke listened to this for some little time, and as peace apparently reigned, he ventured inside.

Hopping down on to the floor, he worked his way across the room, pausing now and again and listening. Still everything was quiet. He found a big chest-of-drawers near E., and glanced up. He decided that the top would be a far better coign of vantage.

Assisted by the drawer knobs, he pulled himself up and sat on the top. From here he could see all round the room in comfort, and the occupant of the bed was now fully visible.

Mr. Muggles was lying flat on his back, with his mouth wide open, sound asleep. One hand was outstiffed, and the other held a book. A shaded electric light near by was switched on.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Muggles had fallen asleep whilst reading.

Marmaduke eyed his namesake steadily for about two solid minutes. Whether the monkey recognised Mr. Muggles or not remained unknown. At all events, Marmaduke concluded that there was no danger from the vicinity of the bed.

And he found a great deal to interest him on the dressing-table.

Happening to glance round, he saw a highly coloured silken tie next to him. He touched it cautiously, found that it didn't fly at him, and drew it into his grip.

At this point he gave a little chatter of delight, and then glanced hurriedly at Mr. Muggles to see if he had given himself away. But Mr. Muggles remained in oblivion.

The silken tie fascinated Marmaduke enormously. First of all, he examined it from end to end, then discovered that it would come to pieces if he pulled hard enough.

This was a happy thought. Shred by shred, Marmaduke proceeded to strew the tie over the floor. Willy's slipper had been contemptuously discarded, and was lying just against the window. Marmaduke had found far better things to claim his attention.

Having dealt with the tie, he found a number of studs, all placed in a row on the

dressing-table. One by one, he flung them out of the window and intoned attentively for the ticks as they dropped on the ground. Failing to catch these sounds, he gave it up.

A pair of new braces caught his eye, but these proved too strong for him to tackle. He discarded them with disgust, and hopped on to a side table to make further investigations.

Here he made a find.

There was a tin lying there, with one or two brushes near by. Opening the tin with caution, he sniffed at the contents, and chattered again. The stuff was most able, but it had a pungent odour, and it was as black as night.

The stuff, in reality, was boot polish, for Mr. Muggles sometimes gave his footgear a rub up during the day. He could never rest the boot boy to give his shoes the fine polish they deserved.

Marmaduke was fairly in his element.

He picked up the first brush handily—which happened to be a pet toothbrush of Mr. Muggles'. Carelessly dipping the brush in the polish, Marmaduke sniffed at it, inhaled, and then began to smear the dressing-table linen. The results were so satisfactory that he sat back and gave a shrill chatter of delight.

This thing was too good to be missed. He gave two of Mr. Muggles' collars a liberal dose, and then, happening to get some polish on his hand, he licked it, and flung the tin down in disgust.

It fell into one of Mr. Muggles' shoes, and this attracted Marmaduke's attention. He hopped down, carefully took the laces out of the shoes, tied them together, and made a long string.

He tied one end of this to the bed-rail, and swung on it. But at this moment Mr. Muggles moved in his sleep, and Marmaduke made one terrific hop on to the top of the wardrobe.

CHAPTER 23.

Mr. Muggles Gets the Cane.

FORTUNATELY, Mr. Muggles did not awake—or, perhaps unfortunately. He only turned slightly agitated, and went off into a deeper slumber.

Marmaduke watched him with bright little eyes.

As everything seemed safe, he now turned his attention to the top of the wardrobe. As there was nothing but dust, he decided that he could spend his time more profitably elsewhere.

With extraordinary skill, he skimmed down, and investigated a chair. It contained Mr. Muggles' clothing, all neatly folded. Marmaduke took the articles one by one and placed them in a heap. The front master's shirt he joyfully tore up, and took endless delight as he heard the material ripping.

But he got tired of this before he had completed the destruction, and he found fresh interest on the washstand-stand. First of all, he seized a shaving brush, and examined it with great interest, for it was something entirely new in his experience.

That it was certainly a brush.

He remembered the boot polish again, so he dropped down, dipped the shaving brush into it, and then executed a weird design on the wallpaper. But the odour again assailed him, so he went back to his perch.

Here he took the soap, flung it into the water jug, and chuckled with glee as he heard the splash. His next essay was to tip the jug over, but this proved too great an effort for his strength, which was just as well, for the crash would have aroused half the corridor.

Mr. Muggles again moved, and as he continued to be harmless, Marmaduke decided to take a closer look. He was gazing curious about this individual who kept moving, but who did nothing.

Pulling himself upon the bed, Marmaduke cautiously advanced.

But, suddenly, he stopped. Possibly he recognised Mr. Muggles' particular scent. Anyhow, he abruptly showed his teeth, and his eyes flashed. Then, as light as a feather, he advanced.

He took one close look at the master's face, and gave a great bound from the bed on to the floor. He sat there, gibbering to himself, and showing his teeth.

Marmaduke was an intelligent little chap, and there could be no question that he had recognised his enemy of the evening. Marmaduke responded to kindness at once, but he always remembered an injury. Fullerton, of the Third, had once given him a cuff, and Fullerton had only to show his nose in Willy's study, and the little monkey promptly spat at him.

It was the same with Mr. Muggles.

For some time, Marmaduke sat there, thinking things over. Possibly he was formulating some kind of revenge. It would be too bad to let this opportunity slip by.

Moving at last, he probed about, visiting all corners of the room. And at last he came across a thin, pliable cane. He seized it, and whipped it up and down in the approved style. Willy had never used a cane to him, but he had seen one once or twice when certain high spirits of the Third had indulged in a rag.

Here was an excellent means of taking his revenge.

Going back to the bed, Marmaduke pulled himself up, and sat there, swinging the cane lightly in his hand. But he didn't dare to use it yet. And he wasn't quite sure whether to cut Mr. Muggles across the face, or upon his open palm which lay invitingly near by.

In the end, he got down off the bed, and practised on Mr. Muggles' heap of disordered clothes. And Marmaduke revealed unsuspected strength. He delivered a couple of terrific whacks which ought, strictly speaking, to have awakened the Form-master up.

But he slept on in sublime ignorance.

And Marmaduke, thoroughly satisfied that he had hit upon the best venue, hopped back on to the bed. As a preliminary, he made a forceful grimace at Mr. Muggles, and put out his tongue. But Mr. Muggles took no notice of these impudent signs.

Marmaduke raised his cane, and dashed.

Swish!

The stroke descended slightly out of the true, and instead of catching Mr. Muggles across the palm, hit the tips of his fingers, which was really much more painful.

Mr. Muggles started, and sat up.

Swish!

This time the cane took him right across the face. A dangerous, agonising blow near the eyes. Marmaduke was not at all particular about his aim. Although intelligent, he could not be expected to make nice distinctions in this direction.

Mr. Marmaduke Muggles awoke with a shriek of pain. He sat up, every trace of sleep driven from him, with a thousand sparks in front of his eyes. He was confused, bewildered, and frightened out of his wits.

Beating the air wildly, he half-opened his eyes, and caught a faint, fleeting glimpse

of something as it darted out of the window. Mr. Muggles couldn't tell what it was—in his smarting agony he didn't particularly care, either. Indeed, he couldn't say for certain if he had seen anything. Perhaps it was a trick of his imagination.

And then, his sight returning, he saw a cat across the bed.

CHAPTER 21.

Circumstantial Evidence.

MR. MUGGLES beavited hard. "Good heavens!" he gasped. "I've been assaulted! Some brutal scoundrel has deliberately attacked me."

He put his hands to his face, and drew them away, shivering. He expected to see blood, but didn't. His fingertips ached and burned, and he noticed that they were swelling. Then, further recollection flitting back, he recalled that he had left the light going, and that the window was open. The window!

Vaguely, Mr. Muggles seemed to have an impression that the recent intruder had crept by means of the window. There was a pipe outside—and the ivy—The previous sounds were going.

Mr. Muggles leapt out of bed, and rushed across to the window in his pyjamas. In his excitement, he caught his head a fearful crack against the lower sash, which wasn't fully raised.

He saw a few more stars, and hung over the window—all like a wet sack, all the life taken out of him. And there was now an ugly bruise on his forehead—a sort of general addition in the other injuries.

It was dark outside—quite black.

At least, it seemed so to Muggles. But after a second or two he could distinguish the gravel of the triangle lawn. For the moon was just beginning to appear over the treetops, and was casting long, slanting rays across the grounds.

And in that moment Mr. Muggles remembered his wife.

Something was moving down there!

It was the figure of a junior boy—racing away from beneath Mr. Muggles' window, and making for the cover of the shrubbery. And the House-master instinctively recognized that speeding form.

Willy Handforth!

It was no mere guesswork. Mr. Muggles

knew Willy's figure already—he knew the active gait of the Third Form Skipper. And Mr. Muggles opened his mouth to give vent to a yell.

But just as suddenly he closed it.

The junior had escaped by now, anyhow, and it would be better, perhaps, to let him think that he had got off one free. Mr. Muggles got back into the room, and stood there swaying slightly.

He tried to think clearly.

Willy, of course, had climbed up the pipe, assisted by the ivy. He had found Mr. Muggles asleep, and had deliberately slashed him with the cane. It was the boy's idea of revenge, no doubt. Even Mr. Muggles was startled at the whole incident—he had not suspected that any boy could go to such lengths of vindictiveness.

But a certain satisfaction came to Mr. Muggles. He had seen the culprit—he could name him with accuracy. And this affair could only end in one possible way—prompt expulsion for the young wretch.

"Good gracious me!"

Mr. Muggles gave a start of dismay and horror as he suddenly realized that there was a change in the bed-room. The shaded light was quite sufficient to show him the destruction in all its stark horror.

The clothing on the floor, the tattered suitors, the shredded necktie, and a dozen other evidences of wanton ruin. Mr. Muggles went from article to article, looking like a freshly-boiled bottle. It was rather a wonder that steam didn't come forth.

"Wicked destruction—nothing more nor less than wicked destruction!" gasped Mr. Muggles, at last. "Good heavens! The young hoodlums! The awful young ruffian! Before attacking me he must have committed all the atrocities his evil mind could concoct!"

Mr. Muggles was an orderly man—neatly after nature. The sight of his bed-room, in its present condition, made him go all weak at the knees. He would rather have gazed upon a battlefield.

His face was smarting badly, so he took a look at himself in the mirror.

"Good heavens!" he repeated, aghast.

There was a livid swell right across his face, much more apparent on the right cheek. The blow had only just missed eyes, it seemed. The swell was angry, swelling growing worse and worse every moment.

"The boy deserves prison for this



Cautiously dipping the tooth-brush into the best polish, Marmaduke generously smeared the dressing-table linen with it. Suddenly Mr. Muggles moved in his sleep, and Marmaduke, with one terrific hop, clutched at the top of the wardrobe. (See page 20.)

enraged Mr. Muggles. "He shall have it, too—I'll prosecute, by gad! He shall be sent to a reformatory for this act of unexampled severity!"

Mr. Muggles was frightened.

The pain in his face had been considerable, but actual sight of his injury scared him badly. He had a horrible fear that he would never regain his normal appearance—and Mr. Muggles prided himself that his normal appearance was highly satisfactory. To go through life with a ridge across his right cheek was a terrible sentence.

"Help!" he howled abruptly.

It had occurred to him, for the first time, that it was about time he brought somebody on the scene. Perhaps Willy, in his fright, would run away from the school and vanish! It was high time to call for help.

And Mr. Muggles rushed to the door, flung it open, and proceeded to exercise his lungs to some advantage.

CHAPTER 34.

The Workings of Fate.

"**G**OT him!" chorled Willy triumphantly. "Get him at last!"

He had just wrestled the other side of the triangle, with Marmaduke in his arms—unconscious, happily, of those eyes which had watched him from the bed-cave window.

He found Chubby Heath waiting near the shrubbery.

"You've got him!" breathed Chubby tensely.

"Yes, the young bouncer!"

Willy paused, breathless. Marmaduke was nestling in his arms, and appeared to be highly pleased with himself. He was chattering with delight, and his hairy arms were wound round Willy's neck, and clasped affectionately at the back.

"My hat!" said Chubby, with relief. "First! I don't mind telling you, Willy, old son, I thought he was gone for good! How the dickens did you manage to drop on him?"

"Caught the little beggar coming down one of the pipes," replied Willy. "He dropped like a streak, and landed right in my arms. I believe he's been up to mischief, too—and I thought I heard a noise up to that lighted bed-room. But I didn't wait to make any inquiries."

"I should think not," said Chubby nervously.

"Well, you'd better keep back," said Willy. "If there's an alarm, there's no reason why we should both be collared. You scout like the wind into the dormy, and I'll follow as soon as I've put Marny to bed. And remember—be jolly careful."

Chubby hesitated.

"But, look here, I don't want to leave you—"

"Buzz off!" interrupted Willy. "Don't be a young chump!"

Chubby heaved off, only too thankful to have the opportunity of getting into bed before an alarm was raised. He silently prayed that Willy would get indoors safely. Willy was more like a shadow than a human being, and he stood every chance of success.

Chubby succeeded in reaching the Third-Form dormitory in safety. Everybody was asleep, and he got into his own bed in next to no time. Then, as he snuggled down, he became aware of strange sounds farther along the corridor; but they soon died down, and only a murmur of voices sounded.

In the meantime, Willy slipped to the shed at the back, entered, and secured Marmaduke in his cage. The little monkey was chattering as gaily as ever.

"Yes, you can jabber, you monstrous!" growled Willy. "Goodness knows what mischief you've been up to, my lad! Thank goodness I've got you back O.K.! And there's no harm done, either!"

In this Willy was sadly mistaken—as he was soon to discover, to his intense dismay. He gave Marmaduke some food, filled his water supply, and then hurried out.

But the Third-Form leader's luck had flown.

He got into the Ancient House all right, and negotiated the lower passages until he reached the lobby. And then, disastrously enough, he walked right into Mr. Beverley Stokes.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Stokes, staring at the dim figure sternly. "Is that you, Handforth minor?"

"Yes, please, sir."

"Do you realize that the hour is very late?"

"Yes, please, sir."

"You should have been asleep long ago," went on Mr. Stokes grimly. "What is the meaning of this escapade?"

"Yes, please, sir. I—I mean, nothing, sir," said Willy meekly.

"Let me tell you at once, young man, that your innocent methods will be of no avail on this occasion," said the Housemaster, extending on some more lights. "Oh, indeed! No collar—no tie—and only one slipper! You are in a disgraceful state, Handforth minor!"

"Yes, sir," said Willy tamely.

"What have you got to say?"

This, of course, was the rule. During the last few seconds Willy had been wondering what on earth he could say. The last thing on earth to explain was the truth. Under no circumstances could he reveal the fact that Marmaduke had escaped, for this would seal Marmaduke's fate on the spot.

And it was equally out of the question to tell a lie. Willy Handforth was full of mischief and full of subterfuges, but he was probably the most truthful boy in the Third Form. When he was in a bad scrape—and this was a frequent occurrence—he always told the plain, rugged truth. And in nine cases out of ten he got off lightly.

But this was one of the exceptions. He couldn't tell the whole truth, anyhow. Perhaps a portion of it would suffice.

"Well, Handforth, I am still waiting," said Mr. Stokes. "What are you doing out of your dormitory at this hour of the night, and in this dishevelled condition? Have you been playing some practical joke?"

"No, sir," interrupted Willy. "I've had a look at Rupert."

This was an inspiration. Mr. Stokes knew that Rupert had been ill, and Willy had certainly taken a look at the white rat before leaving the shed. Why say anything about the monkey?

"Indeed!" said Mr. Stokes. "Rupert?"

"Yes, please, sir."

"And is it necessary for you to break bounds after lights-out in order to attend to Rupert?" asked Mr. Stokes, keeping his stern expression with difficulty. "I'm afraid, old son, that it won't wash!"

"Oh, I say, sir," protested Willy, "old Rupert's been ill, you know, and I've been giving him special treatment. I just popped down and had a last look at him, as it were. I say, he's spert, sir!"

Mr. Stokes shook his head.

"No, Handforth, I can't overlook this gross offence," he replied. "You must write me three hundred lines, and count yourself lucky that I don't report the affair to the headmaster. Now be off!"

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Willy gratefully. "Good night, sir."

Willy buzzed upstairs like a streak, full of joy. A paltry three hundred lines was an abominably light punishment for such an offence as his. But Mr. Stokes, knowing Willy, felt that he had dealt out justice.

And Willy, sliding into bed, chuckled with contentment. He didn't know that Fate had been working overtime against him!

CHAPTER 27.

Mr. Muggles Lets It Rip.

MR. BEVERLEY STOKES, smiling to himself, went up to bed.

He believed in being severe when severity was needed, but he was convinced that he had only acted out justice in the case of Willy Handforth. The lag was attached to his pet, and Rupert had certainly been indisposed. Mr. Stokes was convinced that Willy's escapade had been innocent.

He reached the landing, and went past the dormitories to the other corridors, where the masters had their night quarters. He was about to enter his bed-room when he halted and listened.

Sounds of excited talk came to his ears—subdued, but nevertheless excited—and among the voices he recognised that of Mr. Muggles. The Housemaster frowned. There was something queer about this!

He walked to the end of the corridor, and looked round the angle.

Mr. Muggles was standing some distance away, talking animatedly with Fenton and Morson, of the Sixth. All were attired in pyjamas and dressing-gowns.

Mr. Stokes advanced.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked mildly.

"Is anything the matter?" repeated Mr. Muggles, leaping round. "Thank Heaven you have come, Mr. Stokes! I was about to send one of these boys to fetch you! There has been an appalling outrage!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Stokes curiously. "Dear me! Your face, Mr. Muggles—I'm afraid—"

"Yes, sir, my face!" shouted the poor master thickly. "I am glad you have seen! This, sir, is the handwork of Handforth minor! The young hoodlum deliberately assaulted me—"

"Come, come, Mr. Muggles!" interrupted the Housemaster. "Surely you are mistaken!"

"I am not mistaken!" roared Mr. Muggles excitedly.

"Steady on, sir," interrupted Fenton, with a quick look at Mr. Stokes. "Don't shout like that! You'll wake the whole floor! Perhaps it would be as well if you took my original advice——"

"Your advice, young man, is of no consequence!" snapped Mr. Muggles.

Fenton shrugged his shoulders.

"I told Mr. Muggles to go to the Head, sir," he explained. "Morrow and I have listened to what Mr. Muggles has said, but I'm hanged if I can understand it! I think there must have been a burglar in his room."

"There was no burglar!" drilled Mr. Muggles.

"My dear sir, please control yourself!"

"I will not control myself, Mr. Stokes!" raved the excited man. "And there was no burglar in my room—the culprit is Handforth, mine! I saw him! Do you understand? I distinctly saw him!"

"In your bed-room?" asked Mr. Stokes calmly.

"Yes, sir, in my bed-room!"

The Housemaster was grim. He remembered meeting Willy in the lobby, and Willy had been coming from the junior passages. Apparently there was a big discrepancy somewhere.

"In the darkness, Mr. Muggles, you must have been mistaken," said the Housemaster firmly. "You probably saw somebody else."

"My light was on, and I saw Handforth, mine!" interrupted Mr. Muggles angrily. "He assaulted me and went out of the window, sliding down the pipe. Good gracious me! I saw him running across the Triangle!"

Mr. Stokes looked suddenly grave. The discrepancy had vanished. The knowledge that Mr. Muggles' assailant had escaped by the window made all the difference. Mr. Stokes had caught Willy as he was creeping indoors after his escape!

"I really think, Mr. Muggles, that you had better come to the headmaster," said Mr. Stokes quietly. "No good can come of a discussion here. If you have really been attacked——"

"There is no 'if' about it, sir!" interrupted the Third-Form master. "Look at my face, sir! I was brutally slashed by Handforth, mine, in my sleep—or, at least, he thought I was asleep. I had no idea that he intended such a vicious means of

revenge. I saw him as distinctly as I am seeing you—just as distinctly! He was in my bedroom——"

Mr. Muggles paused, breathless. He had realised, too, that he was drawing on his imagination somewhat. He hadn't exactly seen Willy in the bed-room, but having made the statement in his excitement, he must now adhere to it.

"Dr. Stafford must hear of it at once," said Mr. Stokes firmly. "Fenton, will you be good enough to remain here until I return? Some of the junior boys may have been awakened, and we don't want any disturbances."

"Right you are, sir," said Fenton, nodding.

And Mr. Stokes, grasping Mr. Muggles firmly by the arm, led him off along the corridor to the headmaster's private quarters.

CHAPTER II.

Practical Positive.

DR. MALCOLM STAFFORD was, fortunately, in his study.

He had been doing some late writing—making notes on a book on archæology, which he was preparing. It was the Head's chief relaxation, and he was feeling highly satisfied with his evening's work.

And then Mr. Stokes and Mr. Muggles arrived.

"Dear me! Is something the matter?" asked the Head, adjusting his glasses, and regarding Mr. Muggles' dishevelled hair with surprise. "I trust, Mr. Muggles, that your bed-room is quite comfortable!"

"I have no complaints to make about my bed-room, sir," said Mr. Muggles. "Will you be good enough to examine my face?"

The Head started.

"Your face!" he repeated. "But, my dear sir——"

Mr. Muggles thrust his face forward, and the Head understood. There was no mistaking that ugly, fierce wound. And the bang which Mr. Muggles had given himself on the forehead was now a livid, bruised bump.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Dr. Stafford. "Has there been an accident?"

"No, sir; but there has been an appalling outrage!" panted Mr. Muggles both.

"Those—those injuries were inflicted by

junior boy! They were inflicted, in fact, by Handforth minor."

Dr. Stafford looked horrified.

"But, Mr. Muggles, really— This— this is dreadful!" he exclaimed. "I think you must be mistaken—"

"I don't wonder at that remark, sir—I don't wonder at all!" interrupted Mr. Muggles. "It seems incredible that any junior boy could get with such base boodigamoo. Unfortunately, it happens to be true. And I have positive evidence of the fact. I saw the young scoundrel with my own eyes!"

The Head pursed his lips.

"Sit down, Mr. Muggles," he said quietly. "You, too, please, Mr. Stokes. Let us discuss this affair calmly. I shall be obliged, Mr. Muggles, if you will tell us your story from the beginning."

Dr. Stafford's quiet voice calmed the Third-Form master, and he sat down. The other two were grave; apparently, a very serious thing had happened.

"I went to bed comparatively early," said Mr. Muggles, calming himself with an effort. "I fancy I must have dropped into a dose, with the light burning, and, as the night is mild, I left my window open. I cannot tell you the exact time when I awoke, but I did so with the feeling that I was no longer alone in the bedroom."

"You actually saw the intruder?" asked the Head.

"I lay in bed, giving so sign that I was awake," went on Mr. Muggles, warning to his work, and drawing liberally upon his imagination. "A figure had entered by the window, and was standing near the dressing-table. That figure I recognised as belonging to Handforth minor."

"How was he dressed?" asked Mr. Stokes keenly.

"Dressed!" repeated Mr. Muggles, with a testy wave of his hand. "What does that matter!"

"It may matter very much."

"Too—the boy was in his usual clothing, of course," said Mr. Muggles impatiently. "But he had no collar on, and, by his noiseless movements, I gathered he was wearing slippers."

Mr. Stokes looked more grave than ever. The story was beginning to fit in grimly. He did not know that Mr. Muggles had taken a long shot. He had certainly seen Willy Handforth in the Triangle, and he

had seen no gleam of white—and had concluded that Willy wore no collar—which, as it happened, was the truth.

"Well, sir, please continue," said the Head. "You say that Handforth minor was in your bed-room."

"He was, and he deliberately set about the task of ruining my clothes," continued Mr. Muggles. "He threw them about, he tore my shirt to shreds, my tie to ribbons, and did as much wanton destruction as possible. I watched all this while pretending to be asleep—thinking that I should be able to catch the young rascal red-handed."

"Amazing—truly amazing!" murmured the Head. "But, really, I cannot imagine Handforth minor acting in this outrageous manner— However, please continue, Mr. Muggles."

"The boy came near to my bed, but I still remained silent," went on Mr. Muggles. "It was my intention to rise up suddenly and grasp him. But he must have found my cane somewhere, and he used it before I could put my plan into execution."

"Your cane?"

"Yes," said Mr. Muggles, highly satisfied with the shaping of his story—which, to do him justice, he believed to be the truth.

"I heard a sudden swish and the next second the cane descended with appalling force across my face."

"Good heavens!"

"It was a deliberate, vicious attack upon an apparently sleeping man," continued Mr. Muggles tensely. "I leapt up, agonised, and then I was struck heavily upon the head with some hard object. You see the bruise, sir. It is a wonder I was not knocked senseless!"

Mr. Muggles felt a slight quail as he made this last statement—for he knew it to be a deliberate untruth. But his hatred of Willy was so great that his sense of proportion was warped.

Dr. Stafford and Mr. Stokes were literally startled. Mr. Muggles' story was clear and concise, and there seemed no possibility of a mistake.

CHAPTER 25. Investigations.

THAT Willy Handforth could have perpetrated this outrage was a painful shock to the headmaster, for he had always held a very high opinion of the volatile Third-Form leader.

"And how did the boy escape, Mr. Muggles?" he asked quietly.

"By the window," replied Mr. Muggles. "I was half-blinded, but I managed to see him scramble through. By the time I got to the window he had reached the ground, and was running across the Triangle. I saw him distinctly in the moonlight."

"And that is all?"

"Is it not sufficient?" demanded Mr. Muggles. "Of course, the boy will be expelled at once—that is certain——"

"It shall be for me to decide, Mr. Muggles," interrupted the Head curtly.

"But, really, you don't mean——"

"Reputation will certainly be the boy's reward if your story is completely proven," interjected the headmaster. "But I shall certainly not convict without evidence, Mr. Muggles——"

"But I saw the boy!" insisted the other.

"I am not doubting your story, sir, but there is a remote chance that you were mistaken in the identity of the culprit," said Dr. Stafford gently. "If, for example, Handforth minor can prove a certain alibi, it will be obvious that you saw quite another boy in your room. More than once I have nearly made a grave mistake of that kind, and I shall take no risks. This affair shall be thrashed out to the bottom."

Mr. Muggles rose impatiently to his feet.

"There is no question or doubt about the boy's identity," he exclaimed excitedly. "Remember, sir, that I have been assaulted! Indeed, I have a good mind to inform the police, and have the boy charged with assault! A reformatory is the only place for such as he!"

"Come, come, Mr. Muggles, control yourself," interrupted the Head sternly. "There is no need to talk about the police. Your injuries, after all, are merely superficial. The boy shall certainly be expelled, however. I suggest that we ask Mr. Nelson Lee to look into this matter."

"I hardly think it's necessary, sir," put in Mr. Stokes, smiling. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Lee is away in London, and I don't think he'll be back until to-morrow."

"Yes, yes, to be sure, I had forgotten," said the Head. "Well, it would be as well to have Handforth minor in here at once."

"Before doing so, I want you to come and look at my room, sir," said Mr. Muggles. "Then perhaps you will be able

to appreciate the full nature of this outrage. Be good enough to come with me, sir."

"An excellent suggestion," declared Mr. Stokes.

They went, and found everything quiet, except for Morrow and Ferris outside the door. Mr. Muggles went in first, and extended his hand with eloquent meaning.

"The room is exactly as I left it!" he exclaimed. "The bedside light, as you see, was quite sufficient. There was no possibility of my making any mistake in identification."

"Nevertheless, I think we will have some more light," said the Head. "Please turn the switch, Mr. Stokes."

The Housemaster did so, and the bedroom was flooded with fresh electric light.

The torn clothing, the hearse-drawn linen and wallpaper, and all the other tricks that Marmaduke had played, were clear evidence that somebody had been actively engaged upon mischief.

"Good heavens!" said the Head, aghast.

"This—is is appalling!"

"It is, indeed," agreed Mr. Stokes.

"I hope you realize, gentlemen, that I have not been exaggerating," said Mr. Muggles triumphantly. "All this the boy did before he attacked me. There can be no doubt that it was performed in a spirit of vindictive revenge. Several times by day I have punished the boy, and he evidently resented it. This is the result."

"It is quite incomprehensible," muttered the Head, in deep distress. "I could never have believed that Handforth minor would act in this insane manner. It is totally opposed to his character—foreign to his open nature. I am grieved—deeply grieved."

Mr. Stokes had bent down, and now held something in his hand. And his expression had become drawn. He had been trying to think of some possible way in which Willy could prove his innocence, but now the last hope had gone.

For he held one of Willy's slippers in his grasp.

CHAPTER 20.

On the Carpet.

"WHAT have you got there, Mr. Stokes?" asked the Head.

"A slipper, sir," said Mr. Stokes gravely.

"Ah!" shouted Mr. Muggles. "That is

undoubtedly one of the boy's slippers! Indeed, I recognise it! Is there any further proof necessary? Does not this slipper clearly indicate that Handforth minor was in this room?"

"I am afraid it does," admitted Mr. Stokes sadly. "This is unquestionably Handforth minor's slipper, and its presence here is conclusive. It is my duty, sir, to inform you of a little incident which occurred a few minutes before I learned of Mr. Muggles' plight," he added, turning to Dr. Stafford.

"An incident?" repeated the Head.

"I was passing through the lobby, and I happened in some face to face with Handforth minor," said Mr. Stokes. "He was breaking bounds, of course, and he was coming in the direction of the junior quarters."

"There you are!" shouted Mr. Muggles victoriously. "What did I say? Thank you, Mr. Stokes for corroborating my story! Thank you, indeed! It is a great relief."

The Head shook his head.

"It is all very terrible," he said, disinterestedly.

"Handforth minor admitted that he had been breaking bounds, but gave me to understand that he had been outside to attend to his white rat—which, it seems, has been ill," continued Mr. Stokes.

"It was an excuse—a paltry excuse!" declared Mr. Muggles.

"So it seems," agreed Mr. Stokes. "This boy was collarless, and I particularly noticed that one of his slippers was missing. Its discovery in this room is, I fear, only too eloquent."

"I knew it!" muttered Mr. Muggles. "I knew there could be no mistake. It was fortunate that you happened to meet the young scoundrel, sir. What do you intend doing now? Would it not be advisable to have Handforth minor brought here at once, and confronted?"

"Yes, it shall be done!" said Dr. Stafford. "He can do nothing but confess—and then he will be placed in the punishment-room, and will leave in the morning. I am immensely shocked. Never have I been so deluded in a boy's character!"

"I will fetch Handforth minor," said Mr. Stokes quickly.

He went out, leaving the headmaster (along with Mr. Muggles—who, now the tension was over, sat down wearily on the

edge of the bed. He was beginning to feel the strain.

Mr. Beverley Stokes entered the Third-Form dormitory and walked quietly to Willy Handforth's bed. That cheerful youth had just dozed off, feeling happy and content that all was serene. He felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Hallo! That you, Chubby?" he mumbled. "Go to sleep, father! I don't want to talk any more to-night."

"It is I, Handforth minor," said Mr. Stokes quietly.

Willy sat up with a jerk, and Chubby Heath, in the next bed, also roused himself. All the other fags were asleep. Willy and Chubby had been chatting until about five minutes ago.

"Handforth minor, dress yourself and come with me," said Mr. Stokes grimly.

"Eh? What for, sir?"

"Never mind what for—do as I bid," commanded Mr. Stokes. "I will wait for you at the door."

He walked away, and Willy felt his heart leap.

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"There you are—I knew it!" hissed Chubby. "I heard old Muggles' voice when I came up—and I know your giddy monkey must have been up to mischief."

"Shut up!" warned Willy tensely.

"But look here—"

"Don't breathe a word about Marney!" exclaimed Willy. "Not a word—understand! If the truth comes out, I shall lose him!"

"All right, but you're mad," said Chubby gruffly. "Anyhow, I'm going to tell Mr. Stokes that I was with you! I say, sir! Shall I get up, too?"

"No, Heath, you will not," called Mr. Stokes, from the door.

"But, please, sir, I broke boards with Handforth minor," confessed Chubby. "We both went out together."

"In that case, Heath, you'd better dress!"

"Yes, sir," said Chubby promptly.

"Ass—idiot—imbecile!" hissed Willy, without any great show of gratitude. "There's no need for two of us to be swiped! Oh, you hopeless cockoon! You've let yourself in for a swishing now!"

"I don't care," said Chubby defiantly. "I'm not going to let you take all the blame!"

"Remember, not a word about Marney!"

"All right!"

"Promise?"

"Oh, look here—"

"No talking, boys—dress yourselves!" commanded Mr. Stokes curtly.

Both Willy and Chubby hurried. Willy believed that Chubby had given his solemn word that he wouldn't speak about Marmaduke, and Chubby was under that impression, too.

Two minutes later the lads joined Mr. Stokes at the door, and they were forthwith ushered to Mr. Muggles' bed-room for the ordeal.

CHAPTER 21.

As Black as Night.

DR. STAFFORD raised his eyebrows. "Two of them?" he said, in surprise. "But, Mr. Stokes, I wasn't aware that Mr. Muggles had complained against two boys."

"Only Handforth minor, sir," said Mr. Muggles. "The other boy had nothing whatever to do with the affair."

"What affair, sir?" asked Willy, looking

round. "But Mr. Muggles is quite right about Heath. I dragged him out of bed, and only took him with me for company."

"That will do, Handforth minor," interrupted the Head. "We will go into that later. You are the boy we want. Heath, stand over on that side of the room until you are questioned. I do not think you are guilty in this regrettable business."

"Thank you, sir," said Chubby.

He was greatly alarmed, and, for that matter, so was Willy. But whilst Chubby was alarmed for his leader, Willy was alarmed at the state of Mr. Muggles' bed-room. In a flash he realised that he was gazing upon some of Marmaduke's handiwork. So this was where the monkey had been a great deal of his time!

"Handforth minor, what have you got to say about this room?" asked Dr. Stafford. Willy looked round.

"Nothing, sir," he replied.

"Did you cause all this wanton destruction?"

"No, sir."

"The boy is lying!" shouted Mr. Muggles furiously. "He came into this room, and—"

"I'm not lying, sir," interrupted Willy, with a resolute glare. "If I've done anything wrong, I'll admit it: I'm no giddy hero, but when I'm collared I own up. That's true, isn't it, Mr. Stokes?"

"I must admit that I have always found you to be truthful, Handforth minor," said Mr. Stokes. "In this case, however, the evidence is so conclusive that we are compelled to think otherwise. Come, Willy, confess at once. It will be far the better way."

Willy remained silent. He could explain about Marmaduke, of course, but he didn't. Firstly, he didn't want Marmaduke to be taken away from him, and, secondly, he had a firm suspicion that his story wouldn't wash. Would the Head believe that his monkey had caused all this damage?

"We are waiting for you to speak," put in Mr. Muggles harshly. "It is no good, Handforth minor—the evidence is deadly! Not only did I see you in this room with my own eyes, but you were foolish enough to leave one of your slippers here."

Willy started. Those who were watching him took it to be a start of guilt. But Willy suddenly realised what Marmaduke had done with his slippers. And he was

surprised, moreover, to hear Mr. Muggles' extraordinary statement.

"You saw me here, sir?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes—in this room!" snapped Mr. Muggles. "Don't dare to deny it! I saw you tearing up my clothing, and damaging other property! I saw you getting out of the window, and I saw you running across the Triangle.—Good heavens, boy, you don't think you can escape this net?"

Willy Handforth took a deep breath. He was staggered, although he didn't show it. He had never believed Mr. Muggles to be capable of such vindictive falsehood. Obviously, this man was lying, for he couldn't possibly believe that he had seen Willy in the room. But what could Willy say after his own Farm-master had made such a conclusive statement? Who would believe him—a mere lad—with all the other evidence piled up?

In common fairness to Mr. Muggles, it must be stated that he fully believed Willy to be the culprit. He had no inkling of a monkey, and had firmly made up his mind that Willy was guilty. His greatest crime was exaggeration, and taking things for granted without adequate reason.

"Well, Handforth minor?" asked the Head. "What have you got to say?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Willy quietly.

He was thankful now that he had kept quiet about Marmaduke. After Mr. Muggles' direct evidence, the monkey story would be discredited on the instant. He could tell it, of course, but Mr. Muggles would promptly refute it. And Mr. Muggles' word would carry the most weight. He, according to his own story, had seen Willy actually in the room, and for his own sake he couldn't depart from that account now.

"You have heard what Mr. Muggles has told us," continued the Head. "Have you nothing to say at all?"

"Mr. Muggles was mistaken, sir."

"You deny being in this room?"

"Yes, sir."

"The boy is lying all the time!" shouted Mr. Muggles angrily.

"One moment, sir—one moment!" interrupted the Head. "Handforth minor, bear in mind the fact that your slipper was in this room—a piece of deadly evidence alone. Can you account for its presence here?"

Willy made no reply for a full minute.

"Well?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't say anything," said Willy quietly.

"Think carefully."

"I can only add, sir, that I didn't leave the slipper here," went on Willy. "I didn't do this damage, and I didn't touch Mr. Muggles. That's the plain truth, sir."

The Head looked at Mr. Stokes, and they were both grins.

CHAPTER 12.

Chubby Heath's Alarm.

WILLY'S attitude was condemning in itself.

He gave no explanation, but simply denied the charge. In the case of a guilty person, this was to be expected. So it was by no means surprising that Dr. Stafford should frown heavily.

"My boy, you are making your position worse and worse," he declared angrily. "Mr. Muggles has told us the full story, and you can give no explanation. Your only attitude, indeed, is one of guilt. You deny the charge, but offer no alternative explanation."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Willy. "but I didn't do it."

"Under the circumstances, Handforth minor, I can only conclude that you are guilty," said the Head. "You will be taken to the punishment-room, and in the morning you will leave the school for ever. Expulsion is the only possible punishment that I can inflict."

Willy staggered.

"Sacked!" he muttered hoarsely. "Oh, but—but—"

"He's innocent, sir!" shouted Chubby Heath, rushing forward. "He didn't do this! I can prove he didn't!"

"Are you going to believe the word of this boy, sir?" demanded Mr. Muggles harshly. "He will naturally lie to save his friend."

"Dry up, Chubby, you can't do anything!" muttered Willy.

He gave him a warning look which told its own story, although Chubby couldn't quite understand it. If Willy was sacked, what did it matter about the monkey? Surely Willy would be willing to sacrifice Marmaduke for the sake of remaining at the school? Chubby didn't realize that Willy had convinced himself that the man-

her story would fail—that it would only strike the Head as being a sheer concoction. By telling it, more harm than good would be done.

"Heath, you can go back to your dormitory," said the Head curtly.

"But, please, sir—"

"I am satisfied that your own part in this affair was negligible," went on the headmaster, "but I shall question you further to-morrow, and inflict the punishment that you deserve. For the present, you must go back to bed."

Chubby Heath went, rather dazed.

And, the investigation over and the case proved up to the hilt, things moved swiftly. Willy was taken off to the punishment-room, and Mr. Muggles was left to his own devices. Dr. Stafford and Mr. Stokes went down to the former's study, and discussed the affair.

It was all over.

Willy Handforth's guilt was proven, and expulsion was the only possible sentence. The Head rather thought that he ought to flog the boy in addition, but Willy's good record stood him in excellent stead, and he was to be allowed to leave the school without suffering further.

Mr. Muggles was triumphant. And, left alone in his bed-room, he began to feel one or two uneasy qualms. He was a detestable man, but by no means wicked. He would not deliberately lie in order to get a boy into trouble.

But, his temper cooled down, he realised that he had gone, perhaps, a little too far. After all, he hadn't actually seen Willy in the room. Mr. Muggles suffered a little spasm of conscience.

But, even so, what did it matter? Willy had left his slobber in the room, and Mr. Stokes had met Willy coming back. There was no shadow of doubt about the affair. Willy was guilty. Mr. Muggles was sincerely convinced of this—so the slight discrepancy in his own story did not seem to matter.

But if the excitement had died down elsewhere, it was just working up to fever pitch in the Third-Form dormitory. Chubby Heath, nearly sick with alarm and fear, had awakened everybody.

And now all the lags were excitedly discussing the situation in whispers.

"Old Willy slobbered!" said Tommy Hobbs.

"It can't be possible!"

"You're speaking us, Chubby!" said Joey Lemon.

"Of course he is!" chimed in Owen minor.

"But I tell you it's true!" blazed Chubby. "Don't you believe me, you young lathered? It's all because of old Muggles—and Marmaduke! That giddy monkey has got Willy the sack!"

"But how?" asked Lemon desperately.

In his own peculiar way, Chubby repeated all he had heard.

"Don't you see, the Head thinks Willy did all that—and it was that blessed monkey all the time!" he ended up. "I don't suppose Muggles knows anything about the monkey, but that makes no difference. Willy's sacked! He'll be pushed off in the morning!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"But why didn't you tell the Head about Marmaduke?" asked Owen minor fiercely. "You silly lathered! You were on the spot, and yet you didn't say anything! It's all your fault—"

"Willy made me promise not to speak!" broke in Chubby hotly. "He must be mad, or something."

"You oughtn't to have taken any notice," declared Lemon. "You've got plenty of reason for breaking your word! It wouldn't be a crime in a case like this! Look here, go straight to the Head, tell him all about Marmaduke."

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll get up a deputation," said Lemon excitedly. "Three or four of us will go. We can't let Willy be sacked like this—it would be a horrible thing! And the sooner we act, the better!"

Without doubt the Third meant business!

CHAPTER 21.

Prompt Measures.

"THAT'S the idea—a deputation!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go on, Chubby—you've got to be the leader!"

Chubby Heath hesitated.

"But I promised Willy I wouldn't speak about the monkey—and I can't break my word!" he growled. "It's no good you chaps egging me on. I'm not going to play a dirty trick like that. When I give my word, I mean it!"

"Goody-goody!"

Swivel!

One of the fags went down, howling, and Chubby glared round.

"Anybody else going to call me goody-goody?" he demanded fiercely. "Just because I won't break my promise you sneer at me! You're a meanly lot, if you like! Willy's a fathead, I'll admit, but he's got himself into the mess, and we're dished! All through his silly monkey, too."

And while this was going on, Willy was pondering deeply in the punishment-room. Sleep was out of the question. He sat there, on the edge of the bed, thinking everything over.

He was startled by the suddenness of the tragedy.

Everything had conspired against him—fate had placed him in a queer predicament, and it seemed to him that there was no possible escape. Again he thought about telling the story of Marmaduke, but again he rejected it. After all this time, it would sound like a sheer invention.

The Head might credit that Marmaduke had torn Mr. Muggles' shirt to pieces and played about with the boot polish, but he would never believe that a mean monkey had slashed the Form-master across the face with a cane. Even Willy was astonished.

"I never thought old Marney had so much sense!" he murmured. "Of course, he needs tanning for swiping anybody on the face, but I didn't even know he could use a cane. That monkey's a glibby marvel!"

Willy shook his head. No, the Head would never believe it. And what would Ted say in the morning, when he heard the news? This stirred another train of thought in Willy's mind.

How would his brother take the disgrace! And what would his father and mother say? There was a grim prospect in front of the unfortunate Third-Former. To be sent home from school in disgrace is the worst thing that can happen to any boy.

But Willy was a philosophic youngster, and he was consoled by the thought that he was innocent. That, of course, made all the difference. Being innocent gave him plenty of courage to face the coming ordeal.

His champions were still thrashing the matter out in the Third-Form dormitory, and it seemed likely that a settlement would be arrived at. For Chubby Heath had suddenly remembered something.

"I say!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Dry

up! All you chaps, stop this giddy row! I want to think!"

"Got an idea?" asked Lamm eagerly.

"No, it's something else," muttered Chubby, frowning. "Willy asked me to promise not to speak about the monkey. I remember it now—old Stokes was at the door, waiting for us to dress. And I don't think I promised, now I come to recollect it."

"Are you sure?"

"Pretty nearly," said Chubby excitedly. "Yes, by jingo! Old Stokes interrupted, and Willy didn't press me again. Anyhow, I'll chance it—I'll go to the Head, and tell him all about Marmaduke. And if I have broken my promise, I don't suppose Willy will mind much. Anyhow, he'd be willing enough to release me."

Willy had insisted upon a high code of honour in the Third, and when a fellow gave his word, that word had to be kept—or Willy wanted to know the reason why. Without him, the fags would be utterly leaderless. Chubby Heath or Owen minor would make a pretence, perhaps, but without Willy the Form would be at a loose end.

"There's no need for a crowd of us to go," went on Chubby. "I think it'll be a lot better if I buzz down alone. I was with Willy, remember, and you chaps were asleep. You'd only be in the way."

"All right—buzz off!" said Owen minor briskly.

The other fags, in fact, were only too pleased to be out of it. The main thing was for Chubby to go to the headmaster and tell him the whole truth. The fags were convinced that an account of Marmaduke's adventures would make all the difference, and after Chubby had gone, they confidently waited for him to come back—with Willy. For Willy would undoubtedly be released.

Chubby was as bold as brass as he left the Third-Form dormitory. He felt certain that the Head would be in his study, and he made his way in that direction, his boldness rising out of his fingertips as he drew nearer and nearer. Somehow, it seemed a different thing altogether now that he was approaching the Head. But it had to be done—it was no good fudging it. If there was any chance of saving Willy, that chance had to be taken.

And although Chubby's hand trembled a bit, he knocked firmly on the door of Dr. Stafford's study.

CHAPTER 34.

New Evidence.

"COME in!" Chubby Heath entered the Head's sanctum, and he felt horribly nervous as he advanced into the room. Dr. Stafford and Mr. Stokes were over by the fireplace, and they both looked at the lag with inquiring eyes. Chubby felt that he was shivering.

"Pup—please, sir," he began nervously.

"Well, Heath," interrupted the Head, as Chubby paused, "why have you come down here? Didn't I tell you to go back to bed?"

"Please, sir, I can tell you the truth about that affair in Mr. Muggles' room," blurted out Chubby desperately. "Willy didn't do it at all. I can prove he didn't, sir."

"Indeed!" said the Head, glancing at Mr. Stokes. "Come, Heath, speak up! If you can throw any fresh light upon this affair I shall be very pleased. But be careful. Remember that Mr. Muggles himself saw Handforth minor in his bed-room, and the boy's slipper was there, also. If you have come here with some concocted story—hoping to whitewash your friend—you had far better leave it unsaid."

Mr. Stokes nodded. The same thought had occurred to him. It seemed only too likely that Chubby had told the Third about Willy's sentence, and the Third had urged him to come down, hoping that he might be able to throw dust into the Head's eyes. In any case, they would soon see.

"Please, sir, the story isn't a concoction at all," said Chubby. "Willy didn't go into Mr. Muggles' bed-room. It was Marmaduke."

"Marmaduke!"

"Willy's pet monkey, sir," said Chubby eagerly. "Marmaduke climbed up, and got into the bed-room, and did all that damage."

"What extraordinary story is this!" demanded the Head eagerly. "Are you seriously asking me to believe, Heath, that a monkey entered Mr. Muggles' bed-room, and committed the outrage?"

"Yes, sir."

"Handforth minor certainly owns a monkey," admitted Mr. Stokes. "But it is only a small creature, and I can hardly credit that—"

"It's true, sir!" urged Chubby. "I've come here to tell you everything! Mr. Muggles ordered Willy to take his pet out

of the study earlier in the evening, and Marmaduke escaped."

"Escaped?"

"Yes, sir; he got out of the window," said Chubby. "We searched for him, and couldn't find him. And after lights out, Willy got up—and I got up, too. We went for a final search."

"Oh!" said Mr. Stokes slowly.

The story was beginning to take shape, but Mr. Stokes did not conceal from himself the fact that it still savoured of an invented yarn, especially concocted to save Willy.

"Go on, Heath," said the Head grimly.

"We spotted Marmaduke in the Triangle, sir, and Willy rushed after him," said Chubby. "Willy dropped one of his slippers, and later on we couldn't find it. The monkey must have grabbed it, and then got up into Mr. Muggles' bed-room."

"But Mr. Muggles saw Handforth minor in the room itself!"

"He didn't, sir—he didn't!" insisted Chubby passionately. "Mr. Muggles was telling lies—"

"Heath!" thundered the Head.

Heath choked and kept silent.

"Mr. Muggles saw Handforth minor in his room, and he saw him running across the Triangle after he had awaked," continued the Head. "I am afraid the story of yours is very thin."

"He saw him in the Triangle, sir," admitted Chubby Heath. "Willy caught the monkey as he came down the pipe, and then rushed across the Triangle to where I was standing. I saw it all, sir."

"If you were with Handforth minor, how is it that he came in alone?" put in Mr. Stokes.

"I came in first, sir—about five minutes before Willy."

There was a silence. The Head was frankly sceptical. He gave no credence to this extraordinary yarn. It certainly did sound tall in the extreme. Mr. Stokes on the other hand, was uneasy. He had half an idea that there was a great deal of truth in it. But how could it be proved? Nothing, at all events, could be done without the aid of Mr. Muggles. If Mr. Muggles admitted seeing the monkey, then all would be clear. But nothing could get over the fact that Mr. Muggles had definitely seen Willy in the bed-room.

"I hardly think I am doing right, Mr. Stokes, but will you ask Mr. Muggles to come down here?" said the Head quietly.

"It is only fair that he should hear this boy's story, and substantiate his own. We cannot have any possible misunderstanding."

The Headmaster went off, and soon returned with Mr. Muggles, who was looking somewhat startled. He had obviously been applying ointment to his brows, and he was looking somewhat haggard, too.

"Heath, repeat your story," said the Head briefly.

Chubby Heath did so, and this time he told it with more emphasis. He had had time to collect his thoughts, and was feeling calmer. When he had finished, there was another silence.

"A monkey?" repeated Mr. Muggles. "Absurd!"

He was looking startled; he had gone a shade paler. But neither Mr. Stokes nor the Head noted this as significant. It was only natural that the Third-Form master should be intensely worried.

"You have heard what Heath has to say," exclaimed the Head. "Frankly, I cannot credit it. He declares that all the damage was done by a monkey, and that Handforth minor was never in your bedroom at all, Mr. Muggles. I must admit that the story fits in perfectly, but it doesn't seem to strike a new note. What is your comment, Mr. Muggles?"

Mr. Muggles drew a deep breath. "The story is a fabrication from start to finish," he declared stoutly. "There is not a word of truth in it! Is it not enough, sir, that I saw Handforth minor with my own eyes?"

CHAPTER 32

Mr. Muggles' Quandary.

MR. MUGGLES was in an exceedingly delicate position, and he knew it. It was only with difficulty that he maintained an air of confidence.

But one fact stood out deadlily.

The outrage had been performed by Marmaduke, the monkey! There was no shadow of doubt, no possibility of any other explanation. For the first time, Mr. Muggles knew the truth, and it came as a staggering shock to him.

But he was in a dreadful quandary.

Up till this minute he had firmly believed Willy to be the culprit. He had taken it absolutely for granted. As there had been

no mention of the monkey, he had not even recalled the creature to his mind.

But as he had stood there, listening to Chubby's story, a vague suspicion had entered his mind, suddenly to burst out into positive certainty. This moment came when he remembered the black shape which had slid over the window-sill.

Forgotten until now, the incident came flooding back. In possession of the truth, Mr. Muggles cast his mind back, and remembered that little black shape. Of course, it was Marmaduke! He knew it now, as well as he knew that he was alive. Everything had been done by the monkey! Chubby Heath's story was true in every detail.

But how could Mr. Muggles admit it?

How could he stand there, on his very first evening at St. Frank's, and confess to the headmaster that he had allowed himself to descend to pure invention?

He had been asleep until that slash had awakened him, and he had only assumed that Willy Handforth had done all the damage in his bed-room.

But he had definitely stated—out once, but several times—that he had seen Willy Handforth in the bed-room with his own eyes! For the sake of his own reputation, he could do nothing but stick to that story. To depart from it in any detail would be to seal his own doom.

Mr. Muggles was not a rascal; he hated the position he was in. But his own safety came before Willy's. If there was to be any sacrifice, it was to be the boy's. He couldn't possibly stand here and convict himself of being a liar!

And so, with all the boldness that he could muster, he declared that Chubby's story was a fabrication. If he was to be secure, it was his only course. And Willy's own fate was sealed!

Having made the decision, Mr. Muggles was more than ever committed to his course. As usual in such cases as this, the farther he went the deeper he got. To turn back was now a matter of impossibility. It alarmed him intensely, but there was nothing else to be done.

Dr. Stafford shrugged his shoulders rather wearily.

"Heath, why did you come here with this cock-and-ball story?" he asked. "I can only inflict a severe punishment upon you—"

"But it's the truth, sir!" shouted Chubby desperately.

"Silence!"

"Mr. Muggles is mistaken!" insisted Chubby, his voice shrill and his face flushed with excitement. "Why, I was outside all the time! I was with Willy from start to finish, and I know for a fact that he didn't get into the bed-room! I tell you Mr. Muggles is mistaken, sir!"

"Be lenient with the boy, sir," said Mr. Muggles huskily. "No doubt he is acting from the best of motives, but there can be no two ways in this affair. You know the story, so what need is there for me to make any further comment?"

"None," said the Head. "Heath, you must go back to bed, and in the morning I shall name your punishment. I am convinced that you are not entirely to blame. Knowing your friend to be in trouble, and knowing that his monkey could possibly be blamed for this outrage, you sought to use that animal as a shield. But it is wrong of you—"

"It's the truth, sir!" said Chubby, nearly bursting.

"You are only making things worse by going on like that," said the Head sternly. "Do you realise, my boy, that what you say is tantamount to accusing Mr. Muggles of falsehood? Go back to your bed before you make this thing worse—at once, sir!"

Chubby Heath went out in a kind of daze, bewildered that there could be such injustice. He had told his story for nothing, and Willy was in the same predicament as ever.

Mr. Stokes felt his own doubts subsiding. Mr. Muggles was very firm, and very concise. The Housemaster could not bring himself to believe that Mr. Muggles was standing there and deliberately telling falsehoods. And so the unfortunate Willy was left in the punishment-room, sentenced to expulsion.

What Mr. Muggles felt like as he went back to bed is difficult to say.

It was either Willy or himself.
So Willy was the one to go!

CHAPTER 16.

Nearly a Rebellion.

CHUBBY HEATH found himself in the Third-Farm dormitory almost before he knew it. He hardly remembered walking there. As soon

as he got inside he was set upon by Christopher Pike.

"Well?"

"What's the news?"

"Everything all serene now!"

"Where's Willy?"

Chubby only heard the last question.

"Willy?" he repeated. "In the punishment-room."

"But isn't he cleared?" demanded Juley Lemon. "Didn't you tell the Head about Marmaduke?"

"It's no good—they wouldn't swallow it," said Chubby dully. "I've done Willy no good, and I shall probably get swished in the morning. The Head thought I was lying. He wouldn't believe a word about Marmaduke, and sent me back to bed."

"Great pop!"

"My, only aunt!"

"He's in the soup now, and no giddy error!"

The lads were excited, and somewhat dismayed. They had relied upon Chubby Heath clearing their leader, and now that all hope was gone, they gave full expression to their feeling. Nobody thought of sleep. In a situation of this kind, even discussion was the only thing.

Chubby Heath slowly recovered himself.

"And Muggles!" he said fiercely. "Muggles, the beast, the rotter—the awful cad! It's his fault—standing there and telling all these lies! He's done it on purpose—just to get Willy into trouble. He's not a master at all—he's a giddy crook!"

"What do you mean?"

"What did old Muggles do?"

"Haven't I told you?" said Chubby, glaring round. "He told the Head that he saw Willy in the bed-room. So what was the good of my speaking about the monkey? Old Muggles stuck to his tale, and the Head was forced to believe him. The Head can't call a master a liar, even though he does come from Redcliffe!"

"Redcliffe must be a hole!" said Tommy Hobbs disgustedly.

"Rather!"

"Bother Redcliffe!" snapped Chubby. "We've got enough trouble here, haven't we? If I'd thought about it at first, I wouldn't have gone down at all. Foxes only made things worse. I expect that's why Willy didn't want to say anything about his monkey. My hat, Willy's got some sense!"

"More than any here!" said Tommy Hobbs.

"All right—I know it!" snapped Chubby. "I'm a fasthead!"

"Nothing like being frank!"

"If you want a thick ear, Dicky Jones, you'd better say that again!" roared Chubby. "I ought to have thought this thing out completely. It's quite likely that old Muggles did think that Willy attacked him, but now that he knows about the monkey he's probably changed his opinion. But he can't admit it; he can't tell the Head he's a liar."

"Why not?"

"Oh, don't be silly!" growled Chubby. "Old Muggles has got himself in a thick about. He cares more for his own skin than he does for Willy's, doesn't he? He's in a cleft stick now—he's committed himself."

"I wish somebody would commit him to penal servitude!" said Lemon.

"Or boil him in oil!" put in Hobbs.

"Or fry his face!" suggested Dicky Jones.

Chubby Heath glared round.

"I've always known you chaps to be brainless, but you needn't show it off," he said sourly. "Here we are, in a crisis like this, and all you can do is to jabber a lot of piffle! What are we going to do about Willy? How are we going to get him out of this hole?"

"Why not reason him, and defy the Head?" asked Lemon sarcastically.

The lads were averse at this suggestion.

"The Fourth have done that sort of thing once or twice, but we shouldn't stand a giddy chance," said Chubby doubtfully. "There ain't so many of us, for one thing, and for some uncouthly reason the Head looks on us as a crowd of infants. Blowed if I know why he should! We're not much younger than those Fourth Form fat-heads!"

"We're got a lot more sense, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course, there's no talking," went on Chubby thoughtfully. "It all depends upon the morning. Look here, you chaps, if I decide on a bold course, will you back me up?"

"Yes, rather!"

"You'll all be solid—you won't back down at the last minute?"

"No fear!"

"Well, I've got an idea, but I'm not go-

ing to say anything about it now," went on Chubby deliberately. "It's only a suggestion, and I want to think it over. Get back in bed and leave me in peace. I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

"Yes, but—"

"We're not going to sit still under this injustice," said Chubby grimly. "The Head may have acted in good faith, but we know that poor old Willy's innocent. We know that he's being sacked for something he didn't do. And we're going to show the Head that the Third won't stand it!"

"Hurrah!"

"And shut up that noise!" exclaimed Chubby, who had taken command of the Third surprisingly well under the stress of circumstances. "Now, then—back to bed! Don't kick up any more shindy, or we shall all get the sack!"

And for well over an hour Chubby Heath lay in bed thinking deeply, his eyes gleaming with a fixed resolve. The infusion of Willy's sentence had hurt him in the quick, and he had made up his mind that the Third would have a good lot to say before the matter was completely ended!

CHAPTER II.

Edward Oswald Hears the News.

NIPPER entered the dormitory of the Ancient House with a grave, troubled expression. The first ringing-bell had gone, but nobody had stirred. There would be plenty of activity as soon as the second bell clanged out, but the first bell was always treated with contempt.

Nipper had been out on the playing-fields with the first eleven, putting in some practice under the celebrated William Napoleon Browne, and, apparently, Nipper had heard some grave news on the way in.

He went over to Handforth's bed and shook Edward Oswald by the shoulder.

"Wake up, old man!" he said quietly.

"Get away!" growled Handforth. "If you touch me again, Walter Church, I'll bill you under the—"

"It's me, old son," said Nipper. "I've got some bad news."

"Eh? Bad news?" Handforth sat up with a jerk, and stared at Nipper. "What's up? I say, you're looking a bit—"

"Your minor's sacked!" said Nipper. "I'm no good at breaking things gently, old man—"

"Sacked!" said Handforth dazedly. "My minor?"

"Yes."

"What piffing rot!" roared Handforth.

"Look here, you fathead, you can't spoof me like this!"

"Honest injun!" insisted Nipper quietly.

His very tone was enough.

"My minor sacked!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "But what for? What's he done? When did it happen? I met him last night, and everything was all right then."

"I don't know all the details, but it seems that he got into Mr. Muggles' room after lights-out and attacked him," replied Nipper. "I can't believe it, you know. There must be some mistake, but I understand the evidence is conclusive. He's been expelled."

Handforth leapt out of bed.

"He hasn't gone, has he?" he asked huskily.

"No, he's in the punishment-room."

Handforth had never dressed so quickly in all his life. He flung his clothes on at lightning speed, and dashed out. In the corridor he ran against Chubby Heath and Owen minor. Miraculously enough, those two fags were out and dressed before the second rising-bell.

"Oh, I say, Handforth," said Chubby, "have you heard—? Yes, I can see you have. I say, it's all wrong—it's all a fake. Willy didn't do it at all!"

"That's nothing new!" snorted Handforth. "I knew it. Willy's a frightful young set, but he doesn't go about assaulting people after lights-out. The Head must be dotty!"

Chubby quickly related the facts, and Handforth listened, with grim expression and glittering eyes.

"Of course, old Muggles has been telling whoppers!" he said. "It was that giddy monkey! All right, kids—leave this to me! I'll settle it! I'm going straight to the Head, and within five minutes Willy will be free."

"Better go easy," advised Chubby. "You'll only get yourself into trouble. You leave it to the Third."

"Huh! Might as well leave it to a lot of beetles!" roared Handforth. "A fat lot of good you young fags can do. He's my minor, and I've got to look after him. I'll attend to this!"

He strode away, hurried to the headmaster's study, hammered on it, and walked in. Dr. Stafford had just got down, and he was opening his letters. He looked up, startled, as Handforth burst in. His frown vanished, however, as he recognized the junior.

"Has my minor been sacked, sir?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"Yes, Handforth, he has," said the Head. "If you have come here to make a scene, I advise you to go away. I naturally sympathize with you, but you must not imagine—"

"There's a mistake, sir!" interrupted Handforth. "My minor didn't knock Mr. Muggles about. He wouldn't do that sort of thing! I want you to take him out of the punishment-room at once—"

"Your minor is leaving the school immediately after breakfast," interrupted the Head coldly. "Control yourself, Handforth. I have already written to your father, explaining the full details—"

"He won't go, sir—I won't let him go!" bellowed Handforth excitedly. "Look here, you can't do it! It's Mr. Muggles' fault; he's been telling lies—"

"Handforth!" thundered Dr. Stafford.

"Mr. Muggles has got his knife into Willy, and he's done this on purpose," booted Handforth. "You can't spoof me, sir!"

"One more word, Handforth, and I will flag you!"

"It was Mr. Muggles' fault—"

"Leave this room, sir!" commanded the Head sternly. "No, not another word! Under the circumstances, I will overlook your unbearable impertinence, but go before I change my mind!"

"But, look here, sir—"

"Go!" interrupted the Head, pointing to the door.

And Edward Oswald Handforth went—tamed. His effort to save his minor had been brief, and nobody could claim that it had been an unequalled success. Handforth's famous bull-headed methods paid sometimes, but not always.

CHAPTER 32.
A Last Effort.

WILLY awoke to the sound of the ringing-bell, as usual.

But he was in strange quarters. One look round brought everything back to his mind. He was in the punishment-room, and he had dropped off to sleep fully dressed, and was lying on the outside of the bed.

He got up, yawning, and walked over to the window.

It was a glorious spring morning, with the sun flooding the picturesque Triangle, and the vivid green playing-fields. The old chestnut-trees were gently swaying in the soft breeze, and a few delightfully fleecy clouds were visible in the azure blue of the heavens.

"Naturally," muttered Willy bitterly, "it would be a ripping morning, of course! I shouldn't notice it at any ordinary time, but just because I'm going away it's got to be first! It wouldn't be half so hard if the weather was rotten, with shafts of rain."

Willy was quite correct in this point of view. Somehow, it would seem an awful wrench to leave the old school on such a glorious morning as this. He stood there, his face overcast and troubled.

It was a sad blow to all his hopes—to all his ambitions. But it was no good fighting against fate. It was destined that he should get the sack, and so he had got it. And, anyhow, what was the good of crying over spilt milk? It wouldn't have seemed so hard if he had been guilty; he would have deserved it then. But to be sacked because of the misdeeds of his monkey was a great hardship.

"Oh, well, it's no good growling!" muttered Willy, shaking himself. "I might as well keep a stiff upper lip. Anyhow, I didn't do it, and I'm not going to be wropey. I'm not going to let the chaps see me cowering."

He was a confirmed optimist, and made up his mind, then and there, to show a bold front. He would be careless and cheerful, just to show the others that he was perfectly indifferent.

Afterwards, when he had left the school for ever, he would be able to give way to his depression, which was already gnawing at him inwardly.

Morrow, of the Sixth, came along and released him. And the prefect, much to his own discomfort, was obliged to watch over Willy like a warden while the latter made his morning toilet.

Willy had breakfast alone, in one of the headmaster's ante-rooms. His brass were all packed, and he had arranged with Morrow to have his pets looked after for a day or two until he could make some new arrangements. Willy had wanted to take these little animals away with him, but it was impossible.

As soon as he had finished breakfast, Mr. Stokes came to him.

"Good-morning, sir," said Willy brightly.

"Good-morning, my boy," said Mr. Stokes, sitting down. "I'm sorry this has happened—frightfully sorry. You don't know how it hurts me."

"That's all right, sir," said Willy uncomfortably.

"I think you had better know that Heath came to the headmaster last night, and related some extraordinary story about your monkey," went on Mr. Stokes, watching Willy's face. "He declared that it was the monkey who entered Mr. Muggles' room."

Willy looked startled and astonished, and Mr. Stokes sighed. Willy's expression was one of surprise, as though he had heard this for the first time.

"I told Chubby not to say anything, sir," he growled.

"Are you trying to indicate that the story is true?"

"Yes, sir," replied Willy. "It's true enough. It was Marmaduke who did everything, but I don't expect you to believe it. And I shan't mind a bit, sir, it does sound thick, I know."

"Upon my soul!" said Mr. Stokes. "I almost believe in you, you young rascal!"

"Thank you, sir."

"At the same time, Mr. Muggles' statement is very definite," said Mr. Stokes, shaking his head. "Isn't it rather mean to put the blame on to a harmless monkey? It's not like you, Willy, to do that."

Willy flushed.

"I wouldn't put the blame on a toad, sir," he growled. "Marmaduke did do it—and there's no question of blame, anyhow. He can't help being mischievous—it's his nature. And I expect he went for Mr.

Muggles because Mr. Muggles had been cruel to him earlier in the evening."

"Then you still insist that this story is true?"

"Oh, what's the good, sir?" asked Willy. "You don't believe it!"

"I would like to believe it," said the Headmaster frankly. "The headmaster has asked me to extract a confession from you—for it would be much more satisfactory—"

"I've got no confession to make, sir," replied Willy firmly. "I'm being sacked, and I'm not kidding. The Head's only doing his duty, because Mr. Muggles' evidence can only be taken one way. But Mr. Muggles was either telling lies, or labouring under a delusion. Can I go now, sir? I should like to get off as soon as possible!"

Mr. Stokes sighed, and gave it up.

CHAPTER II.

Saying Good-bye.

BUT the Headmaster had an uncomfortable feeling that an injustice was being done. He had a great belief in Willy, and after that little talk, he was more than ever convinced that the lads were telling the truth.

Mr. Sackin even had a chat with the Head, and suggested a further inquiry. But Dr. Stafford, who didn't know his boys as intimately as Mr. Stokes did, could see no advantage of taking such a course. And it was a very delicate situation. He could not repeatedly question Mr. Muggles' veracity.

So Willy's last hope had gone.

The lads were kept in the Head's quarters until morning school had begun. Only his major was allowed to return and bid him good-bye. The interview was quite short, and both brothers were acutely uncomfortable.

Willy told his major not to worry, and Edward Oswald assured his minor that he would be back again within a couple of days. It was only necessary to leave everything to him, and the men would soon show again.

Then Handforth went, and thought of about fifty other things that he ought to have said. But it was too late now, and

he went into morning school with the rest of the Fourth, moody and depressed.

As for the Third, there was a curious air of resignation about the lads.

It had certainly been expected that they would display some kind of emotion. The Third didn't. Before lessons the lads were playing about in the Triangle as usual. And when morning school began they went into their class-rooms, as noisy and as boisterous as ever.

Mr. Muggles was immensely relieved.

He was rather a changed man this morning. The knowledge that Willy was being unjustly treated weighed heavily upon his conscience. It had all come about through his own unfortunate habit of letting his imagination get the better of him. He had put two and two together, and made a dozen. It was too late to do the sum again.

And it was a great relief to find the Third Form quite normal. Mr. Muggles would have had a bad time if the lads had treated him with veiled hostility. It was far better for everything to go on as usual. In that way, the incident would soon be forgotten.

Little did Mr. Muggles know the truth.

Little did he know of the secret whisperings which had passed round the Third before breakfast. The lads were like a secret society, and they had fixed upon a definite plan of action.

It was costing them an enormous amount of will-power to keep up this present farce. While they were acting normally, they felt like open rebellion. The whole scheme was to delude the master.

And Chubby, who was the ringleader, regarded his followers with entire approval. The blow, when it came, would be all the more effective. Mr. Muggles' own satisfaction as the Form settled down to its morning work caused the lads to be more and more restless.

They couldn't keep it up for very long, and as the minutes sped by, Mr. Muggles was vaguely aware that a kind of electricity was in the air. His boys constantly looked at the clock, although it would be a long time before the interval.

He had forgotten that Willy was leaving by the 10.30 train, and that the lads were waiting for ten o'clock to come. At that hour there would be, according to the programme, a big surprise for Mr. Muggles.

At five minutes to ten, the door opened, and Willy Handforth walked in.

"Sorry to interrupt," he said calmly. "I just came along—"

"Good old Willy!" roared the Third.

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Muggles was startled.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Handforth minor! What are you doing here? How dare you come in like this—"

"It's all right! I shan't be a minute," interrupted Willy calmly. "I only popped in to say good-bye. Thanks, you chaps, for that cheer—it did my old heart good! Too late now! I might see you again one day!"

"Hurrah!"

"This—this is appalling!" gasped Mr. Muggles. "Go at once! Do you hear me, Handforth minor! Leave this room!"

The sight of Willy had renewed all his old hostility, and bereft him of every atom of resource. Willy had acted in the same way as a red flag acts upon a bull.

"I say, you chaps!" roared Chubby Heath, heaving up. "It's three minutes to! We'll do it now!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Willy!"

"We're coming with you, old son—we're all going to leave St. Frank's together!" yelled Owen minor. "We're going on strike!"

And the next moment pandemonium reigned. Mr. Muggles did his utmost to restore order, but it was hopeless.

The Third had rebelled.

CHAPTER 40.

Mutiny.

MR. MUGGLES stormed and shouted. "Order!" he roared. "Back to your places, you young rascals! Good heavens. What is this? Heath—Owen minor—Lemon! How dare you defy me in this way!"

"Yah! Heiter!"

"Outside!"

"You got Willy the sack!" roared Chubby Heath. "But we're all going with him! And we're going to stay away until he's reinstated! He's innocent, and the Third's going to stand by him!"

"Hurrah!"

The fags crowded for the doorway in a hopeless kind of jam, and Mr. Muggles dashed about on the outside, shouting until he was hoarse. He might as well have saved himself the trouble, for his efforts were of no avail.

The Third Formers had kept themselves manfully in check since breakfast time, but they had been inwardly seething. Now that the bubble had been pricked, they couldn't contain their excitement.

They crowded out, hot, dusty, and dishevelled, and once free of the Form room, they swarmed down the passage, into the lobby, and then out into the Triangle. They collected in a noisy crowd at the bottom of the steps, and the most surprised fellow in St. Frank's at that moment was Willy Handforth.

"You young ass!" he roared. "What's the idea? You can't do this—you can't mutiny!"

"We've done it!" shouted Chubby. "Old Muggles can get you reinstated if he tells the truth, and we're all going on strike until you're pardoned. We've got it all planned out!"

"My only hat!" said Willy.

He looked at the excited fags proudly. He had trained them well, but he had never believed it possible that they would have such pluck as this. His whole outlook was changed. With the Third in rebellion, he would certainly not take that train to London, but stick to the Third.

Willy guessed why the mutiny had happened.

In the ordinary course of events, with Mr. Buscliffe in control, the fags would never have plucked up enough courage. But they weren't used to Mr. Marmalade Muggles, and they still looked upon him as an outsider. To defy his authority was no great crime.

And Willy's own appearance in the Form at such an opportune moment had precipitated the affair beyond all recall. Two minutes earlier Willy's heart had been as heavy as lead, but now his lips smiled. With the Third to back him up, perhaps his innocence would be proved.

All his old warlike spirit came back. He took charge of the situation on the spot.

"Good for you!" he shouted enthusiastically. "Why, my hat! I didn't think you had enough gumption! But I appreciate

"H, and you're a set of bricks! We'll show 'em what's what!"

"Hurrah!"

"We'll show 'em what the Fighting Third can do!" thundered Willy. "That's what we'll call ourselves—the Fighting Fags! How's that, eh? Three (beers) before we march off!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with old Muggles!"

"Good old Willy!"

"No surrender!"

The fags yelled themselves hoarse, and various other Forms throughout the school wondered what on earth all the noise was about. Unquestionably something unusual had happened, and the Fourth, at least, guessed that it was not unconnected with Willy Handforth.

Edward Oswald insisted upon rushing to the window and looking out.

"The Third's outside!" he shouted excitedly. "They're all crowding round the steps! I believe they've rebelled! Good old Willy!"

"Handforth!" thundered Mr. Crowell, the Form-master.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Speaking to me, sir?"

"Go back to your place at once, Handforth," said Mr. Oswald sternly.

"But the Third's on strike, sir!"

"We are not concerned with the doings of the Third!"

"But my minor—"

"Your minor, I understand, has been expelled from the school," said Mr. Crowell sharply. "If the Third-Formers have thought it necessary to make a scene, I am sorry for them. It would have been far better to have let the unfortunate boy go without any demonstration."

Handforth sat down again, excited. He wanted to dash out and make inquiries, but there was a look in Mr. Crowell's eyes which warned him to keep his place.

And the noise continued unabated.

CHAPTER 14.

Rallying Round Old Willy!

WILLY HANDFORTH leapt upon one of the stone pillars at the front of the Ancient House steps, and gazed at the crowd of excited fags. They were all protest now, and Mr. Muggles was

hovering in the doorway, yelling out orders which nobody took any notice of.

"Thanks, you chaps, for doing this!" shouted Willy. "I'm not going back to London now. I'll stay with you, and we'll fight it out. Now that I know you're solidly supporting me, I'll fight on until the truth is dug up!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You're the chap, Willy!"

"But it won't do for us to stay here," went on Willy grimly. "It's a wonder Mr. Stokes hasn't appeared already, and, although you can defy Mr. Muggles, it won't be so easy to defy a fine chap like Barry Stokes! So the sooner we're off the better!"

"Hear, hear!"

Willy leapt down, pushed his way through the crowd, and turned.

"We'll do it properly!" he yelled. "Now then, form up! Hurry up, you fatheads! You've done some drilling, haven't you? Form up, and make haste about it. Good! That's the idea!"

The fags, rather flustered, formed up. They hadn't haggained for anything of the sort, but Willy's word was law. And it would certainly look better to walk out of the Triangle in an orderly fashion, instead of in a mob.

"Fine!" shouted Willy. "That's the style—quick march!"

And, with Willy at the head, the Third marched to the gates, passed out—to the complete stupefaction of Mr. Cuttle, the porter—and turned up the lane in the direction of Bannington Moor.

Dr. Stafford, at his window, was like a man dazed. He had seen the Third go, and he stood there, rubbing his eyes. Such a thing as this was unprecedented in the history of the school. Once or twice the Fourth had rebelled against authority—under severe provocation—but the Third had never shown its independence in this startling fashion.

"Good gracious me!" ejaculated the Head faintly.

He wasn't quite sure what had happened, and hurried out to investigate. He felt, vaguely, that Mr. Muggles was responsible. He wasn't satisfied with Mr. Muggles. The Redcliffe master was obviously not of the right temperament to deal with fags, and the head still had a slightly unpleasant flavour in his mouth over the previous

night's affair. He couldn't help feeling that there had been some mistake about Willy Handforth's guilt.

So the Head was looking very grim as he went out.

And the Third, now clear of the school, was marching up the lane, yelling at the top of its voice, and letting the whole countryside know something big had happened.

Issac Manser & Co., of the Moor View School, just settling down to lessons, heard the din and racket as the Third marched past. They couldn't understand it, and there was a good deal of talk among the girls before the mistress restored order.

The Third marched on—not silently, as might be supposed, but with a definite object in view. Willy found this out after a few hundred yards had been covered.

"Got any plan?" asked Chubby, who marched proudly beside him.

"Yes, rather," said Willy. "The old mill."

"Not bad," commented Chubby. "Make it a fortress, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I'm not sure whether it'll do for a real siege, but we can make a start there, anyhow," said Willy. "There's plenty of room, and there's open ground on every side, so that no one can be surprised by a sudden attack. But what about grub?"

"Mr. lot!" said Chubby, with a start.

"It's my belief that the rebellion will be over within a few hours, but we've got to be prepared for emergencies," went on Handforth minor. "Not that we need worry. The Fourth is bound to back us up—trust Ted for that! We'll leave it for the present, and see what the Fourth does after morning school."

"Good idea!" agreed Chubby.

He was excited and happy, and he didn't trouble to look into the future. The affairs of the moment were enough for him. And the rest of the Third was the same. Willy was with them, and nothing else was of importance.

Willy, however, thought more deeply.

Early that morning he had given up all hope. He had never dreamed that he would have the support of the whole Third. But this sudden rebellion would compel the Head to make a thorough investigation, and it was more than likely that Mr. Muggles would crumble up. As soon as he did that

—as soon as he admitted that he had not seen Willy in his bed room—the Head would readily believe the fog's story.

So this meeting was all to the good. No harm could possibly come of it, and it was a hundred chances to one that Willy's innocence would be established.

And the old mill would make excellent headquarters for the time being.

It was a somewhat ramshackle building, standing on the moor, but still thoroughly weatherproof, and plenty of room in it. And the fogs could easily inhabit the upper floors, and defy all efforts to get them out.

It was their first rebellion on their own, and they were determined to make the most of it.

CHAPTER 42.

Preparing for Emergencies.

MR. MUGGLIS was looking rather green when Dr. Malcolm Stafford came hurrying across the Triangle, just after the fogs had vanished. The sight of the Head caused Mr. Muggles to grab at the stonework for support.

"What does this mean, Mr. Muggles?" asked the Head curtly.

"I—I—I—" Mr. Muggles passed, incoherently.

"Why have you sent your boys out?" demanded the Head.

"I didn't send them, sir," blurted out Mr. Muggles. "They—they have rebelled."

"Rebelled!" said the Head, aghast.

"I couldn't do anything with them, sir. They took absolutely no notice of me," panted Mr. Muggles. "My authority was flouted in the most outrageous manner! It was Handforth minor's fault! He came into the Form-room and told them the boys—"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Head. "Handforth minor deliberately came into your Form-room and incited your boys to rebellion? This is amazing, Mr. Muggles! It proves beyond doubt that the boy is better out of the school!"

Mr. Muggles drew a deep breath.

"He—he didn't exactly incite them, sir," he amended. "It was his very appearance which acted as a kind of spur. I cannot truthfully say that he urged the boys to rebel."

The Head stared at Mr. Muggles coldly.

"Then perhaps you will tell me exactly what did happen?" he asked. "I am afraid,

Mr. Muggles, that you are apt to draw upon your imagination. I hope you did not do that last night?"

Mr. Muggles nearly fell over.

"No, sir—no," he panted. "Not at all! Handforth's minor cause into the Form-room to say good-bye, and before I could do anything the entire Form rose up and rushed out of the room."

"This is a very different account from what you told me a moment ago, Mr. Muggles," said the Head, frowning. "You said that Handforth's minor cause in and inflamed your pupils."

"Perhaps—perhaps I was a little too hasty, sir," said Mr. Muggles with difficulty. "But they've gone, and by what I can understand they are determined to stand by that wretched boy!"

The Head thought for a moment.

"This is a terrible affair!" he declared. "We cannot allow an incident of this kind to remain. Come with me, Mr. Muggles. We must follow the boys, and bring them back. I fancy they will take notice of me, at all events," he added grimly.

They went to the gates and passed up the road. There was no doubt as to which route the fags had taken. Indeed, their shouts could still be heard in the distance.

The Head was alarmed, and his feelings regarding Mr. Muggles were becoming more and more bitter. The Redcliffe matter had revealed nothing but incapacity ever since he had arrived.

And the Head was concerned, too, about the way Mr. Muggles had exaggerated Willy's behaviour. Was it possible that he had drawn the long bow in relating the previous night's bedroom adventure? Was there any chance of that monkey story being true? For the first time, Dr. Stafford began to experience a few qualms.

The Third-Formers were in the old mill by this time, and the heavy door had been closed and bolted from within. And Willy was searching about for materials with which to make barricades. He wanted to be on the safe side—to be prepared for emergencies.

"We needn't worry just now," he decided. "We're right near the wood, and there's plenty of logs—we can break off, and turn it into rubbish in use. There'll be some of the masters along soon, so we'd better wait for 'em. Leave all the talking to us!"

"Father!"

"We can trust you, old man."

The fags were swarming through the mill like rabbits in a warren, and faces were visible at practically every window. Willy made sure that the main door was secure, and then he went upstairs to one of the upper floors.

"Hallo!" yelled Owen minor suddenly. "Somebody coming already!"

"Thought so," grunted Willy. "They haven't lost much time. My hat! It's the Head himself!"

"Oh, corks!"

"Supposing he orders us to come down!" asked Joey Lemon, startled. "We can't defy the Head, can we?"

"Why not?" roared Chubby. "Now that we've rebelled, we've got to defy everybody! It's no good doing a thing by halves, you fatheads! Didn't you promise to back me up? The Head can't eat us, and we're born in a good cause. Now, this is where you want to show your pluck!"

"Hurrah!"

"That's the way, Chubby!" grinned Willy. "Lecture 'em!"

But the Third-Formers needed no further lecturing. They had no intention of being disrespectful to the Head, but if he commanded them to return to St. Frank's, they would have no alternative but to refuse. There was only one thing they wanted—the reinstatement of Willy.

Mr. Muggles and Dr. Stafford approached the old mill with mixed feelings. There was something significant in the way the fags had barred themselves into the ancient building. This was no merely rash act of fags, but a thoroughly-organised affair.

And Dr. Stafford felt rather alarmed.

CHAPTER 43

Open Defiance!

"GOOD-MORNING, sir!"

The Head started as that voice came down to him from some where above. He and Muggles looked up, and beheld every window crowded with youthful faces.

"Good-morning, sir," called Willy Handforth again. "Sorry we've had to trouble you like this, but there was nothing else for it. Lovely morning, sir—although I'm afraid there are a few rainclouds about."

The Head quivered with anger.

"Handforth minor, I have no intention of

arguing with you," he said sadly. "You are no longer one of my pupils, and by this time you should have been on your way to London. Are you responsible for this insubordination on the part of the Third?"

"No, sir!" roared Chubby Heath. "He didn't have anything to do with it. We planned this last night—and we should have walked out of the Form-room even if Willy hadn't come!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We're standing by Willy, sir."

This piece of news took the Head by surprise. So Handforth minor was not responsible for this mutiny, after all!

"We wish you hadn't come, sir," said Willy, in distress. "We hate being disobedient and disobeying your orders, sir, but it can't be helped. The Third's come to a decision."

"Hush!"

"We won't surrender until Willy is reinstated!" roared Chubby.

"Never!"

"You will leave this place at once, and return to the school!" commanded the Head, pale with anger. "Remember, boys, I am in earnest! Return now, and I will inflict a normal punishment. But defy me, and I shall have no alternative but to flog every boy, and deprive him of all the remaining half holidays in the term!"

The Third received this piece of news with a shudder.

"I say!" muttered Fullerton. "It's a bit thick, you know! We'd better give in! I knew what it would be—I didn't want to join in this affair—"

"Dry up, you wurm!" roared Dicky Jones indignantly.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we must be firm," exclaimed Willy, his voice quite calm and respectful. "I'm quite innocent of that assault on Mr. Muggles, or I wouldn't let these chaps revolt. As soon as you know I'm not guilty, you'll realise that we're justified."

"You young rascal!" stormed the Head. "Your guilt was made clear, and this defiance is sheer bravado! I can assure you it will not pay! You are only leading your former companions into trouble."

"We'll risk it, sir!" shouted Chubby defiantly.

"Hear, hear!"

"No surrender!"

The Third was practically solid. And they had the courage of a strong case to back

them. They knew that Willy was innocent, and so there was no need for them to waver. The truth was bound to come out sooner or later. They were not merely taking his word for it. Chubby Heath had been on the spot, too, and it was inconceivable that the pair of them should lie.

Dr. Stafford was painfully aware of his undignified position.

The lads were obviously in a hostile mood. There could be no mistaking the nature of their refusal. And to remain here, arguing, was a humiliating ordeal.

"Boys, I will give you one more chance," called the Head, controlling his anger with difficulty. "Return to the school!"

"No fear!"

"Not without Willy, sir!"

"If Willy is reinstated, we'll come back at once!" shouted Chubby. "Then you are, sir—that proves that we're in earnest. If you'll give us your word that Willy can come back with us, and take his old place in the school, we'll go straight back to our classroom."

"Hear, hear!"

The Third roared its approval of this suggestion.

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"You will return without Handforth minor—and Handforth minor will take the next train to London!" said the Head, exasperated beyond all measure. "Good heavens. Do you think I will be dictated to by the Third Form? Come down at once! I command it!"

Willy said something to the fags, and all the fags vanished. There was a complete silence from within the mill. And for a moment the Head thought that he had prevailed, and that the Third Form was going to troop tamely out.

But the Third didn't troop out.

There came no sign at all from the mill. And after waiting vainly for two or three minutes the Head passed his lips with vexation and amusement. This was open defiance, indeed! The fags were ignoring him!

Less angry, the Head might have put a more kindly construction upon the sudden change of front. As a matter of fact, Willy was distressed at the idea of disobeying the Head. And he had decided that it was better for everybody to withdraw, so that there could be no continuation of the unfortunate argument.

After waiting a few moments longer, the Head turned on his heel and walked away. He couldn't shout at the blank walls, and the bare windows. And Mr. Muggles, who was with him, turned also.

Mr. Muggles was feeling very bad. One word from him, and this disastrous position would end. But Mr. Muggles had turned his back, and the word was never uttered.

CHAPTER 44.

Friends in the Fourth.

"IT'S true, then?" ejaculated Edward Oswald Handforth. "My only hat! It's true! The Third Form has rebelled! The cheeky young swags! Take their blessed nerve, I must say!"

"I should think so!" said Church indignantly. "What will things come to next? They all deserve the sack!"

"Good luck to 'em!" retorted Handforth. "The sack? You silly fathead! They're backing up my minor!"

"Sorry!" said Church hastily. "I'd forgotten that!"

"All the same, I'm afraid they're in for

trouble," said McClure, with a sober shake of his head. "Those fags will never sink it out. They'll crumple up within a few hours, and then we shall see an orgy of Soggiogs."

The whole school was agog with the news.

It was almost midday now, and morning lessons were over. The seniors were exceedingly interested, although they didn't admit it. They talked scathingly about the nerve of these infernal fags. In their hearts, they were glad enough of the excitement.

The Fourth was more frank. The Fourth was candidly pleased at the whole affair, for Willy Handforth was a popular youngster, and the knowledge that the Third was backing him up pleased everybody.

Nipper was talking seriously with Reggie Pitt.

"I've been thinking it over," said Nipper thoughtfully. "There's more in this than meets the eye, Reggie."

"Say on, Wise One," said Pitt. "Thy slave is all ears."

"I've noticed it, but you needn't brag!" said Nipper. "But seriously, old man, I'm inclined to believe that these Third Formers are lacking a winner. There's something about Muggles that I don't like. I'm willing to stake my shirt that he told a false story about that assault."

"So am I," agreed Reggie. "But what can we do?"

"You've heard the yarn, of course," went on Nipper. "Chebby Heath declares that the whole thing was done by Willy's minor."

"Isn't that a bit tall?"

"No, it isn't," said Nipper firmly. "I've had some experience of monkeys, and they can do the most extraordinary things. As far as I can make out, Muggles caught sight of Willy in the Triangle after waking up, and instantly assumed that Willy was the culprit."

"Well?"

"Well, he named Willy, and then went on to say that he saw Willy in the bed-room, destroying his clothes," said Nipper. "I've had a word with Chasby this morning, and he told me all about it. What does it suggest to you?"

"I'm blessed if I know," said Pitt, scratching his head. "I haven't got a rational de-

trifling mind like yours, old son. I suppose you mean that Muggles was asleep all the time, and invented that pack about seeing Willy?"

"Kasully," agreed Nipper. "It didn't need a trained detective mind to see that. But here's the vital point. Once Muggles made that statement, he couldn't back out without calling himself a liar. So, even after hearing about the monkey, he stuck to it."

"Yes, but where are we going to?" asked Pitt practically.

"This," replied Nipper, with a grim look. "If we could find evidence that a monkey was in Mr. Muggles' room—well, collapse of Muggles! See? A bit of evidence like that, and he'll crumple all up."

"But how the dickens can we prove—"

"Come with me, and we'll have a look round Mr. Muggles' room," said Nipper.

Reggie Pitt was considerably animated, and he accompanied Nipper with alacrity. It was strange that nobody else had thought of this little investigation. But, until the affair had been made all-important by the Third's rebellion, Willy's fate had seemed sealed.

Now that there was hope for him, the only course was to prove that the Third was in the right. And Nipper, who had been doing a good deal of thinking, went to work in a business-like way.

He would have gone to Nelson Lee in the ordinary course, but the famous detective was away from the school—although, as a matter of fact, he was expected back this lunch time.

Nipper took the way upstairs, and boldly walked into Mr. Muggles' bed-room.

"I say, it's a bit risky, isn't it?" asked Pitt.

"No—Muggles is out," replied Nipper. "If we're found in here I'll simply say what I'm doing, and chance the consequences."

"But what are you doing?"

Nipper produced a powerful magnifying lens. He proceeded at once to the dressing-table, and frowned with annoyance when he found that everything had been made tidy. However, the maids had done their work in the most shabby fashion, and no brush had been used. Fortunately, it was not the day for turning out this particular bed-room.

Carefully, closely, Nipper examined the dressing-table cover through his magnifying

lens. And during the first moment he chuckled.

"Why, it's as easy as rolling off a form!" he exclaimed tensely. "Look here, Reggie! I don't even need the lens! This cloth is smothered with hairs! See 'em?"

"Hairs?" repeated Pitt, with a start. "Hairs?"

"Don't you see! This proves as clearly as a bell that Willy's monkey was up here last night—it substantiates Chubby Heath's story," replied Nipper. "Just a little practical research, and we've got the proof. We shall be able to set things right in no time!"

He bent down against the wall, and examined the black smudges on the paper. And here he made another discovery. Quite clearly there were any amount of tiny fingerprints impressed on the sticky best polish.

"Good enough!" said Nipper crisply. "If the governor's gone down by the morning train I'll collar him the instant he gets up."

"He's just coming 'cross the Triangle!" exclaimed Reggie excitedly.

"Good man!" exclaimed Nipper. "It's working like a charm!"

CHAPTER 45.

Mr. Muggles in the Wink.

THE Third was just a bit dubious.

"I say, the Head's bound to be wild," Dicky Jones was saying.

"I'm game to carry on, of course, I'll fight to the end. But if we don't all get a flogging each I shall be jolly well surprised. In fact, it might mean the sack for you, Chubby!"

"That's right, be cheerful!" roared Chubby Heath.

"Well, I'm only warning you——"

"I don't want to be warned!" snapped Chubby. "Do you think I don't know it? But, if we win the day, there won't be the sack for anybody. What's more, we ought to stick out for Willy's reinstatement, and no punishments for anybody else!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good idea!"

"That's the stuff, Chubby!"

"We'll win, too!" said Willy Handford, nodding. "Just because the Head hasn't knuckled under the first half-hour you mean's got the wind up. It was only natural that he should try something like

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start with. But he'll soon get tired, and give us a hearing."

"But what's the good of a hearing unless old Muggles owns up?" asked Hobbs. "He's the glibby boy to the situation. If only we can force him—"

"I say, he's coming!" yelled somebody.

"Who's coming?"

"Muggles!"

There was a rush to the windows, and the lads were interested to see Mr. Marmaduke Muggles approaching the mill. Dr. Stafford was standing some distance away, looking rather dejected. There was nobody else in sight.

Mr. Muggles came up close and looked upwards.

"Heath," he commanded, "come down and open this door!"

"Not likely, sir!" shouted Chubby. "We're not going to—"

"Let him in!" whispered Willy quickly.

"Eh?"

"Let him in!" said Willy crisply. "We needn't be afraid of him, and perhaps we can persuade him to speak up. It's worth trying, anyhow!"

Chubby looked out of the window again.

"You want to corpse in, sir?" he asked.

"No, Heath, I do not want to come in," retorted Mr. Muggles. "But I want you to open this door, and all of you must come out at once. The headmaster has instructed me to parley with you, and I dislike this shamming."

"All right, sir—wait a minute."

Mr. Muggles was astonished. He had frankly told the headmaster that it would be useless to hold any conference with the rebels. And here they were, ready to open the door at his bidding!

A crowd of lads hurried below.

"Remember, leave it to me!" said Willy briskly. "There hasn't got to be any horse-play unless he gets nasty. I expect the Head's sent him to offer some kind of compromise, but it won't work."

Downstairs they flung open the door, and found Mr. Muggles outside.

"This way, sir," said Willy.

And before Mr. Muggles could dodge half a dozen lads had swooped upon him, dragged him inside, and the door was closed again. Mr. Muggles looked round in the gloom, greatly perturbed.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" he panted.

"It's all right, sir. We just want a little talk," said Willy. "First of all, what's the subject of this visit?"

"Dr. Stafford has decided to be amazingly lenient," declared Mr. Muggles. "He has instructed me to tell you that if the Third Form returns at once there will be no punishment whatever, and the entire incident will be overlooked."

"And what about Handforth minor, sir?" asked Chubby.

"Handforth minor is to leave by the first train—"

"Yeh! Not likely!"

"We're not deserting Willy!"

"Never!"

Mr. Muggles faced the storm with difficulty.

"You young rascals!" he shouted, flying into one of his passions. "This defiance will do you no good. You have been nothing but a trouble since I came here. I'd no idea that there were such young hooligans in a school like St. Frank's!"

The lads pressed round him angrily.

"Why don't you own up about that monkey!" roared half a dozen voices. "You know jolly well that Willy never got into your bedroom!"

"Fustish—rubbish!" shouted Mr. Muggles furiously. "I saw Handforth minor with my own eyes!"

This deliberate goading was too much. In spite of Willy's commands, the Third fell upon Mr. Muggles, and Mr. Muggles vanished. It was very swift, and very exciting.

Willy and Chubby Heath managed to get the door open, and they yelled for Mr. Muggles to be released. The lads crowded back, excited and indignant. And a kind of scarecrow staggered dazedly out into the open—a torn, battered, dishevelled wreck.

It was Mr. Muggles, although he didn't look quite himself!

CHAPTER

Nelson Lee Takes a Hand.

DR. STAFFORD uttered a startled exclamation.

"Good gracious me!" he gasped.

"This—this is worse than ever!"

Mr. Muggles was staggering across the

room towards him. The Third Form-master was reeling along drunkenly. He was a picture. His hat was pushed over his eyes, and it had got jammed. His collar was unbuttoned, his tie had gone, and his coat and waistcoat were flying open. There were rents all over him, and he was smothered with dust from head to foot. Undoubtedly Mr. Muggles was not presenting his usual dapper appearance.

His swaying gait, however, was not due to injuries. The fags had hardly hurt him at all; they had contented themselves with rolling him in the dust. It is to be feared that Mr. Muggles was putting it on.

"This, sir," he burst out, like a tornado—"this, sir, is the result of your advice! Look at me, Dr. Stafford! Look at me! I am in a terrible condition!"

"Really, Mr. Muggles—" "This is your doing!" roared the other. "The next time, sir, I advise you to go on your crease yourself!"

"Mr. Muggles, pray control yourself!" shouted the Head. "You forget to whom you are speaking!"

"I forget nothing of the sort!" roared Mr. Muggles. "I didn't come to this school to take charge of a crowd of hooligans! That's what they are, sir—nothing more or less than hooligans!"

And Mr. Muggles, his temper completely out of control, turned and strode off. He would regret the outburst, as usual, soon afterwards. And meanwhile, the Head stood there, breathing hard.

"Upon my soul!" he muttered. "The man's temper is quite appalling!"

The Head was rapidly coming to the conclusion that Mr. Muggles was mistaken. He ought never to have come to St. Frank's at all. In charge of a senior house at Hurdcliffe, with only a few older boys to deal with, he was possibly a success. But to control fags was not Mr. Muggles' forte.

Moreover, the Head was growing more and more uneasy.

Those evidences of temper and exaggeration on Mr. Muggles' part were making the Head dubious. His belief in Willy's guilt was lessening. He felt, after all, that perhaps the boy had spoken the truth regarding the monkey. If so, Mr. Muggles was a liar. And Mr. Muggles being a school-master, the Head was loath to believe this.

He hurried back to St. Frank's, suddenly

remembering that Nelson Lee would probably be back. And Lee was the second-in-command at St. Frank's—indeed, he frequently advised the Head to great advantage.

At the old school Nipper was busy telling his governor a full account of the previous night's happenings. And Nelson Lee listened with concern, for Willy Handforth was one of his own favourites.

"I am distressed to hear this about the boy," he said gravely. "But really, Nipper, if the headmaster has expelled him, that ought to be enough. Dr. Stafford would not take such a step without positive evidence—"

"He thinks he has positive evidence, sir, but Mr. Muggles was lying," said Nipper grimly.

"You mustn't say that, Nipper—"

"I say it because I can prove it, sir!"

"You can prove it?"

"Yes, and I want you to come and prove it, too. Your word carries more weight than mine," said Nipper. "Look here, sir, Muggles swore that he saw Willy in his bed-room, and that there was no sign of a monkey."

"Well?"

"What's he going to say when we show the Head a lot of monkey hairs in Muggles' bed-room?" asked Nipper kindly. "And what's he going to say when we show him monkey finger-prints on the wall? Why, governor, that room is fairly chock full of evidence."

Nelson Lee stroked his chin.

"I'll have a look at that room at once," he said quickly. "If what you say is right, Nipper, that's a gross act of injustice has been done, and Mr. Muggles is indeed guilty of unwarrantable falsehood."

Nipper was delighted at Lee's prompt measures. It was like his master to waste no time. With Nelson Lee, to think was to act. And he hurried upstairs with Nipper.

Five minutes in Mr. Muggles' room was sufficient.

"Well, sir?" asked Nipper, at length.

"Of course, there is no question about it," replied Lee quietly. "It needs no detective to prove that a monkey was in this room. There are traces in almost every corner. Even the cane bears one or two black smudges which cannot be mistaken."

"Good!" said Nipper contentedly. "Then it proves that Willy was never here. Muggles told a false yarn, and now he'll have to face the music."

CHAPTER 47.

Facing the Music.

DR. STAFFORD was looking worried and concerned when Nelson Lee entered his study. The Head had arrived back at the school, and had lost no time in sending for Lee. The latter had only just concluded his investigations.

"I am thankful you are here, Mr. Lee," said the Head wearily. "Of course, you have heard of this unfortunate occurrence? You know about the Third Form rebellion?"

"Yes," said Lee. "An unfortunate business, doctor; but I really think the boys acted under strong provocation."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Head. "You think so?"

"I certainly do," replied Lee. "In fact, I can plainly tell you that the boys are more or less justified in their attitude."

The Head felt suddenly limp.

"Justified, Mr. Lee?" he repeated. "Justified! Do you realise that they have flouted all authority? Handforth minor was expelled, and he should have left the school by the 10.30 train. Instead of that he takes charge of the Third Form, and there is this disgraceful rebellion."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I do not regard it as a rebellion so much as an exhibition of loyalty to an innocent boy," he replied quietly. "I'm afraid you have been misled, doctor. While undoubtedly acting from the best of motives, and on the strongest evidence, you have punished Handforth minor unjustly."

"Good gracious!" gasped the Head. "I do not understand you!"

"Shall I explain?"

"Please do!" urged Dr. Stafford. "It passes my comprehension that you should speak with such confidence, and you have only arrived in the school within the last hour! It is amazing, Mr. Lee. You are always giving me these surprises!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I cannot take such credit when I don't deserve it," he replied. "Nipper is en-

tirely responsible in the present instance. It was his quick thinking which led to my investigations."

"What investigation?"

"I understand that the boys maintain that Mr. Muggles was attacked by a monkey!" said Nelson Lee. "And I further understand that Mr. Muggles scents this theory as preposterous, and adheres to his original story that Willy Handforth is the culprit."

"Exactly!"

"Then perhaps Mr. Muggles will be good enough to explain why his room is literally smothered with monkey hairs," said Nelson Lee grimly. "There are hairs on practically everything the little creature touched. And the monkey's finger-prints are strewn about the room as though he had deliberately placed them there."

The Head leapt to his feet.

"Is this true, Mr. Lee?" he asked excitedly.

"I have just come from Mr. Muggles' room."

"Then—then the man was inventing his story when he declared that he saw Handforth minor with his own eyes?"

"Undoubtedly!"

Dr. Stafford clenched his fists, and his face was suffused with anger.

"Then I expelled that boy unjustly!" he exclaimed tensely. "Heath's account was true—the monkey was, actually, the culprit! Handforth minor had no direct hand in the affair at all!"

"And, to be perfectly frank, doctor, I consider the Third Form boys had a very excellent reason for rebelling," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I strongly advise you to reinstate Handforth minor at once, and to let the whole matter drop. I further suggest that Mr. Muggles will be far happier at Redcliffe."

"I will send for Mr. Muggles at once!" declared the Head.

Ten minutes later Mr. Muggles came installed up once more, but by no means his usual self. The headmaster's gaze was stern, and Mr. Muggles quailed. He seemed to have some premonition of what was coming. The Head was short, and in the point.

"Mr. Muggles," he said, "last night you told me a false story."

"Sir!" said the other, flustered. "How dare you—"

"Mr. Lee—who is an expert on these things—has found positive traces of a monkey in your bedroom," continued the Head sternly. "I have an idea, Mr. Muggles, that you know of this all the time—"

"I didn't—on my word, I didn't!" interrupted Mr. Muggles desperately. "I thought Handforth minor was my assistant. I was asleep at the time—"

"But you told me you were wide awake!"

"I—or—was dozing," blustered Mr. Muggles. "Perhaps I was mistaken—some can never tell in the half light. I am quite willing to give Handforth minor the benefit of the doubt. And since Mr. Lee has found these traces, I must bow to his superior knowledge."

The Head looked at him rather contemptuously. Mr. Muggles had confessed, in a roundabout fashion, it was true, that he had lied on the previous night. It was all that the Head wanted. He was thoroughly satisfied that Willy Handforth was guilty.

"We do not wish to pursue this subject, Mr. Muggles," said the Head icily. "If you will make arrangements to leave at the earliest possible moment I shall be obliged. I fear your talents are not of the type we require in this school."

Mr. Marmaduke Muggles opened his mouth to reply, but he found no words. Looking considerably shrivelled, he went to the door, and passed out.

CHAPTER 48.

All Serious.

CHUBBY HEATH looked at his watch anxiously.

"Half-past one!" he exclaimed.

"I wonder what's happened! I thought we should have had a whole army here before this! They haven't even tried to turn us out, yet!"

"What about dinner?" asked Parry. "I say, I'm getting famished! It's past dinner-time already."

"We're all half-starved!"

"What are you going to do about it, Willy?"

"The only thing is to raze up some money, and some of us will have to go to the village and buy some grub," said Willy

practically. "That'll do for the time being, and I expect my major will be along after lessons. He bound to work up the Fourth!"

"Yes, and Archie Glenharne and Singleton and Trugellis-West and those chaps have got pots of money," said Chubby Heath happily. "They'll back out without a murmur—they're sportsmen! There's no need to worry about food—we shall have plenty. But we don't seem to decide on any policy, and that's the main thing!"

"Hi!" roared somebody. "There's a whole crowd coming!"

"My hat!"

There was a rush for the windows, and a cheer went up when twenty or thirty Fourth Formers were observed. Handforth & Co. were prominent with Archie Glenharne, Pitt, Nipper, and many others in the crowd.

But, most surprising of all, Nelson Lee was well in advance—striding on towards the mill on his own. Willy Handforth frowned.

"I say, I don't like this!" he muttered. "Mr. Lee's a sport—we can't defy him! I'll be rotten! It's a pity he's lasted in—I'll ask him to go away—and leave it to somebody else."

"All the same it's rotten!" growled Chubby Heath.

Nelson Lee came up close and looked upwards.

"Come along, boys—out of this!" he said cheerfully.

"I say, sir, be a pal!" pleaded Willy. "You know we don't want to defy you—it's an awful position!"

"Indeed?" smiled Lee. "How is the position awful? Mr. Muggles has left the school, and I have the headmaster's authority for telling you that your expulsion is cancelled and—"

"What!" gasped Willy excitedly.

"That your expulsion is cancelled and that the entire Third Form is to come back to the school for dinner!" continued Nelson Lee. "Afternoon lessons will go on as usual and nothing further will be heard of this little incident."

"Hurrah!"

It was a high-pitched, crackled kind of cheer, for the lads were so excited that their voices went. They had won! Almost as soon as the rebellion had started it was over, and the Third Form—

"Come along down!" said Nelson Lee pleasantly. "Oh, by the way. I have decided to take you young rascals in class until Mr. Suncliffe is better, so unless you are on your best behaviour, you'd better look out!"

"Hurrah!"

It was another tremendous cheer, and a minute later the lads swarmed out of the mill. They cheered Nelson Lee to the echo, but Willy managed to get a word with Nipper, and learned how the miracle had come about.

"You're a brick," said Willy gratefully. "Thanks awfully, Nipper!"

"Rats!" grinned Nipper. "Nothing to thank me for."

"Now, my son, what about it?" demanded Edward Oswald, grasping Willy's hand, and shaking it with unnecessary vigour. "You've got to answer for yourself! What do you mean by inciting a rebellion?"

Willy grinned.

"Come off it, Ted! I didn't incite it at all—it was Chubby. And if Chubby hadn't you would!"

"By George!" said Handforth. "I believe I would!"

The lads made a triumphant return—although, acting on Willy's advice, they made no noise when they re-entered the school grounds. It was tacitly agreed that everything was to go on as though there had been no rebellion at all.

And Willy was hugely delighted when he learned that he could still keep Marmaduke, on condition that Marmaduke was confined to the rear shed.

"Good!" he confided to Chubby, as they stood in front of Marmaduke's cage. "You can take it from me, my lad, that old Marmy will be back in our study inside three days! Who cares for rules?"

And Marmaduke, it must be regretfully added, distinctly winked.



OUR MAGAZINE CORNER.

How to Become an Airman.

Of the future of flying there is no doubt, both for commercial and military purposes. In the Army the airman is as important as the soldier, and will become more important as time goes on. It is for this reason that our authorities are greatly extending our Air Force, and it is in connection with this extension that a scheme has been proposed for training boys to become air mechanics. It is a scheme well worth considering by boys who wish for an active open-air career.

At the present time 1,000 boys are being asked for every year by the Royal Air Force—200 of them are required by July, so now is the time to make preparation for entry.

The boys required must be between 13 and 16½ years of age, and they have to pass an open competitive examination set by the Civil Service Commissioners. Boys who are still at school or attending continuation schools may, however, receive a nomination from their local educational authority, when they will be excused the open examination, and will compete in an examination with other nominated candidates, which is not quite so difficult.

The headmaster of the boys' school should be consulted as to obtaining this nomination.

The "open" examinations are usually held twice a year, and the subjects taken are arithmetic, experimental science, composition, and general questions.

The composition set at a recent examination was: "Write a conversation about leaving school between some friends on a walk." "Describe a picnic at which everything went wrong." Then the general questions included items such as "Describe the duties of a foot-ball as today referred." "What do you like in the works of any English poet, and why do you like it?" and so on.

Full particulars, showing the kind of questions dealt with can be obtained by writing to the Air Ministry, Kingsway, W.C., or the Civil Service Commissioners, Burlington Gardens, W.

Those boys who succeed receive three years' training in one of the following trades:

Carpenter-fitters, Copper-smiths, Electricians, Wiremen, Operators, Mechanics, Instrument-

makers, Franchismen, etc., the training quarters being at present in Linsmeath, Bucks, and Harpenden.

The training is divided up as follows:

Twenty hours per week in the workshop; eight hours per week in the school; nine hours per week in physical training, drill, and games.

There are plenty of opportunities for recreation—cricket, football, hockey, boxing, shooting, running, etc. being encouraged, and on Trooping Holidays, six weeks' leave is allowed every year.

On reaching 15 the boy is taken on in the Air Force as a skilled tradesman or "Aircraftman," for 12 years, during which time he follows the trade he has learned, and at 20 he can, if he wishes, return to civil life. If he does so, it will be as if he has not done badly for himself. He has obtained his apprenticeship free of cost; he has received good pay, and he can go into civil life as a skilled tradesman.

He can, however, if he likes, apply to be re-enlisted for a further 12 years in the Air Force, and on being engaged, he will be given every opportunity of rising to the highest non-commissioned or warrant rank, with a substantial pension at the end of his service.

The pay, in addition to all rations, clothing, free accommodation, etc., is as follows:

Boy in training, 1/6 per day (7 days a week); Aircraftsman, 1/6 per day; Leading Aircraftsman, 6/6 to 8/2 a day; Corporal, 7/6 to 9/6 a day; Sergeant, 9/6 to 10/- a day; Sergeant-pilot, 12/6 to 13/6 a day; Flight-Sergeant (pilot), 15/- to 15/6 a day; Sergeant-major, 16/- to 16/6 a day.

Opportunities for further promotion are open, and an efficient man can reach commissioned rank, and become a full-fledged flying officer, at much higher pay.

To the young men who mean to get on, the Royal Air Force offers good opportunities, and interested readers should get the full details from the Air Ministry at the address above mentioned and study them carefully.

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