

Hornung Ernest William

# Fathers of Men



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**Hornung E.**

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# E. W. Hornung

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### CHAPTER I

### BEHIND THE SCENES

The two new boys in Heriot's house had been suitably entertained at his table, and afterwards in his study with bound volumes of *Punch*. Incidentally they had been encouraged to talk, with the result that one boy had talked too much, while the other shut a stubborn mouth tighter than before. The babbler displayed an exuberant knowledge of contemporary cricket, a more conscious sense of humour, and other little qualities which told their tale. He opened the door for Miss Heriot after dinner, and even thanked her for the evening when it came to an end. His companion, on the other hand, after brooding over Leech and Tenniel with a sombre eye, beat a boorish retreat without a word.

Heriot saw the pair to the boys' part of the house. He was filling his pipe when he returned to the medley of books, papers, photographic appliances, foxes' masks, alpen-stocks and venerable oak, that made his study a little room in which it was difficult to sit down and impossible to lounge. His sister, perched upon a coffin-stool, was busy mounting photographs at a worm-eaten bureau.

"How I hate our rule that a man mayn't smoke before a boy!" exclaimed Heriot, emitting a grateful cloud. "And how I wish we didn't have the new boys on our hands a whole day before the rest!"

"I should have thought there was a good deal to be said for that," remarked his sister, intent upon her task.

"You mean from the boys' point of view?"

"Exactly. It must be such a plunge for them as it is, poor things."

"It's the greatest plunge in life," Heriot vehemently agreed. "But here we don't let them make it; we think it kinder to put them in an empty bath, and then turn on the cold tap – after first warming them at our own fireside! It's always a relief to me when these evenings are over. The boys are never themselves, and I don't think I'm much better than the boys. We begin by getting a false impression of each other."

Heriot picked his way among his old oak things as he spoke; but at every turn he had a narrow eye upon his sister. He was a lanky man, many years her senior; his beard had grown grey, and his shoulders round, in his profession. A restless energy marked all his movements, and was traceable in the very obstacles to his present perambulations; they were the spoils of the inveterate wanderer from the beaten track, who wanders with open hand and eye. Spectacles in steel rims twinkled at each alert turn of the grizzled head; and the look through the spectacles, always quick and keen, was kindly rather than kind, and just rather than compassionate.

"I liked Carpenter," said Miss Heriot, as she dried a dripping print between sheets of blotting-paper.

"I like all boys until I have reason to dislike them."

"Carpenter had something to say for himself."

"There's far more character in Rutter."

"He never opened his mouth."

"It's his mouth I go by, as much as anything."

Miss Heriot coated the back of the print with starch, and laid it dexterously in its place. A sheet of foolscap and her handkerchief – an almost unfeminine handkerchief – did the rest. And still she said no more.

"You didn't think much of Rutter, Milly?"

“I thought he had a bad accent and – ”

“Go on.”

“Well – to be frank – worse manners!”

“Milly, you are right, and I’m not sure that I oughtn’t to be frank with you. Let the next print wait a minute. I like you to see something of the fellows in my house; it’s only right that you should know something about them first. I’ve a great mind to tell you what I don’t intend another soul in the place to know.”

Heriot had planted himself in British attitude, heels to the fender.

Miss Heriot turned round on her stool. She was as like her brother as a woman still young can be like a rather elderly man; her hair was fair, and she had not come to spectacles; but her eyes were as keen and kindly as his own, her whole countenance as sensible and shrewd.

“You can trust me, Bob,” she said.

“I know I can,” he answered, pipe in hand. “That’s why I’m going to tell you what neither boy nor man shall learn through me. What type of lad does this poor Rutter suggest to your mind?”

There was a pause.

“I hardly like to say.”

“But I want to know.”

“Well – then – I’m sure I couldn’t tell you why – but he struck me as more like a lad from the stables than anything else.”

“What on earth makes you think that?” Heriot spoke quite sharply in his plain displeasure and surprise.

“I said I couldn’t tell you, Bob. I suppose it was a general association of ideas. He had his hat on, for one thing, when I saw him first; and it was far too large for him, and crammed down almost to those dreadful ears! I never saw any boy outside a stable-yard wear his hat like that. Then your hunting was the one thing that seemed to interest him in the least. And I certainly thought he called a horse a ‘hoss!’”

“So he put you in mind of a stable-boy, did he?”

“Well, not exactly at the time, but he really does the more I think about him.”

“That’s very clever of you, Milly – because it’s just what he is.”

Heriot’s open windows were flush with the street, and passing footfalls sounded loud in his room; but at the moment there were none; and a clock ticked officiously on the chimneypiece while the man with his back to it met his sister’s eyes.

“Of course you don’t mean it literally?”

“Literally.”

“I thought his grandfather was a country parson?”

“A rural dean, my dear; but the boy’s father was a coachman, and the boy himself was brought up in the stables until six months ago.”

“The father’s dead, then?”

“He died in the spring. His wife has been dead fourteen years. It’s a very old story. She ran away with the groom.”

“But her people have taken an interest in the boy?”

“Never set eyes on him till his father died.”

“Then how can he know enough to come here?”

Heriot smiled as he pulled at his pipe. He had the air of a man who has told the worst. His sister had taken it as he hoped she would; her face and voice betokened just that kind of interest in the case which he already felt strongly. It was a sympathetic interest, but that was all. There was nothing sentimental about either of the Heriots; they could discuss most things frankly on their merits; the school itself was no exception to the rule. It was wife and child to Robert Heriot – the school of his

manhood – the vineyard in which he had laboured lovingly for thirty years. But still he could smile as he smoked his pipe.

“Our standard is within the reach of most,” he said; “there are those who would tell you it’s the scorn of the scholastic world. We don’t go in for making scholars. We go in for making men. Give us the raw material of a man, and we won’t reject it because it doesn’t know the Greek alphabet – no, not even if it was fifteen on its last birthday! That’s our system, and I support it through thick and thin; but it lays us open to worse types than escaped stable-boys.”

“This boy doesn’t look fifteen.”

“Nor is he – quite – much less the type I had in mind. He has a head on his shoulders, and something in it too. It appears that the vicar where he came from took an interest in the lad, and got him on as far as Cæsar and Euclid for pure love.”

“That speaks well for the lad,” put in Miss Heriot, impartially.

“I must say that it appealed to me. Then he’s had a tutor for the last six months; and neither tutor nor vicar has a serious word to say against his character. The tutor, moreover, is a friend of Arthur Drysdale’s, who was captain of this house when I took it over, and the best I ever had. That’s what brought them to me. The boy should take quite a good place. I should be very glad to have him in my own form, to see what they’ve taught him between them. I confess I’m interested in him; his mother was a lady; but you may almost say he never saw her in his life. Yet it’s the mother who counts in the being of a boy. Has the gentle blood been hopelessly poisoned by the stink of the stables, or is it going to triumph and run clean and sweet? It’s a big question, Milly, and it’s not the only one involved.”

Heriot had propounded it with waving pipe that required another match when he was done; through the mountain tan upon his face, and in the eager eyes behind the glasses, shone the zeal of the expert to whom boys are dearer than men or women. The man is rare; rarer still the woman who can even understand him; but here in this little room of books and antique lumber, you had the pair.

“I’m glad you told me,” said Miss Heriot, at length. “I fear I should have been prejudiced if you had not.”

“My one excuse for telling you,” was the grave rejoinder. “No one else shall ever know through me; not even Mr. Thrale, unless some special reason should arise. The boy shall have every chance. He doesn’t even know I know myself, and I don’t want him ever to suspect. It’s quite a problem, for I must keep an eye on him more than on most; yet I daren’t be down on him, and I daren’t stand up for him; he must sink or swim for himself.”

“I’m afraid he’ll have a bad time,” said Miss Heriot, picking a print from the water and blotting it as before. Her brother had seated himself at another bureau to write his letters.

“I don’t mind betting Carpenter has a worse,” he rejoined without looking up.

“But he’s so enthusiastic about everything?”

“That’s a quality we appreciate; boys don’t, unless there’s prowess behind it. Carpenter talks cricket like a *Lillywhite*, but he doesn’t look a cricketer. Rutter doesn’t talk about it, but his tutor says he’s a bit of a bowler. Carpenter beams because he’s got to his public school at last. He has illusions to lose. Rutter knows nothing about us, and probably cares less; he’s here under protest, you can see it in his face, and the chances are all in favour of his being pleasantly disappointed.”

Heriot’s quill was squeaking as he spoke, for he was a man with the faculty of doing and even thinking of more than one thing at a time; but though his sister continued mounting photographs in her album with extreme care, her mind was full of the two young boys who had come that night to live under their roof for good or ill. She wondered whether her brother was right in his ready estimate of their respective characters. She knew him for the expert that he was; these were not the first boys that she had heard him sum up as confidently on as brief an acquaintance; and though her knowledge had its obvious limitations, she had never known him wrong. He had a wonderfully fair mind. And yet the boy of action, in whom it was possible to stimulate thought, would always be nearer his heart than the thoughtful boy who might need goading into physical activity. She could not help feeling

that he was prepared to take an unsympathetic view of the boy who had struck her as having more in him than most small boys; it was no less plain that his romantic history and previous disadvantages had already rendered the other newcomer an object of sympathetic interest in the house-master's eyes. The material was new as well as raw, and so doubly welcome to the workman's hand. Yet the workman's sister, who had so much of his own force and fairness in her nature, felt that she could never like a sulky lout, however cruel the circumstances which had combined to make him one.

She felt a good deal more before the last print was in her album; in the first place that she would see really very little of these two boys until in years to come they rose to the Sixth Form table over which she presided in hall. Now and then they might have headaches and be sent in to keep quiet and look at the *Punches*; but she would never be at all in touch with them until they were big boys at the top of the house; and then they would be shy and exceedingly correct, of few words but not too few, and none too much enthusiasm, like all the other big boys. And that thought drew a sigh.

"What's the matter?" came in an instant from the other bureau, where the quill had ceased to squeak.

"I was thinking that, after all, these two boys have more individuality than most who come to us."

"One of them has."

"Both, I think; and I was wondering how much will be left to either when we run them out of the mould in five years' time!"

Heriot came to his feet like an exasperated advocate.

"I know where you get that from!" he cried with a kind of jovial asperity. "You've been reading some of these trashy articles that every wiseacre who never was at a public school thinks he can write about them now! That's one of their stock charges against us, that we melt the boys down and run them all out of the same mould like bullets. We destroy individuality; we do nothing but reduplicate a type that thinks the same thoughts and speaks the same speech, and upholds the same virtues and condones the same vices. As if real character were a soluble thing! As if it altered in its essence from the nursery to the cemetery! As if we could boil away a strong will or an artistic temperament, a mean soul or a saintly spirit, even in the crucible of a public school!"

His breezy confidence was almost overwhelming; but it did not overwhelm his hearer, or sweep her with him to his conclusion. She had her own point of view; more, she had her own coigne of observation. Not every boy who had passed through the house in her time was the better for having been there. She had seen the weak go under – into depths she could not plumb – and the selfish ride serenely on the crest of the wave. She had seen an unpleasant urchin grow into a more and more displeasing youth, and inferiority go forth doubly inferior for the misleading stamp – that precious stamp – which one and all acquired. She loved the life as she saw it, perforce so superficially; it was a life that appealed peculiarly to Miss Heriot, who happened to have her own collegiate experience, an excellent degree of her own, and her own ideas on education. But from the boys in her brother's house she held necessarily aloof; and in her detachment a clear and independent mind lay inevitably open to questionings, misgivings, intuitions, for which there was little time in his laborious days.

"But you admit it is a crucible," she argued. "And what's a crucible but a melting-pot?"

"A melting-pot for characteristics, but not for character!" he cried. "Take the two boys upstairs: in four or five years one will have more to say for himself, I hope, and the other will leave more unsaid; but the self that each expresses will be the same self, even though we have turned a first-rate groom into a second-rate gentleman. 'The Child,' remember, and not the school, 'is father of the Man.'"

"Then the school's his mother!" declared Miss Heriot without a moment's hesitation.

Heriot gave the sudden happy laugh which his house was never sorry to hear, and his form found the more infectious for its comparative rarity.

"Does she deny it, Milly? Doesn't she rub it into every one of them in Latin that even they can understand? Let's only hope they'll be fathers of better men for the help of this particular *alma mater*!"

The house-master knocked out his pipe into a wooden Kaffir bowl, the gift of some exiled Old Boy, and went off to bid the two new boys good-night.

## CHAPTER II

### CHANGE AND CHANCE

Rutter had been put in the small dormitory at the very top of the house. Instead of two long rows of cubicles as in the other dormitories, in one of which he had left Carpenter on the way upstairs, here under the roof was a square chamber with a dormer window in the sloping side and a cubicle in each of its four corners. Cubicle was not the school word for them, according to the matron who came up with the boys, but “partition,” or “tish” for short. They were about five feet high, contained a bed and a chair apiece, and were merely curtained at the foot. But the dormitory door opened into the one allotted to Rutter; it was large enough to hold a double wash-stand for himself and his next-door neighbour; and perhaps he was not the first occupant whom it had put in mind of a loose-box among stalls.

He noted everything with an eye singularly sardonic for fourteen, and as singularly alive to detail. The common dressing-table was in the dormer window. The boy had a grim look at himself in the glass. It was not a particularly pleasant face, with its sombre expression and stubborn mouth, but it looked brown and hard, and acute enough in its dogged way. It almost smiled at itself for the fraction of a second, but whether in resignation or defiance, or with a pinch of involuntary pride in his new state of life, it would have been difficult even for the boy to say. Certainly it was with a thrill that he read his own name over his partition, and then the other boys’ names over theirs. Bingley was the fellow next him. Joyce and Crabtree were the other two. What would they be like? What sort of faces would they bring back to the glass in the dormer window?

Rutter was not conscious of an imagination, but somehow he pictured Joyce large and lethargic, Crabtree a humorist, and Bingley a bully of the Flashman type. He had just been reading *Tom Brown* by advice. He wondered would the humorist be man enough to join him in standing up to the brutes, and whether pillow-fights were still the fashion; he did not believe they were, because Master Evan had never mentioned them; but then Master Evan had only been at a preparatory school last spring, and he might have found it quite otherwise at Winchester. The new boy undressed with an absent mind. He was wondering what it would have been like if he had been sent to Winchester himself, and there encountered Master Evan on equal terms. He had never done so much wondering in his life; he found a school list in the dormitory, and took it to bed with him, and lay there doing more.

So there was an Upper Sixth and a Lower Sixth, and then a form called the Remove; and in the Remove, by the way, was friend Joyce of the corner opposite. Then came the Fifts – three of them – with Crabtree top of the Lower Fifth. Clever fellow, then, Crabtree! The bully Bingley was no doubt notoriously low in the school. The Middle Remove came next, and through each column of strange names the boy read religiously, with a fascination he could not have explained, here and there conjuring an incongruous figure from some name he knew. He had got down to the Middle Fourth when suddenly his breath was taken as by a blow.

Heriot came in to find a face paler than it had looked downstairs, but a good brown arm and hand lying out over the coverlet, and a Midsummer List tightly clutched. The muscles of the arm were unusually developed for so young a boy. Heriot saw them relax under his gaze as he stood over the bed.

“Got hold of a school list, have you?”

“Yessir,” said Rutter with a slurring alacrity that certainly did not savour of the schoolroom. Heriot turned away before he could wince; but unluckily his eyes fell on the floor, strewn with the litter of the new boy’s clothes.

“I like the way you fold your clothes!” he laughed.

“I beg your pardon, sir, but where am I to put them?”

It was refreshingly polite; but, again, the begging-pardon opening was not the politeness of a schoolboy.

“On this chair,” said Heriot, suiting the action to the word. The boy would have leapt out of bed to do it himself. His shyness not only prevented him, but rendered him incapable of protest or acknowledgement; and the next moment he had something to be shy about. Mr. Heriot was holding up a broad and dirty belt, and without thinking he had cried, “What’s this?”

Rutter could not answer for shame. And Heriot had time to think.

“I can sympathise,” he said with a chuckle; “in the holidays I often wear one myself. But we mustn’t betray each other, Rutter, or we shall never hear the last of it! I’ll give you an order for a pair of braces in the morning.”

“I have them, sir, thanks.”

“That’s right.” Heriot was still handling the belt as though he really longed to buckle it about himself. Suddenly he noticed the initials, “J. R.”

“I thought your name was Ian, Rutter?”

“So it is, sir; but they used to call me Jan.”

Heriot waited for a sigh, but the mouth that appealed to him was characteristically compressed. He sat a few moments on the foot of the bed. “Well, good-night, and a fair start to you, Jan! The matron will put out the gas at ten.”

The lad mumbled something; the man looked back to nod, and saw him lying as he had found him, still clutching the list, only with his face as deep a colour as his arm.

“Have you come across any names you know?”

“One.”

“Who’s that?”

“He won’t know me.”

They were the sullen answers that had made a bad impression downstairs; but they were strangely uttered, and Rutter no longer lay still.

“He must have a name,” said Heriot, coming back into the room.

No answer.

“I’m sorry you’re ashamed of your friend,” said Heriot, laughing.

“He’s not my friend, and – ”

“I think that’s very likely,” put in Heriot, as the boy shut his lips once more. “What’s in a name? The chances are that it’s only a namesake after all.”

He turned away without a sign of annoyance or of further interest in the matter. But another mumble from the bed intercepted him at the door.

“Name of Devereux,” he made out.

“Devereux, eh?”

“Do you know him, sir?”

“I should think I do!”

“He’ll not be in this house?”

Rutter was holding his breath.

“No, but he got my prize last term.”

“Do you know his other name?”

It was a tremulous mumble now.

“I’m afraid I don’t. Wait a bit! His initials are either E. P. or P. E. He only came last term.”

“He only would. But I thought he was going to Winchester!”

“That’s the fellow; he got a scholarship and came here instead, at the last moment.”

The new boy in the top dormitory made no remark when the matron put out the gas. He was lying on his back with his eyes wide open, and his lips compressed out of sight, just as Heriot had left him. It was almost a comfort to him to know the worst for certain; and now that he did know it,

beyond all possibility of doubt, he was beginning to wonder whether it need necessarily be the worst after all. It might easily prove the best. He had always liked Master Evan; that was as much as this boy would admit even in his heart. The fact would have borne a warmer recognition. Best or worst, however, he knew it as well as though Evan Devereux had already come back with the rest of the school, and either cut him dead or grasped his hand. The one thing not to be suspected for an instant was that the lean oldish man, with the kind word and the abrupt manner, could possibly know the secret of a new boy's heart, and have entered already into his hopes and fears.

It was very quiet in the top dormitory. Rutter wondered what it would be like when all the boys came back. Carpenter's dormitory was downstairs, but they were all within earshot of each other. He wondered what it would have been like if Master Evan had been in that house, in that little dormitory, in the partition next his own. Master Evan! Yet he had never thought of him as anything else, much less addressed him by any other name. What if it slipped out at school! It easily might; indeed, far more easily and naturally than "Devereux." That would sound very like profanity, in his ears, and on his lips.

The new boy grinned involuntarily in the dark. It was all too absurd. He had enjoyed ample opportunity of picking up the phraseology of the class to which he had been lately elevated: "too absurd" would certainly have been their expression for the situation in which he found himself. He tried to see it from that point of view. He was not without a wry humour of his own. He must take care not to magnify a matter which nobody else might think twice about. A public school was a little world, in which two boys in different houses, even two of an age, might seldom or never meet; days might elapse before Evan as much as recognised him in the throng. But then he might refuse to have anything to do with him. But then – but then – he might tell the whole school why!

"He was our coachman's son at home!"

The coachman's son heard the incredible statement as though it had been shouted in his ear. He felt a thousand eyes on his devoted face. He knew that he lay blushing in the dark. It took all his will to calm him by degrees.

"If he does," he decided, "I'm off. That's all."

But why should he? Why should a young gentleman betray a poor boy's secret? Rutter was the stable-boy again in spirit; he might have been back in his trucklebed in the coachman's cottage at Mr. Devereux's. The transition of standpoint at any rate was complete. He had always liked Master Evan; they had been very good friends all their lives. Incidents of the friendship came back in shoals. Evan had been the youngest of a large family, and that after a gap; in one sense he had been literally the only child. Often he had needed a boy to play with him, and not seldom Jan Rutter had been scrubbed and brushed and oiled to the scalp in order to fill the proud position of that boy. He must have known how to behave himself as a little kid, though he remembered as he grew older that the admonition with which he was always dispatched from the stables used to make it more difficult; there were so many things to "think on" not to do, and somehow it was harder not to do them when you had always to keep "thinking on." Still, he distinctly remembered hearing complimentary remarks passed upon him by the ladies and gentlemen, together with whispered explanations of his manners. It was as easy to supply as to understand those explanations now; but it was sad to feel that the manners had long ago been lost.

And, boy as he was, and dimly as may be, he did feel this: that in the beginning there had been very little to choose between Evan and himself, but that afterwards the gulf had been at one time very wide. He could recall with shame a phase in which Master Evan had been forbidden, and not without reason, to have anything to do with Jan Rutter. There was even a cruel thrashing which he had received for language learnt from the executioner's own lips; and it was characteristic of Jan that he had never quite forgiven his father for that, though he was dead, and had been a kind father on the whole. Later, the boy about the stables had acquired more sense; the eccentric vicar had taken him in hand, and spoken up for him; and nothing was said if he bowled to Master Evan after his tea, or

played a makeshift kind of racquets with him in the stable-yard, so long as he kept his tongue and his harness clean. So the gulf had narrowed again of late years; but it had never again been shallow.

It was spanned, however, by quite a network of mutual offices. In the beginning Evan used to take all his broken toys to Jan, who was a fine hand at rigging ships and soldering headless horsemen. Jan's reward was the reversion of anything broken beyond repair, or otherwise without further value to its original owner. Jan was also an adept at roasting chestnuts and potatoes on the potting-shed fire, a daring manipulator of molten lead, a comic artist with a piece of putty, and the pioneer of smoking in the loft. Those were the days when Evan was suddenly forbidden the back premises, and Jan set definitely to work in the stables when he was not at the village school. Years elapsed before the cricket stage that drew the children together again as biggish boys; in the interim Jan had imbibed wisdom of more kinds than one. On discovering himself to be a rude natural left-hand bowler, who could spoil the afternoon at any moment by the premature dismissal of his opponent, he was sagacious enough to lose the art at times in the most sudden and mysterious manner, and only to recover it by fits and starts when Evan had made all the runs he wanted. And as Jan had but little idea of batting, there was seldom any bad blood over the game. But in all their relations Jan took care of that, for he had developed a real devotion to Evan, who could be perfectly delightful to one companion at a time, when everything was going well.

And then things had happened so thick and fast that it was difficult to recall them in their chronological order; but the salient points were that Rutter the elder, that fine figure on a box, with his bushy whiskers and his bold black eyes, had suddenly succumbed to pneumonia after a bout of night-work in the month of February, and that the son of an ironmaster's coachman by a northern town awoke to find himself the grandson of an East Anglian clergyman whose ancient name he had never heard before, but who sent for the lad in hot haste, to make a gentleman of him if it was not too late.

The change from the raw red outworks of an excessively modern and utilitarian town, to the most venerable of English rectories, in a countryside which has scarcely altered since the Conquest, was not appreciated as it might have been by Jan Rutter. He had nothing against the fussy architecture and the highly artificial garden of his late environment; on the contrary, he heartily preferred those familiar immaturities to the general air of complacent antiquity which pervaded his new home. That was the novelty to Jan, and there was a prejudice against it in his veins. It was the very atmosphere which had driven his mother before him to desperation. Her blood in him rebelled again; nor did he feel the effect the less because he was too young to trace the cause. He only knew that he had been happier in a saddle-room that still smelt of varnish than he was ever likely to be under mellow tiles and mediæval trees. The tutor and the strenuous training for a public school came to some extent as a relief; but the queer lad took quite a pride in showing no pride at all in his altered conditions and prospects. The new school and the new home were all one to him. He had not been consulted about either. He recognised an authority which he was powerless to resist, but there the recognition ended. There could be no question of gratitude for offices performed out of a cold sense of duty, by beings of his own blood who never so much as mentioned his father's death, or even breathed his mother's name. There was a tincture of their own pride even in him.

He had heard of public schools from Evan, and even envied that gilded child his coming time at one; but, when his own time came so unexpectedly, Jan had hardened his heart, and faced the inevitable as callously as any criminal. And then at its hardest his heart had melted within him: an arbitrary and unkind fate held out the hope of amends by restoring to his ken the one creature he really wished to see again. It was true that Jan had heard nothing of Evan since the end of the Christmas holidays; but then the boys had never exchanged a written word in their lives. And the more he thought of it, the less Jan feared the worst that might accrue from their meeting on the morrow or the day after. Not that he counted on the best: not that his young blood had warmed incontinently to the prospect which had chilled it hitherto. Master Evan as an equal was still an inconceivable figure; and

the whole prospect remained grey and grim; but at least there was a glint of excitement in it now, a vision of depths and heights.

So the night passed, his first at a public school. The only sounds were those that marked its passage: the muffled ticking of his one treasure, the little watch under his pillow, and the harsh chimes of an outside clock which happened to have struck ten as he opened the Midsummer List. It had since struck eleven; he even heard it strike twelve. But life was more exciting, when he fell asleep soon after midnight, than Jan Rutter had dreamt of finding it when he went to bed.

## CHAPTER III

### VERY RAW MATERIAL

It was all but a summer morning when Jan got back into the trousers without pockets and the black jacket and tie ordained by the school authorities. Peculiarly oppressive to Jan was the rule about trouser pockets; those in his jacket were so full in consequence that there was barely room for his incriminating belt, which he rolled up as small as it would go, and made into a parcel to be hidden away in his study when he had one. This was his last act before leaving the dormitory and marching downstairs at an hour when most of the household were presumably still in bed and asleep; but Jan was naturally an early riser, and he had none of the scruples of conventionality on the score of an essentially harmless act. He was curious to see something of his new surroundings, and there was nothing like seeing for oneself.

At the foot of the lead-lined stairs, worn bright as silver at the edges, there was a short tiled passage with a green baize door at one end and what was evidently the boys' hall at the other. The baize door communicated with the master's side of the house, for the new boys had come through it on their way up to dormitory. The hall was a good size, with one very long table under the windows and two shorter ones on either side of the fireplace. On the walls hung portraits of the great composers, which Jan afterwards found to be house prizes in part-singing competitions discontinued before his time; at the moment, however, he took no kind of interest in them, and but very little in the two challenge cups under the clock. What did attract him was the line of open windows, looking like solid blocks of sunlight and fresh air. On the sill of one a figure in print was busy with her wash-leather, and she accosted Jan cheerily.

"You *are* down early, sir!"

"I always am," remarked Jan, looking for a door into the open air.

"You're not like most of the gentlemen, then," the maid returned, in her cheerful Cockney voice. "They leaves it to the last moment, and then they 'as to fly. You should 'ear 'em come down them stairs!"

"Is there no way out?" inquired Jan.

"You mean into the quad?"

"That's the quad, is it? Then I do."

"Well, there's the door, just outside this door; but Morgan, 'e keeps the key o' that, and I don't think 'e's come yet."

"Then I'm going through that window," announced the new boy, calmly; and carried out his intention without a moment's hesitation.

Had his object been to run away on his very first morning, before his house-master was astir, as the maid seemed to fear by the way she leant out of her window to watch him, the next step would have taxed all Jan's resources.

Heriot's quad was a gravel plot very distinctively enclosed, on the left by the walls of buildings otherwise unconnected with the house, on the right by the boys' studies. At the further extremity were twin gables over gothic arches which left the two interiors underneath open at one end to all the elements; never in his life had Jan beheld such structures; but he had picked up enough from his tutor to guess that they were fives-courts, and he went up to have a look into them. To the right of the fives-courts was an alley ending at a formidable spiked gate which was yet the only obvious way of escape, had Jan been minded to make his. But nothing was further from his thoughts; indeed, there was a certain dull gleam in his eyes, and a sallow flush upon his face, which had not been there the previous evening. At all events he looked wider awake.

The studies interested him most. There was a double row of little lattice windows, piercing a very wall of ivy, like port-holes in a vessel's side. Not only were the little windows deep-set in ivy, but each had its little window-box, and in some of these still drooped the withered remnant of a brave display. Jan was not interested in flowers, or for that matter in anything that made for the mere beauty of life; but he peered with interest into one or two of the ground-floor studies. There was little to be seen beyond his own reflection broken to bits in the diamond panes. Between him and the windows was a border of shrubs, behind iron palings bent by the bodies and feet of generations, and painted green like the garden seats under the alien walls opposite. On the whole, and in the misty sunlight of the fine September morning, Jan liked Heriot's quad.

"You're up early, sir!"

It was not the maid this time, but a bearded man-servant whom the boy had seen the previous night. Jan made the same reply as before, and no sort of secret of the way in which he had got out into the quad. He added that he should like to have a look at the studies; and Morgan, with a stare and a smile quite lost on Jan, showed him round.

They were absurdly, deliciously, inconceivably tiny, the studies at Heriot's; each was considerably smaller than a dormitory "tish," and the saddle-room of Jan's old days would have made three or four of them. But they were undeniably cosy and attractive, as compact as a captain's cabin, as private as friar's cell, and far more comfortable than either. Or so they might well have seemed to the normal boy about to possess a study of his own, with a table and two chairs, a square of carpet as big as a bath-sheet, a book-shelf and pictures, and photographs and ornaments to taste, fretwork and plush to heart's content, a flower-box for the summer term, hot-water pipes for the other two, and above all a door of his own to shut at will against the world! But Jan Rutter had not the instincts of a normal schoolboy, nor the temperament favourable to their rapid growth. He had been brought up too uncomfortably to know the value of comfort, and too much in the open air to appreciate the merits of indoor sanctuary. Artistic impulse he had none; and the rudimentary signs of that form of grace, to be seen in nearly all the studies he was shown, left him thoroughly unimpressed.

"Is it true," he asked, "that every boy in the school has one of these holes?"

"Quite true," replied Morgan, staring. "You didn't say 'holes,' sir?"

"I did," declared Jan, enjoying his accidental hit.

"You'd better not let Mr. Heriot hear you, sir, or any of the gentlemen either!"

"I don't care who hears me," retorted Jan, boastfully; but it must not be forgotten that he had come to school against his will, and that this was his first opportunity of airing a not unnatural antagonism.

"You wait till you've got one of your own," said the well-meaning man, "with a nice new carpet and table-cloth, and your own family portraits and sportin' picters!"

"At any rate I should know a horse from a cow," returned Jan, examining something in the nature of a sporting print, "and not hang up rot like that!"

"You let Mr. Shockley hear you!" cried Morgan, with a laugh. "You'll catch it!"

"I've no doubt I shall do that," said Jan, grimly. He followed Morgan into an empty study, and asked if it was likely to be his.

"Not unless you take a pretty high place in the school. It's only the top dozen in the house that get these front studies upstairs. You can make up your mind to one at the back, and be glad if it's not downstairs, where everybody can see in and throw in stones."

Jan felt he had not made a friend of Morgan; and yet in his heart he was more favourably impressed with what he had seen than his peculiar temperament permitted him to show. Little as their adventitious attractions might appeal to him, there was something attractive to Jan about this system of separate studies. It appealed, and not without design, to that spirit of independence which happened to be one of his stronger points. Moreover he could conceive a very happy intimacy between two real friends in one of these little dens; and altogether he brought a brighter face to the breakfast-

table than he had shown for an instant overnight. Heriot glanced at it with an interested twinkle, as though he had been at the explorer's elbow all the morning; but whatever he might have known, he betrayed his knowledge neither by word nor sign.

After breakfast the two boys sallied forth with orders signed by Heriot for a school cap apiece; and saw the long old-fashioned country street for the first time in broad daylight. It gave the impression of a street with nothing behind it on either side, the chance remnant of a vanished town. Nothing could have been more solid than the fronts of the drab stone houses, and nothing more startling than the glimpses of vivid meadowland like a black-cloth close behind. The caps were procured from the cricket professional, a maker of history whose fame provided Carpenter with a congenial topic on the way, but sat sadly on the failing giant who was there to serve them in the little shop. The caps were black but not comely, as Carpenter more than once remarked; they were a cross between a cricket-cap and that of a naval officer, with the school badge in red above the peak. Jan chose the biggest he could find, and crammed it over his skull as though he was going out to exercise a horse.

The day was fully occupied with the rather exhaustive examination designed to put the right boy in the right form. There were no fewer than three papers in the morning alone. There was, however, a short break between each, which Carpenter was inclined to spend in boring Rutter with appreciative comments upon the striking mural decorations of the great schoolroom in which the examination was held. There were forty-two new boys, some of them hulking fellows of fifteen or more, some quite small boys in Eton jackets; and the chances are that none among them was more impressed than Carpenter by the reproductions of classical statuary hung upon the walls of Pompeian red, or by the frieze of ancient and modern authors which a great mind had planned and a cunning hand had made; but it is certain that none thought less of them than Jan Rutter. To pacify his companion he did have a look at the frieze, but it was exactly the same look as he had cast into the studies before breakfast. The two had more in common when they compared notes on the various papers.

"I didn't mind the Latin grammar and history," said Jan. "I've had my nose in my grammar for the last six months, and you only had to answer half the history questions."

Jan's spirits seemed quite high.

"But what about the unseen?" asked Carpenter.

"I happened to have done the hardest bit before," said Jan, chuckling consumedly; "and not so long since, either!"

Carpenter looked at him.

"Then it wasn't unseen at all?"

"Not to me."

"You didn't think of saying so on your paper?"

"Not I! It's their look-out, not mine," chuckled Jan.

The other made no comment. It was the long break in the middle of the day, and the pair were on their way back to Heriot's for dinner.

"I wish they'd set us some verses," said Carpenter. "They'd be *my* best chance."

"Then you're a fool if you take it," put in a good-humoured lout who had joined them in the street.

"But it's the only thing I can do at all decently," explained the ingenuous Carpenter. "I'm a backward sort of ass at most things, but I rather like Latin verses."

"Well, you're another sort of ass if you do your best in any of these piffling papers."

"I see! *You* mean to make sure of a nice easy form?"

"Rather!"

"There's no fagging over the Upper Fourth, let me tell you, even for us."

"Perhaps not, but there's more kinds of fagging than one, you take my word for it; and I prefer to do mine out of school," said the big new boy, significantly, as their ways parted.

Carpenter wanted to discuss his meaning, but Jan took no interest in it, and was evidently not to be led into any discussion against his will. He had in fact a gift of silence remarkable in a boy and not a little irritating to a companion. Yet he broke it again to the extent of asking Heriot at table, and that *à propos* of nothing, when the other boys would “start to arrive.”

“The tap will be turned on any minute now,” said Heriot, with a look at his sister. “In some houses I expect it’s running already.”

“Which house is Devereux in?” asked Rutter, always direct when he spoke at all.

“Let me think. I know – the Lodge – the house opposite the chapel with the study doors opening into the quad.”

Carpenter’s silence was the companion feature of this meal.

The boys had time for a short walk afterwards, and more than a hint to take one. But they only went together because they were thrown together; these two had obviously as little else in common as boys could have; and yet, there was something else, and neither dreamt what a bond it was to be.

“Do you know Devereux?” Carpenter began before they were out of their quad.

“Why? Do you know him?”

Jan was not unduly taken aback; he was prepared for anything with regard to Devereux, including the next question long before it came.

“We were at the same preparatory school, and great pals there,” replied Carpenter, wistfully. “I suppose you know him at home?”

“I used to, but only in a sort of way,” said Jan, warily. “I don’t suppose we shall see anything of each other here; he mayn’t even recognise me, to start with.”

“Or me, for that matter!” cried Carpenter, with less reserve. “He’s never written to me since we left, though I wrote to him twice last term, and once in the holidays to ask him something.”

It was on the tip of Jan’s tongue to defend the absent Evan with injudicious warmth; but he remembered what he had just said, and held his tongue as he always could. Carpenter, on the other hand, apparently regretting his little show of pique, changed the subject with ingenuous haste and chattered more freely than ever about the various school buildings that they passed upon their way. There was a house at the end of the street with no fewer than three tiers of ivy-covered study windows; but it had no quad. There were other houses tucked more out of sight; but Carpenter knew about them, and which hero of the Cambridge eleven had been at this, that, or the other. His interest in his school was of the romantic and imaginative order; it contrasted very favourably with Jan’s indifference, which grew the more perversely pronounced as his companion waxed enthusiastic. It appeared that Carpenter was following a number of youths from his part of the world, who had been through the school before him, and from whom he had acquired a smattering of its lore. The best houses of all, he had heard, were not in the town at all, but on the hill a quarter of a mile away. The pair went to inspect, and found regular mansions standing back in their own grounds, their studies and fives-courts hidden from the road; for the new boys trespassed far enough to see for themselves; and Rutter at once expressed a laconic preference for the hill houses, whereat Carpenter stood up as readily for the town.

“There’s no end of rivalry between the two,” he explained, as they trotted down into the valley, pressed for time. “I wouldn’t be in a hill house for any money, or in any house but ours if I had my choice of all the lot.”

“And I wouldn’t be here at all,” retorted Jan, depriving his companion of what breath he had as they hurried up the hill towards the town. By turning to the left, however, in the wake of other new boys in a like hurry, they found themselves approaching the chapel and the great schoolroom by a shorter route. It led through a large square quad with study doors opening upon it down two sides, and nothing over these studies but their own roof.

“There’s plenty of time,” said Jan, with rather a furtive look at a little gold lady’s watch that he pulled out in his fist. “I wonder if this is the Lodge?”

“No – it’s the next – opposite the chapel. This is the School House. Do come on!”

The School House and the Lodge were like none of the other houses. Instead of standing by themselves in the town or on the hill, each formed a part of the distinctive group of which the chapel and the great schoolroom were the salient features. Their quadrangles not only adjoined, but there was no line of demarcation to show where one began or the other ended. In both the study doors opened straight into the fresh air; but in neither was a boy to be seen as Carpenter and Rutter caught up the flying remnant of the forty-two.

“Let’s go back by the Lodge,” said Jan, when at last they were let out for good. But now the scene was changing. Groups of two and three were dotted about in animated conversation, some still in their journey hats, others in old school caps with faded badges, but none who took the smallest notice of the new boys with the new badges, which they had still to learn to crease correctly over the peak.

And now it was that Rutter horrified his companion by accosting with apparent coolness a big fellow just emerged from one of the Lodge studies.

“Do you mind telling us if a boy they call Devereux has got back yet?” asked Jan, with more of his own idioms than he had often managed to utter in one breath.

“I haven’t seen him,” the big fellow answered civilly enough. But his stare followed the retreating couple, one of whom had caught the other by the arm.

“I shouldn’t talk about ‘a boy,’ if I were you,” Carpenter was saying as nicely as he could.

But Rutter was quite aware of his other solecisms, though not of this one, and was already too furious with himself to brook a gratuitous rebuke.

“Oh! isn’t it the fashion? Then I’ll bet you wouldn’t!” he cried, as he shook off the first arm which had ever been thrust through his by a gentleman’s son.

A ball like a big white bullet was making staccato music in Heriot’s outer fives-court; two school caps were bobbing above the back wall; and a great thick-lipped lad of sixteen or seventeen, who was hanging about the door leading to the studies, promptly asked the new boys their names.

“What’s your gov’nor?” he added, addressing Carpenter first.

“A merchant.”

“A rag-merchant, I should think! And yours?”

Jan was not embarrassed by the question; he was best prepared at all his most vulnerable points. But his natural bluntness had so recently caused him such annoyance with himself, that he replied as politely as he possibly could:

“My father happens to be dead.”

“Oh, he does, does he?” cried the other with a scowl. “Well, if you happen to think it funny to talk about ‘happening’ to me, you may jolly soon happen to wish you were dead yourself!”

The tap had indeed been turned on, and the water was certainly rather cold; the more fortunate for Rutter that his skin was thick enough to respond with a glow rather than a shiver.

## CHAPTER IV SETTLING IN

Jan's impressions were not the less vivid for his determination not to be impressed at all; for no attitude of mind is harder to sustain than one of deliberate indifference, which is not real indifference at all, but at best a precarious pose. Jan was really indifferent to a large extent, but not wholly, and the leaven of sensibility rendered him acutely alive to each successive phase of his experience; on the other hand, the fact that he was not too easily hurt was of immense value in keeping his wits about him, and his whole garrison of senses at attention. Sensitive he was, and that to the last degree, on a certain point; but it was a point no longer likely to arise that night. And meanwhile there was quite enough to occupy his mind.

There was the long-drawn arrival of the house, unit by unit, in bowler hats which changed as if by magic into old school caps, and even in "loud" ties duly discarded for solemn black. Then there was tea, with any amount of good cheer in hall, every fellow bringing in some delicacy of his own, and newcomers arriving in the middle to be noisily saluted by their friends. Nobody now took the slightest notice of Jan, who drifted into a humble place at the long table, which was still far from full, and fell to work upon the plain bread and butter provided, until some fellow pushed a raised pie across the table to him without a word. The matron dispensed tea from a gigantic urn, and when anybody wanted another cup he simply rattled it in his saucer. Jan could have made even more primitive use of his saucer, for the tea was hot if not potent. But fortunately there were some things it was not necessary for Carpenter to tell him, for that guide and counsellor was not in hall; he had gone out to tea with another new boy and his people, who knew something about him at home.

Jan was allowed to spend the evening in an empty study which he might or might not be able to take over next day, according to the place assigned to him in the school; meanwhile the bare boards, table, Windsor chair, and book-shelf, with an ironically cold hot-water pipe, and the nails with which the last occupant had studded the walls, looked dismal enough in the light of a solitary candle supplied by Morgan. The narrow passage resounded with shouts of laughter and boyish badinage from the other studies; either the captain of the house had not come back, or he was not the man to play the martinet on the first night of the term; and Jan, left as severely alone as even he could have wished, rose with alacrity when one in passing pounded on his door and shouted that it was time for prayers. He was in fact not sorry to mingle with his kind again in the lighted hall, where the fellows were already standing in their places at table, armed with hymn-books but chatting merrily, while one of the small fry stood sentinel in the flagged passage leading to the green baize door. Jan had scarcely found a place when in flew this outpost with a sepulchral "hush!" In the ensuing silence came Miss Heriot followed by her brother, who began by giving out the hymn which she played on the piano under the shelf with the cups, and which the house sang heartily enough.

It was one of the many disadvantages of Jan's strange boyhood that he had been brought up practically without religion. Mention has been made of an eccentric clergyman who was the first to take an interest in Jan's intellectual welfare; unhappily, his eccentricities had been of such a character as almost to stultify his spiritual pretensions; and in his new home the boy had encountered another type of clerical example which had been but little better in its effect upon his mind. Prayer had never been to him the natural practice which it is to young English schoolboys of all shades of character and condition. So he paid very little attention to the prayers read by Heriot, at this first time of hearing; but even so the manly unaffected voice, and a few odd phrases on which it dwelt in gentler tones, were not altogether lost upon Jan. Nevertheless, when he went up to dormitory, after biscuits (which he heard called "dog-rocks") and milk, and another dreary half-hour in the empty study, the last thing he feared or thought about was the kind of difficulty which had beset little Arthur in a certain chapter

of *Tom Brown* which had not appealed to Jan. And all this may be why he was so much impressed by what happened in the little dormitory at the top of the house, when he and his three companions were undressing for bed.

Joyce, the captain of the dormitory, who proved to be a rather delicate youth with a most indelicate vocabulary, suddenly ceased firing, as it were, and commanded silence for “bricks.”

“Know what ‘bricks’ are?” asked Bingley, who occupied the “tish” adjoining Jan’s, and turned out to be a boy of his own age, instead of the formidable figure of his imagination.

“It’s your prayers,” said Joyce, with such an epithet that Jan could not possibly believe him.

“You *are* a brute, Joyce!” cried Crabtree, poking a clever red head through his curtains.

“Nevertheless, my boy,” rejoined Joyce, imitating a master through his nose, “I know what bricks are, and I say them.”

“Obvious corruption of *præx*,” began Crabtree, in didactic fashion, when Joyce cut him short with a genial malediction, and silence reigned for the best part of a minute.

Jan went on his knees with the others, though he had not done so the night before, and his lips moved through the Lord’s Prayer; but in his heart he was marvelling at the language of the nice tall fellow in the far corner. It was the kind of language he had often heard in the stables, but it was the last kind that he had expected to hear in a public school; and somehow it shocked him, for the first time in his life. But on the whole he was thankful to find himself in such pleasant company in dormitory, and it came to him to express his thankfulness while he was on his knees.

Nothing occurred, as they lay talking in the dark, to modify the new boy’s feeling on this point; nor had he subsequent occasion to revise a triple opinion which might well have proved premature in one case or the other. It revealed on the contrary an unusually sound instinct for character. Joyce’s only foible was his fondness for free language. He had a redeeming sense of humour, and it was in treatment rather than in choice of subject that he erred. Crabtree was irreproachable in conversation, and a kindly creature in his cooler moods; but he suffered from the curse of intellect, was precociously didactic and dogmatic, and had a temperament as fiery as his hair. Bingley was a lively, irresponsible, curly-headed dog, who enjoyed life in an insignificant position both in and out of school. The other two had nicknames which were not for the lips of new boys; but Jan called Bingley “Toby” after the first night.

Prayers were in houses on the first morning of the term, and nothing else happened before or after breakfast until the whole school assembled in the big schoolroom at ten o’clock to hear the new school order. Jan pulled his cap over his eyes as he found himself wedged in a crowd from all the houses, converging at the base of the worn stone spiral stair up and down which he had trotted at his ease between the papers of the previous day. Now he was slowly hoisted in the press, the breath crushed from his body, his toes only occasionally encountering a solid step, a helpless atom in a monster’s maw. At the top of the stone stairs, however, and through the studded oak door, there was room for all; but here it was necessary to uncover face and head; and yet none that he knew of old was revealed to Jan’s close though furtive scrutiny.

Carpenter, who had come with him, and squeezed into the next seat, watched the watcher in his turn, and then whispered:

“He’s not come back yet.”

“Who’s not?”

“Evan Devereux. I asked a fellow in his house.”

“What made you think of him now?”

“Oh, nothing. I only thought you might be looking to see if he was here.”

“Well, perhaps I was,” said Jan, with grumpy candour. “But I’m sure I don’t care where he is.”

“No more do I, goodness knows!” said Carpenter.

And between three and four hundred chattered on all sides with subdued but ceaseless animation; the præpostors keeping order more or less, but themselves chatting to each other as became

the first morning of the term. Then suddenly there fell an impressive silence. The oak door opened with a terrible click of the latch, like the cocking of a huge revolver, and in trooped all the masters, cap in hand and gown on shoulders, led by a little old man with a kindly, solemn, and imperious air. And Jan felt that this could only be Mr. Thrale, the Head Master, but Carpenter whispered:

“That’s Jerry!”

“Who?”

“Old Thrale, of course, but everybody calls him Jerry.”

And Jan liked everybody’s impudence as Mr. Thrale took his place behind a simple desk on the dais, and read out the new list, form by form, as impressively as Holy Writ.

The first names that Jan recognised were those of Loder, the captain of his house, and Cave *major*, its most distinguished representative on tented field; they were in the Upper and Lower Sixth respectively. Joyce was still in the Remove, as captain of the form, but Crabtree had gained a double remove from the Lower to the Upper Fifth. Next in Jan’s ken came Shockley – the fellow who had threatened to make him wish he was dead – and then most thrillingly – long before either expected it – Carpenter’s name and his own in quick succession.

“What form will it be?” whispered Jan into the other’s ear.

“Middle Remove,” purred Carpenter. “And we don’t have to fag after all!”

Devereux was the next and the last name that Jan remembered hearing: it was actually in the form below his!

The new boys had already learnt that it was customary for the masters to take their forms in hall in their own houses; they now discovered that Mr. Haigh, the master of the Middle Remove, had just succeeded to the most remote of all the hill houses – the one house in fact on the further slope of the hill. Thither his new form accordingly repaired, and on the good ten minutes’ walk Carpenter and Rutter had their heads violently knocked together by Shockley, for having the cheek to get so high and to escape fagging their first term.

“But you needn’t think you have,” he added, ominously. “If you young swots come flying into forms it takes the rest of us two years to get to – by the sweat of our blessed brows – by the Lord Harry you shall have all the swot you want! You’ll do the construe for Buggins and me and Eyre *major* every morning of your miserable lives!”

Buggins (who rejoiced in a real name of less distinction, and a strong metropolitan accent) was climbing the hill arm-in-arm with Eyre *major* (better known as Jane), his echo and his shadow in one distended skin. Buggins embroidered Shockley’s threats, and Eyre *major* contributed a faithful laugh. But Jan heard them all unmoved, and thought the less of Carpenter when his thinner skin changed colour.

Mr. Haigh gave his new form a genial welcome, vastly reassuring those who knew least about him by laughing uproariously at points too subtle for their comprehension. He was a muscular man with a high colour and a very clever head. His hair was turning an effective grey about the temples, his body bulging after the manner of bodies no longer really young and energetic. Energy he had, however, of a spasmodic and intemperate order, though he only showed it on this occasion by savagely pouncing on a rather small boy who happened to be also in his house. Up to that moment Carpenter and Rutter were ready to congratulate themselves and each other upon their first form-master; but, though he left them considerably alone for a day or two, they were never sure of Mr. Haigh again.

This morning he merely foreshadowed his scheme of the term’s work, and gave out a list of the new books required; but some of these were enough to strike terror to the heart of Jan, and others made Carpenter look solemn. Ancient Greek Geography was not an enticing subject to one who had scarcely beheld even a modern map until the last six months; and to anybody as imperfectly grounded as Carpenter declared himself to be, it was an inhuman jump from somebody’s *Stories in Attic Greek* to Thucydides and his Peloponnesian War.

“I suppose it’s because I did extra well at something else,” said Carpenter with unconscious irony on their way down the hill. “What a fool I was not to take that fat chap’s advice! Why, I’ve never even done a page of Xenophon, and I’m not sure that I could say the Greek alphabet to save my life!”

“I only hope,” rejoined Jan, “that they haven’t gone and judged me by that unseen!”

But their work began lightly enough, and that first day the furnishing of their studies was food for much more anxious thought, with Carpenter at any rate. As for Jan, he really was indifferent to his surroundings, but the excitable enthusiasm of his companion made him feign even greater indifference than he felt. He was to retain the back upstairs study in which he had spent the previous evening, and Carpenter had the one next it; after dinner Heriot signed orders for carpet, curtains, candles and candlesticks, a table-cloth and a folding arm-chair apiece, as well as for stationery and a quantity of books; and Carpenter led the way to the upholsterer’s at a happy trot. He was an age finding curtains, carpet and table-cloth, of a sufficiently harmonious shade of red; and no doubt Jan made all the more point of leaving the choice of his chattels entirely to the tradesman.

“Send me what you think,” he said. “It’s all one to me.”

Carpenter rallied him in all seriousness on their way back to the house.

“I can’t understand it, Rutter, when you have an absolute voice in everything.”

“I hadn’t a voice in coming here,” replied Rutter, so darkly as to close the topic.

“I suppose I go to the other extreme,” resumed Carpenter, with a reflective frankness which seemed a characteristic. “I shall have more chairs than I’ve room for if I don’t take care. I’ve bought one already from Shockley.”

“Good-night!” cried Jan. “Whatever made you do that?”

“Oh, he would have me into his study to have a look at it; and there were a whole lot of them there – that fellow Buggins, and Jane Eyre, and the one they call Cranky – and they all swore it was as cheap as dirt. There are some beasts here!” added Carpenter below his breath.

“How much was it?”

“Seven-and-six; and I didn’t really want it a bit; and one of the legs was broken all the time!”

“And,” added Jan, for his only comment, “the gang of them are in our form and all!”

They met most of the house trooping out of the quad, with bats and pads, but not in flannels. They were going to have a house-game on the Middle Ground, as the September day was warmer than many of the moribund summer, and there was no more school until five o’clock. Nor did it require the menaces of Shockley to induce the new pair to turn round and accompany the rest; but their first game of cricket was not a happy experience for either boy. Cave *major*, who was in the Eleven, was better employed among his peers on the Upper. Loder, who was no cricketer, picked up with a certain Shears *major*, who was not much of one. Nobody took the game in the least seriously except a bowler off whom the unlucky Carpenter managed to miss two catches. The two new men were chosen last on either side. They failed to make a run between them, and of course had no opportunity of showing whether they could bowl. Both were depressed when it was all over.

“It served me right for dropping those catches,” said Carpenter, however, with the stoicism of a true cricketer at heart.

“I only wish it was last term instead of this!” muttered Jan.

There was another thing that disappointed both boys. The Lodge happened to be playing a similar game on an adjacent pitch. But Devereux was not among the players, and Carpenter heard somebody say that he was not coming back till half-term. Jan’s heart jumped when he heard it in his turn: by half-term he would have settled down, by half-term many things might have happened. Yet the deferred meeting was still fraught in his mind with opposite possibilities, that swung to either extreme on the pendulum of his mood; and on the whole he would have been glad to get it over. At one moment this half-term’s grace was a keen relief to him; at another, a keener disappointment.

## CHAPTER V NICKNAMES

The ready invention and general felicity of the public-school nickname are points upon which few public-school men are likely to disagree. If it cannot be contended that either Carpenter or Rutter afforded a supreme example, at least each was nicknamed before he had been three days in the school, and in each case the nickname was too good an accidental fit to be easily repudiated or forgotten. Thus, although almost every Carpenter has been “Chips” in his day, there was something about a big head thrust forward upon rather round shoulders, and a tendency to dawdle when not excited, that did recall the most dilatory of domestic workmen. Chips Carpenter, however, albeit unduly sensitive in some things, had the wit to accept his immediate sobriquet as a compliment. And in the end it was not otherwise with Rutter; but in his case there were circumstances which made his nickname a secret bitterness, despite the valuable stamp it set upon his character in the public eye.

It happened that on the Saturday afternoon, directly after dinner, the majority of the house were hanging about the quad when there entered an incongruous figure from the outer world. This was a peculiarly debased reprobate, a local character of pothouse notoriety, whose chief haunt was the courtyard of the Mitre, and whom the boys in the quad saluted familiarly as “Mulberry.” And that here was yet another instance of the appropriate nickname, a glance was enough to show, for never did richer hue or bigger nose deface the human countenance.

The trespasser was only slightly but quite humorously drunk, and the fellows in the quad formed a not unappreciative audience of the type of entertainment to be expected from a being in that precise condition. Mulberry, however, was not an ordinary stable sot; it was obvious that he had seen better days. He had ragged tags of Latin on the tip of a somewhat treacherous tongue: he inquired quite tenderly after the *binominal theororum*, but ascribed an unpleasant expression correctly enough to a *lapsus linguae*.

“I say, Mulberry, you are a swell!”

“We give you full marks for that, Mulberry!”

“My dear young friends,” quoth Mulberry, “I knew Latin before any of you young devils knew the light.”

“Draw it mild, Mulberry!”

“I wish you’d give us a construe before second school!”

Jan remembered all his days the stray strange picture of the debauched intruder in the middle of the sunlit quad, with the figures of young and wholesome life standing aloof from him in good-natured contempt, and more fresh faces at the ivy-mantled study windows. Jan happened to be standing nearest Mulberry, and to catch a bloodshot eye as it flickered over his audience in a comprehensive wink.

“You bet I wasn’t always a groom,” said Mulberry; “an’ if I had ha’ been, there are worse places than the stables, ain’t there, young fellow?”

Jan looked as though he only wished the ground would open and engulf him; and the look did not belie his momentary feeling. But he had a spirit more easily angered than abased, and the brown flush which swept him from collar to cap was not one of unmixed embarrassment.

“How should I know?” he cried in a voice shrill with indignation.

“He seems to know more about it than he’ll say,” observed Mulberry, and with another wink he fastened his red eyes on Jan, who had his cap pulled over his eyes as usual, and arms akimbo for the want of trousers pockets. “Just the cut of a jock!” added Mulberry, in quite a complimentary murmur.

“You’re an ugly blackguard,” shouted Jan, “and I wonder anybody can stand and listen to you!”

It was at this point that Heriot appeared very suddenly upon the scene, took the intruder by either shoulder, and had him out of the quad in about a second; in another Heriot rejoined the group in the sun, with a pale face and flashing spectacles.

“You’re quite right,” he said sharply to Jan. “I wonder, too – at every one of you – at every one!”

And he turned on his heel and was gone, leaving them stinging with his scorn; and Jan would have given a finger from his hand to have gone as well without more words; but he found himself hemmed in by clenched fists and furious faces, his back to the green iron palings under the study windows.

“You saw Heriot coming!”

“You said that to suck up to him!”

“The beastly cheek, for a beastly new man!”

“But we saw through it, and so did he!”

“Trust old Heriot! You don’t find that sort o’ thing pay with *him*.”

“I never saw him,” said Jan steadily, despite a thumping heart, “so you can say what you like.”

And he took a heavy buffet from Shockley without wincing.

“And why should you lose your wool with poor old Mulberry?” that worthy demanded with a fine show of charity. “One would think there was something in what he said.”

“You fairly stink of the racing-stables,” said Buggins. “You know you do, you brute!”

And Eyre *major* led a laugh.

“Racing-stables!” echoed Shockley. “There’s more of the stable-boy about him than the jock.”

Jan folded his arms and listened stoically.

“Ostler’s lad,” said one satirist.

“Nineteenth groom,” from another.

“The tiger!” piped a smaller boy than Jan. “The tiger that sits behind the dog-cart – see how he folds his arms!”

And the imp folded his at the most untimely moment; for this was more than Jan was going to stand. Submission to superior force was a law of nature which his common sense recognised and his self-control enabled him to keep; but to take from a boy inches shorter than himself what had to be taken from one as many inches taller, just because they were all against him, was further than his forbearance would go. His flat left hand flew out as the smaller boy folded his arms, and it fell with a resounding smack upon the side of an undefended head.

Within the fewest possible moments Jan had been pinned against the palings by the bigger fellows, his arm twisted, his person violently kicked, his own ears soundly boxed and filled with abuse. This was partly because he fought and kicked as long as he had a free leg or arm. But through it all the satisfaction of that one resounding smack survived, and kept the infuriated Jan just sane enough to stop short of tooth and nail when finally overwhelmed.

“Tiger’s the word,” panted Shockley, when they were about done with him. “But if you try playing the tiger here, ever again, you son of a gun, you’ll be killed by inches, as sure as you’re blubbing now! So you’d better creep into your lair, you young tiger, and lie down and die like a mangy dog!”

It had taken some minutes to produce the tears, but the tears did not quench the fierce animosity of the eyes that shed them, and they were dry before Jan gained his study and slammed the door. And there you may picture him in the chair at the table, on the still bare boards: hot, dishevelled, aching and ashamed, yet rejoicing in his misery at the one shrewd left-hand smack he had somehow administered upon an impudent though defenceless head.

He could hear it for his consolation all the afternoon!

The studies emptied; it was another belated summer’s day, and there was a game worth watching on the Upper. Soon there was no sound to be heard but those from the street, which came through the upper part of the ground-glass window, the only part of the back study windows that was made to open; but Jan sat staring at the wall before his eyes, as though the fresh air was nothing to him,

as though he had not been brought up in his shirtsleeves in and out of the open air in all weathers... And so he was still sitting when a hesitating step came along the passage, paused in the next study, and then, but not for a minute or two, at Jan's door.

"What do you want?" he demanded rudely, when he had responded to a half-hearted knock by admitting Chips Carpenter. Now, Chips had witnessed just the bitter end of the scene in the quad, but Jan did not know he had been there at all.

"Oh, I don't exactly want anything. I can clear out if you'd rather, Rutter."

"All right. I'd rather."

"Only I thought I'd tell you it's call-over on the Upper in half-an-hour."

"I'm not going to call-over."

"*What?*"

"Damn call-over."

Carpenter winced: he did not like swearing, and he did like Rutter well enough to wince when he swore. But the spirit of the oath promptly blotted the letter from his mind. Carpenter was a law-abiding boy who had been a few terms at a good preparatory school; he could scarcely believe his ears, much less a word of Rutter's idle boast. Rutter certainly looked as though he meant it, with his closed lid of a mouth, and his sullen brooding eyes. But his mad intention was obviously not to be carried out.

"My dear man," said Carpenter, "it's one of the first rules of the school. Have you read them? You'd get into a frightful row!"

"The bigger the better."

"You might even get bunked," continued Chips, who was acquiring the school terminology as fast as he could, "for cutting call-over on purpose."

"Let them bunk me! Do you think I care? I never wanted to come here. I'd as soon've gone to prison. It can't be worse. At any rate they let you alone – they got to. But here ... *let* them bunk me! It's the very thing I want. I loathe this hole, and everything about it. I don't care whether you say it's one of the best schools going, or what you say!"

"I say it's *the* best. I know *I* wouldn't swop it for any other – or let a little bullying put me against it. And I have been bullied, if you want to know!"

"Perhaps you're proud of that?"

"I hate it, Rutter! I hate lots of things more than you think. You're in that little dormitory. You're well off. But I didn't come here expecting to find it all skittles. And I wouldn't be anywhere else if it was twenty times worse than it is!"

Rutter looked at the ungainly boy with the round shoulders and the hanging head; for the moment he was improved out of knowledge, his flat chest swelling, his big head thrown back, a proud flush upon his face. There was a touch of consciousness in the pride, but it was none the less real for that, and Jan could only marvel at it. He could not understand this pride of school; but he could see it, and envy it in his heart, even while a fresh sneer formed upon his lips. He wished he was not such an opposite extreme to Carpenter: he could not know that the other's attitude was possibly unique, that few at all events came to school with such ready-made enthusiasm for their school, if fewer still brought his own antagonism.

But, after all, Carpenter did not understand, and never would.

"You weren't in the quad just now," said Jan, grimly.

Chips looked the picture of guilt.

"I was. At the end. And I feel such a brute!"

"You? Why?" Jan was frowning at him. "You weren't one of them?"

"Of course I wasn't! But – I might have stood by you – and I didn't do a thing!"

The wish to show some spirit in his turn, the envious admiration for a quality of which he daily felt the want, both part and parcel of one young nature, like the romantic outlook upon school life,

were equally foreign and incomprehensible to the other. Jan could only see Carpenter floundering to the rescue, with his big head and his little wrists; and the vision made him laugh, though not unkindly.

“You *would* have been a fool,” he said.

“I wish I had been!”

“Then you must be as big a one as I was.”

“But you weren’t, Rutter! That’s just it. You don’t know!”

“I know I was fool enough to lose my wool, as they call it.”

“You mean man enough! I believe the chaps respect a chap who lets out without thinking twice about it,” said Carpenter, treading on a truth unawares. “I should always be frightened of being laughed at all the more,” he added, with one of his inward glances and the sigh it fetched. “But you’ve done better than you think. The fellows at the bottom of the house won’t hustle *you*. I heard Petrie telling them he’d never had his head smacked so hard in his life!”

Jan broke into smiles.

“I did catch him a warm ‘un,” he said. “I wish you’d been there.”

“I only wish it had been one of the big brutes,” said Chips, conceiving a Goliath in his thirst for the ideal.

“I don’t,” said Jan. “He was trading on them being there, and by gum he was right! But they didn’t prevent me from catching him a warm ‘un!”

And in his satisfaction the epithet almost rhymed with *harm*.

Nevertheless, Jan looked another and a brighter being as he stood up and asked Carpenter what his collar was like.

Carpenter had to tell him it was not fit to be seen.

Jan wondered where he could find the matron to give him a clean one.

“Her room’s at the top of the house near your dormitory. I daresay she’d be there.”

“I suppose I’d better go and see. Come on!”

“Shall we go down to the Upper together?” Chips asked as they reached the quad.

“I don’t mind.”

“Then I’ll wait, if you won’t be long.”

And the boy in the quad thought the other had quite forgotten his mad idea of cutting call-over – which was not far from the truth – and that he had not meant it for a moment – which was as far from the truth as it could be. But even Carpenter hardly realised that it was he who had put Rutter on better terms with himself, and in saner humour altogether, by the least conscious and least intentional of all his arguments.

Jan meanwhile was being informed upstairs that he was not supposed to go to his dormitory in daytime, but that since he was there he had better have a comfortable wash as well as a clean collar. So he came down looking perhaps smarter and better set-up than at any moment since his arrival. And at the foot of the stairs the hall door stood open, showing a boy or two within looking over the new illustrated papers; and one of the boys was young Petrie.

Jan stood a moment at the door. Either his imagination flattered him, or young Petrie’s right ear was still rather red. But he was a good type of small boy, clear-skinned, bright-eyed, well-groomed. And even as Jan watched him he cast down the *Graphic*, stretched himself, glanced at the clock, and smiled quite pleasantly as they stood face to face upon the threshold.

“I’m sorry,” said Jan, not as though he were unduly sorry, but yet without a moment’s thought.

“That’s all right, *Tiger!*” replied young Petrie, brightly. “But I wouldn’t lose my wool again, if I were you. It don’t pay, *Tiger*, you take my tip.”

## CHAPTER VI

### BOY TO BOY

The match on the Upper, although an impromptu fixture on the strength of an Indian summer's day, was exciting no small interest in the school. It was between the champion house at cricket and the best side that could be got together from all the other houses; and the interesting point was the pronounced unpopularity of the champions (one of the hill houses), due to the insufferable complacency with which they were said to have received the last of many honours. The whole house was accused of having "an awful roll on," and it was the fervent hope of the rest of the school that their delegates would do something to diminish this offensive characteristic. Boys were lying round the ground on rugs, and expressing their feelings after almost every ball, when Chips and Jan crept shyly upon the scene. But within five minutes a bell had tinkled on top of the pavilion; the game had been stopped because it was not a real match after all; and three or four hundred boys, most of them with rugs over their arms, huddled together in the vicinity of the heavy roller.

It so happened that Heriot was call-over master of the day. He stood against the roller in a weather-beaten straw hat, rapping out the names in his abrupt, unmistakable tones, with a lightning glance at almost every atom that said "Here, sir!" and detached itself from the mass. The mass was deflating rapidly, and Jan was moistening his lips before opening them for the first time in public, when a reddish head, whose shoulders were wedged not far in front of him, suddenly caught Jan's eye.

"Shockley."

"Here, sir."

"Nunn *minor*."

"Here, sir."

"Carpenter."

"Here, sir."

"Rutter."

No answer. Heriot looking up with pencil poised.

"Rutter?"

"Here, sir!"

And out slips Jan in dire confusion, to join Carpenter on the outskirts of the throng; to be cursed under Shockley's breath; and just to miss the stare of the boy with reddish hair, who has turned a jovial face on hearing the name for the second time.

"I say, Carpenter!"

"Yes?"

"Did you see who that was in front of us?"

"You bet! And they said he wasn't coming back till half-term! I'm going to wait for him."

"Then don't say anything about me – see? He never saw me, so don't say anything about me."

And off went Jan to watch the match, more excited than when he had lost self-control in the quad; the difference was that he did not lose it for a moment now. He heard the name of Devereux called over in its turn. He knew that Carpenter had joined Devereux a moment later. He wondered whether Devereux had seen him also – seen him from the first and pretended not to see him – or only this minute while talking to Chips? Was he questioning Chips, or telling him everything in a torrent?

Jan felt them looking at him, felt their glances like fire upon his neck and ears, as one told and the other listened. But he did not turn round. He swore in his heart that no power should induce him to turn round. And he kept his vow for minutes and minutes that seemed like hours and hours.

It was just as well, for he would have seen with his eyes exactly what he saw in his mind, and that was not all there was to see. There was something else that Jan must have seen – and might have

seen through – had his will failed him during the two minutes after call-over. That was the celerity with which Heriot swooped down upon Devereux and Carpenter; laid his hand upon the shoulder of the boy who had won his last term's prize; stood chatting energetically with the pair, chatting almost sharply, and then left them in his abrupt way with a nod and a smile.

But Jan stood square as a battalion under fire, watching a game in which he did not follow a single ball; and as he stood his mind changed, though not his will. He wanted to speak to Evan Devereux now. At least he wanted Evan to come and speak to him; in a few minutes, he was longing for that. But no Evan came. And when at length he did turn round, there was no Evan to come, and no Chips Carpenter either.

The game was in its last and most exciting stage when Jan took himself off the ground; feeling ran high upon the rugs, and expressed itself more shrilly and even oftener than before; and such a storm of cheering chanced to follow Jan into the narrow country street, that two boys quite a long way ahead looked back with one accord. They did not see Jan. They were on the sunny side; he was in the shade. But he found himself following Devereux and Carpenter perforce, because their way was his. He slackened his pace; they stopped at the market-place, and separated obviously against Carpenter's will. Carpenter pursued his way to Heriot's. Devereux turned to the left across the market-place, into the shadow of the old grey church with the dominant spire, with the blue-faced clock that struck in the night, and so to the school buildings and his own quad by the short cut from the hill. And Jan dogged him all the way, lagging behind when his unconscious leader stopped to greet a friend, or to look at a game of fives in the School House court, and in the end seeing Devereux safely into his study before he followed and gave a knock.

Evan had scarcely shut his door before it was open again, but in that moment he had cast his cap, and he stood bareheaded against the dark background of his tiny den, in a frame of cropped ivy. It was an effective change, and an effective setting, in his case. His hair was not red, but it was a pale auburn, and peculiarly fine in quality. In a flash Jan remembered it in long curls, and somebody saying, "What a pity he's not a girl!" And with this striking hair there had always been the peculiarly delicate and transparent skin which is part of the type; there had nearly always been laughing eyes, and a merry mouth; and here they all were in his study doorway, with hardly any difference that Jan could see, though he had dreaded all the difference in the world. And yet, the smile was not quite the old smile, and a flush came first; and Evan looked past Jan into the quad, before inviting him in; and even then he did not shake hands, as he had often done on getting home for the holidays, when Jan's hand was not fit to shake.

But he laughed quite merrily when the door was shut. And Jan, remembering that ready laugh of old, and how little had always served to ring a hearty peal, saw nothing forced or hurtful in it now, but joined in himself with a shamefaced chuckle.

"It is funny, isn't it?" he mumbled. "Me being here!"

"I know!" said Evan, with laughing eyes fixed none the less curiously on Jan.

"When did you get back?" inquired Jan, speedily embarrassed by the comic side.

"Only just this afternoon. I went and had mumps at home."

"That was a bad job," said Jan, solemnly. "It must have spoilt your holidays."

"It did, rather."

"You wouldn't expect to find me here, I suppose?"

"Never thought of it till I heard your name called over and saw it was you. I hear you're in Bob's house?"

"In Mr. Heriot's," affirmed Jan, respectfully.

"We don't 'mister' 'em behind their backs," said Evan, in tears of laughter. "It's awfully funny," he explained, "but I'm awfully glad to see you."

"Thanks," said Jan. "But it's not such fun for me, you know."

“I should have thought you’d like it awfully,” remarked Evan, still looking the new Jan merrily up and down.

“After the stables, I suppose you mean?”

Evan was more than serious in a moment.

“I wasn’t thinking of them,” he declared, with an indignant flush.

“But I was!” cried Jan. “And I’d give something to be back in them, if you want to know!”

“You won’t feel like that long,” said Evan, reassuringly.

“Won’t I!”

“Why should you?”

“I never wanted to come here, for one thing.”

“You’ll like it well enough, now you are here.”

“I hate it!”

“Only to begin with; lots of chaps do at first.”

“I always shall. I never wanted to come here; it wasn’t my doing, I can tell you.”

Evan stared, but did not laugh; he was now studiously kind in look and word, and yet there was something about both that strangely angered Jan. Look and word, in fact, were alike instinctively measured, and the kindness perfunctory if not exactly condescending. There was, to be sure, no conscious reminder, on Evan’s part, of past inequality; and yet there was just as little to show that in their new life Evan was prepared to treat Jan as an equal; nay, on their former footing he had been far more friendly. If his present manner augured anything, he was to be neither the friend nor the foe of Jan’s extreme hopes and fears. And the unforeseen mien was not the less confusing and exasperating because Jan was confused and exasperated without at the time quite knowing why.

“You needn’t think it was because you were here,” he added suddenly, aggressively – “because I thought you were at Winchester.”

“I didn’t flatter myself,” retorted Evan. “But, as a matter of fact, I should be there if I hadn’t got a scholarship here.”

“So I suppose,” said Jan.

“And yet I’m in the form below you!”

Evan was once more openly amused at this, and perhaps not so secretly annoyed as he imagined.

“I know,” said Jan. “That wasn’t my fault, either. I doubt they’ve placed me far too high.”

“But how did you manage to get half so high?” asked Evan, with a further ingenuous display of what was in his mind.

“Well, there was the vicar, to begin with.”

“That old sinner!” said Evan.

“I used to go to him three nights a week.”

“Now I remember.”

“Then you heard what happened when my father died?”

“Yes.”

“It would be a surprise to you, Master Evan?”

It had been on the tip of his tongue more than once, but until now he had found no difficulty in keeping it there. Yet directly they got back to the old days, out it slipped without a moment’s warning.

“You’d better not call me that again,” said Evan, dryly.

“I won’t.”

“Unless you want the whole school to know!”

“You see, my mother’s friends – ”

“I know. I’ve heard all about it. I always had heard – about your mother.”

Jan had only heard that pitiful romance from his father’s dying lips; it was then the boy had promised to obey her family in all things, and his coming here was the first thing of all. He said as much in his own words, which were bald and broken, though by awkwardness rather than emotion.

Then Evan asked, as it were in his stride, if Jan's mother's people had a "nice place," and other questions which might have betrayed to a more sophisticated observer a wish to ascertain whether they really were gentlefolk as alleged. Jan answered that it was "a nice enough place"; but he pointed to a photograph in an Oxford frame – the photograph of a large house reflected in a little artificial lake – a house with a slate roof and an ornamental tower, and no tree higher than the first-floor windows.

"That's a nicer place," said Jan, with a sigh.

"I daresay," Evan acquiesced, with cold complacency.

"There's nothing like that in Norfolk," continued Jan, with perfect truth. "Do you remember the first time you took me up to the tower?"

"I can't say I do."

"What! not when we climbed out on the roof?"

"I've climbed out on the roof so often."

"And there's our cottage chimney; and just through that gate we used to play 'snob'!"

Evan did not answer. He had looked at his watch, and was taking down some books. The hint was not to be ignored.

"Well, I only came to say it wasn't my fault," said Jan. "I never knew they were going to send me to the same school as you, or they'd have had a job to get me to come."

"Why?" asked Evan, more stiffly than he had spoken yet. "I shan't interfere with you."

"I'm sure you won't!" cried Jan, with the bitterness which had been steadily gathering in his heart.

"Then what's the matter with you? Do you think I'm going to tell the whole school all about you?"

Jan felt that he was somehow being put in the wrong; and assisted in the process by suddenly becoming his most sullen self.

"I don't know," he answered, hanging his head.

"You don't know! Do you think I'd think of such a thing?"

"I think a good many would."

"You think I would?"

"I don't say that."

"But you think it?"

Evan pressed him hotly.

"I don't think anything; and I don't care what anybody thinks of me, or what anybody knows!" cried Jan, not lying, but speaking as he had suddenly begun to feel.

"Then I don't know why on earth you came to me," said Evan scornfully.

"No more do I," muttered Jan; and out he went into the quad, and crossed it with a flaming face. But at the further side he turned. Evan's door was still open, as Jan had left it, but Evan had not come out.

Jan found him standing in the same attitude, with the book he had taken down, still unopened in his hand, and a troubled frown upon his face.

"What's the matter now?" asked Evan.

"I'm sorry – Devereux!"

"So am I."

"I might have known you wouldn't tell a soul."

"I think you might."

"And of course I don't want a soul to know. I thought I didn't care a minute ago. But I do care, more than enough."

"Well, no one shall hear from me. I give you my word about that."

"Thank you!"

Jan was holding out his hand.

“Oh, that’s all right.”

“Won’t you shake hands?”

“Oh, with pleasure, if you like.”

But the grip was all on one side.

## CHAPTER VII

### REASSURANCE

Jan went back to his house in a dull glow of injury and anger. But he was angriest with himself, for the gratuitous and unwonted warmth with which he had grasped an unresponsive hand. And the sense of injury abated with a little honest reflection upon its cause. After all, with such a different relationship so fresh in his mind, the Master Evan of the other day could hardly have said more than he had said this afternoon; in any case he could not have promised more. Jan remembered his worst fears; they at least would never be realised now. And yet, in youth, to escape the worst is but to start sighing for the best. Evan might be loyal enough. But would he ever be a friend? Almost in his stride Jan answered his own question with complete candour in the negative; and having faced his own conclusion, thanked his stars that Evan and he were in different houses and different forms.

Shockley was lounging against the palings outside the door leading to the studies; the spot appeared to be his favourite haunt. It was an excellent place for joining a crony or kicking a small boy as he passed. Jan was already preparing his heart for submission to superior force, and his person for any violence, when Shockley greeted him with quite a genial smile.

“Lot o’ parcels for you, Tiger,” said he. “I’ll give you a hand with ’em, if you like.”

“Thank you very much,” mumbled Jan, quite in a flutter. “But where will they be?”

“Where *will* they be?” the other murmured under his breath. “I’ll show you, Tiger.”

Jan could not help suspecting that Carpenter might be right after all. He had actually done himself good by his display of spirit in the quad! Young Petrie had been civil to him within an hour, and here was Shockley doing the friendly thing before the afternoon was out. He had evidently misjudged Shockley; he tried to make up for it by thanking him nearly all the way to the hall, which was full of fellows who shouted an embarrassing greeting as the pair passed the windows. They did not go into the hall, however, but stopped at the slate table at the foot of the dormitory stairs. It was covered with parcels of all sizes, on several of which Rutter read his name.

“Tolly-sticks – don’t drop ’em,” said Shockley, handing one of the parcels. “This feels like your table-cloth; that must be tollies; and all the rest are books. I’ll help you carry them over.”

“I can manage, thanks,” said Jan, uncomfortably. But Shockley would not hear of his “managing,” and led the way back past the windows, an ironical shout following them into the quad.

“You should have had the lot yesterday,” continued Shockley in the most fatherly fashion. “I should complain to Heriot, if I were you.”

Jan’s study had also been visited in his absence. A folding chair, tied up with string, stood against the wall, with billows of bright green creton bulging through string and woodwork; an absurd bit of Brussels carpet covered every inch of the tiny floor; and it also was an aggressive green, though of another and a still more startling shade.

“Curtains not come yet,” observed Shockley. “I suppose they’re to be green too?”

“I don’t know,” replied Rutter. “I left it to them.”

“I rather like your greens,” said Shockley, opening the long soft parcel. “Why, you’ve gone and got a red table-cloth!”

“It’s their doing, not mine,” observed Jan, phlegmatically.

“I wonder you don’t take more interest in your study,” said Shockley. “Most chaps take a pride in theirs. Red and green! It’ll spoil the whole thing; they don’t go, Tiger.”

Jan made some show of shaking off his indifference in the face of this kindly interest in his surroundings.

“They might change it, Shockley.”

"I wouldn't trust 'em," said that authority, shaking and scratching a bullet head by turns. "They're not too obliging, the tradesmen here – too much bloated monopoly. If you take my advice you'll let well alone."

"Then I will," said Jan, eagerly. "Thanks, awfully, Shockley!"

"Not that it *is* well," resumed Shockley, as though the matter worried him. "A green table-cloth's the thing for you, Tiger, and a green table-cloth you must have if we can work it."

"It's very good of you to bother," said Jan, devoutly wishing he would not.

Shockley only shook his head.

"I've got one myself, you see," he explained in a reflective voice, as he examined the red cloth critically. "It's a better thing than this – better taste – and green – but I'd rather do a swop with you than see you spoil your study, Tiger."

"Very well," said Jan, doubtfully.

Shockley promptly tucked the new table-cloth under his arm. "Let's see your tolly-sticks!" said he, briskly.

"Tolly-sticks?"

"Candle-sticks, you fool!"

Jan unpacked them, noting as he did so that the fatherly tone had been dropped.

"I suppose you wouldn't like a real old valuable pair instead of these meagre things?"

"No, thanks, Shockley."

"Well, anyhow you must have a picture or two."

"Why must I?" asked Jan. He had suddenly remembered Carpenter's story of the seven-and-sixpenny chair.

"Because I've got the very pair for you, and going cheap."

"I see," said Jan, in his driest Yorkshire voice.

"Oh, *I* don't care whether you've a study or a sty!" cried Shockley, and away he went glaring, but with the new cloth under his arm. In a minute he was back with the green one rolled into a ball, which he flung in Jan's face. "There you are, you fool, and I'm glad you like your own colour!" he jeered as he slammed the door behind him.

Neither had Jan much mercy on himself, when he had fitted two candles into the two new china sticks, and lit them with a wax match from the shilling box included in his supplies. Shockley's table-cloth might once have been green, but long service had reduced it to a more dubious hue; it was spotted with ink and candle-grease, and in one place cut through with a knife. To Jan, indeed, one table-cloth was like another; he was only annoyed to think he had been swindled as badly as Carpenter, by the same impudent impostor, and with Carpenter's experience to put him on his guard. But even in his annoyance the incident appealed to that prematurely grim sense of the ironic which served Jan Rutter for the fun and nonsense of the ordinary boy; and on the whole he thought it wiser to avoid another row by saying no more about it.

But he was not suffered to keep his resolution to the letter: at tea Buggins and Eyre *major* were obviously whispering about Jan before Buggins asked him across the table how he liked his new table-cloth.

"I suppose you mean Shockley's old one?" retorted Jan at once. "It'll do all right; but it's a good bargain for Shockley."

"A bargain's a bargain," remarked Buggins with his mouth full.

"And a Jew's a Jew!" said Jan.

The nice pair glared at him, and glanced at Shockley, who was two places higher up than Jan, but deep in ingratiating conversation with a good-looking fellow on his far side.

"God help you when the Shocker hears that!" muttered Buggins under his breath.

"You'll be murdered before you've been here a week, you brute!" added Eyre *major* with a titter.

"I may be," said Jan, "but not by you – you prize pig!"

And, much as he was still to endure from the trio in his form and house, this was the last Jan heard directly of the matter. Whether his reckless words ever reached the ears of Shockley, or whether the truth was in them, Jan never knew. As a good hater, however, he always felt that apart from thick lips, heavy nostrils, pale eyes and straight light hair, his arch-enemy combined all the most objectionable characteristics of Jew and Gentile.

So this stormy Saturday came to a comparatively calm close, and Jan was left to wrestle in peace with a Latin prose set by Mr. Haigh at second school. On other nights everybody went back to his form-master after tea, for a bout of preparation falsely called "private work"; but on Saturdays some kind of composition was set throughout the school, was laboriously evolved in the solitude of the study, and signed by the house-master after prayers that night or on the Sunday morning. Unfortunately, composition was Jan's weak point. By the dim light of the dictionary, with the frail support of a Latin grammar, he could grope his way through a page of Cæsar or of Virgil without inevitably plunging to perdition; but the ability to cast English back into Latin implies a point of scholarship which Jan had not reached by all the forced marches of the past few months. He grappled with his prose until head and hand perspired in the warm September evening. He hunted up noun after noun in his new English-Latin, and had a shot at case after case. And when at length his fair copy was food for Haigh's blue pencil, and Jan leant back to survey his own two candles and his own four walls, he was conscious, in the first place, that he had been taken out of himself, and in the second that a study to oneself was a mitigating circumstance in school life.

Not that he disliked his dormitory either; there, nothing was said to him about the row in the quad, of which in fact he had heard very little since it occurred. He was embarrassed, however, by a command from Joyce to tell a story after the gas was out; stories were not at all in Jan's line; and the situation was only relieved by Bingley's sporting offer to stand proxy in the discharge of what appeared to be a traditional debt on the part of all new boys entering that house. Bingley, permitted to officiate as a stop-gap only, launched with much gusto and more minutiae into a really able account of a revolting murder committed in the holidays. Murders proved to be Bingley's strong point; his face would glow over the less savoury portions of the papers in hall; and that night his voice was still vibrating with unctuous horror when Jan got off to sleep.

The school Sunday in his time was not desecrated by a stroke of work; breakfast of course was later, and Heriot himself deliberately late for prayers, which were held in the houses as on the first day of the term, instead of in the big school-room. Chapel seemed to monopolise morning and afternoon. Yet there was time for a long walk after either chapel, and abundant time for letter-writing after dinner. Not that Jan availed himself of the opportunity; he had already posted a brief despatch to the rectory, and nowhere else was there a soul who could possibly care to hear from him. He spent the latter end of the morning in a solitary stroll along a very straight country road, and the hour after dinner over a yellow-back borrowed from Chips.

Morning chapel had been quite a revelation to Jan. He had been forced to go to church in Norfolk; he went to chapel in the stoical spirit born of chastening experience. Yet there was something in the very ringing of the bells that might have prepared him for brighter things; they were like joy-bells in their almost merry measure. The service proved bright beyond belief. The chapel itself was both bright and beautiful. It was full of sunlight and fresh air, it lacked the heavy hues and the solemn twilight which Jan associated with a place of worship. The responses came with a hearty and unanimous ring. The psalms were the quickest thing in church music that Jan had ever heard; they went with such a swing that he found himself trying to sing for the first time in his life. His place in chapel had not yet been allotted to him, and he stood making his happily inaudible effort between two tail-coated veterans with stentorian lungs. Crowning merit of the morning service, there was no sermon; but in the afternoon the little man with the imperious air grew into a giant in his marble pulpit, and impressed Jan so powerfully that he wondered again how the fellows could call him Jerry, until he looked round and saw some of them nodding in their chairs. Then he found that

he had lost the thread himself, that he could not pick it up again, that everything escaped him except a transfigured face and a voice both stern and tender. But these were flag and bugle to the soldier concealed about most young boys, and Jan for one came out of chapel at quick march.

The golden autumn day was still almost at its best, but Jan had no stomach for another lonely walk. A really lonely walk would have been different; but to go off by oneself, and to meet hundreds in sociable twos and threes, with linked arms and wagging tongues, was to cut too desolate a figure before the world. Carpenter apparently had found a friend; at least Jan saw him obviously waiting for one after chapel; yet hardly had he settled to his novel, than a listless step was followed by the banging of the study door next his own.

"I thought you'd gone for a walk," said Jan, when he had gained admission by pounding on Carpenter's door.

"Did you! You thought wrong, then."

Carpenter smiled as though to temper an ungraciousness worthier of Jan, but the effort was hardly a success. He was reclining in a chair with a leg-rest, under the window opposite the door. He had already put up a number of pictures and brackets, and photograph frames in the plush of that period. Everything was very neat and nice, and there was a notable absence of inharmonious or obtrusive shades.

"How on earth did you open the door from over there?" asked Jan.

"Lazy-pull," said Carpenter, showing off a cord running round three little walls and ending in a tassel at his elbow. "You can buy 'em all ready at Blunt's."

"You *have* got fettle'd up," remarked Jan, "and no mistake!"

Carpenter opened his eyes at the uncouth participle.

"I want to have a good study," he said. "I've one or two pictures to put up yet, and I've a good mind to do them now."

"You wouldn't like to come for a walk instead?"

The suggestion was very shyly made, and as candidly considered by Chips Carpenter.

"Shall I?" he asked himself aloud.

"You might as well," said Jan without pressing it.

"I'm not sure that I mightn't."

And off they went, but not with linked arms, or even very close together; for Chips still seemed annoyed at something or other, and for once not in a mood to talk about it or anything else. It was very unlike him; and a small boy is not unlike himself very long. They took the road under the study windows, left the last of the little town behind them, dipped into a wooded hollow, and followed a couple far ahead over a stile and along a right-of-way through the fields; and in the fields, bathed in a mellow mist, and as yet but thinly dusted with the gold of autumn, Carpenter found his tongue. He expatiated on this new-found freedom, this intoxicating licence to roam where one would within bounds of time alone, a peculiar boon to the boy from a private school, and one that Jan appreciated as highly as his companion. It was not the only thing they agreed about that first Sunday afternoon. Jan was in a much less pugnacious mood than usual, and Carpenter less ponderously impressed with every phase of their new life. They exchanged some prejudices, and compared a good many notes, as they strolled from stile to stile. Haigh came in for some sharp criticism from his two new boys; the uncertainty of his temper was already apparent to them; but Heriot, as yet a marked contrast in that respect, hardly figured in the conversation at all. A stray remark, however, elicited the fact that Carpenter, who had disappeared in the morning directly after prayers, had actually been to breakfast with Heriot on the first Sunday of his first term.

Jan was not jealous; from his primitive point of view the master was the natural enemy of the boy; and he was not at the time surprised when Carpenter dismissed the incident as briefly as though he were rather ashamed of it. He would have thought no more of the matter but for a chance encounter as they crossed their last stile and came back into the main road.

Swinging down the middle of the road came a trio arm-in-arm, full of noisy talk, and so hilarious that both boys recognised Evan Devereux by his laugh before they saw his face. Evan, on his side, must have been almost as quick to recognise Carpenter, who was first across the stile, for he at once broke away from his companions.

“I’m awfully sorry!” he cried. “I quite forgot I’d promised these fellows when I promised you.”

“It doesn’t matter a bit,” said Carpenter, in a rather unconvincing voice.

“You didn’t go waiting about for me, did you?”

“Not long,” replied Carpenter, dryly.

“Well, I really am awfully sorry; but, you see, I’d promised these men at the end of last term, and I quite forgot about it this morning at Heriot’s.”

“I see.”

“I won’t do it again, I swear.”

“You won’t get the chance!” muttered Carpenter, as Devereux ran after his companions. He looked at his watch, and turned to Jan. “There’s plenty of time, Rutter. Which way shall we go?”

Jan came out of the shadow of the hedge; he had remained instinctively in the background, and had no reason to think that Evan had seen him. Certainly their eyes had never met. And yet there had been something in Evan’s manner, something pointed in his fixed way of looking at Carpenter and not beyond him, something that might have left a doubt in Jan’s mind if a greater doubt had not already possessed it.

“Which way shall we turn?” Carpenter repeated as Jan stood looking at him strangely.

“Neither way, just yet a bit,” said Jan, darkly. “I want to ask you something first.”

“Right you are.”

“There are not so many here that you could say it for, so far as I can see,” continued Jan, the inscrutable: “but from what I’ve seen of you, Carpenter, I don’t believe you’d tell me a lie.”

“I’d try not to,” said the other, smiling, yet no easier than Jan in his general manner.

“That’s good enough for me,” said Jan. “So what did Devereux mean just now by talking about ‘this morning at Heriot’s’?”

“Oh, he had breakfast with Heriot, too; didn’t I tell you?”

“No; you didn’t.”

“Well, I never supposed it would interest you.”

“Although I told you I knew something about him at home!”

The two were facing each other, eye to eye. Those of Jan were filled with a furious suspicion.

“I wonder you didn’t speak to him just now,” remarked Carpenter, looking at his nails.

“He never saw me; besides, I’d gone and said all I’d got to say to him yesterday in his study.”

“I see.”

“Didn’t Devereux tell you I’d been to see him?”

“Oh, I think he said he’d seen you, but that was all.”

“At breakfast this morning?”

“Yes.”

“Did Heriot ask him anything about me?”

“No.”

“Has he told you anything about me at home, Chips?”

“Hardly anything.”

“How much?”

“Only that he hardly knew you; that was all,” declared Carpenter, looking Jan in the face once more. “And I must say I don’t see what you’re driving at, Rutter!”

“You’d better go and ask Devereux,” said Jan, unworthily; but, as luck would have it, he could not have diverted his companion’s thoughts more speedily if he had tried.

“Devereux? I don’t go near him!” he cried. “He promised to wait for me after chapel, and he cut me for those fellows we saw him with just now.”

“Although you were friends at the same private school?”

“If you call that friendship! He never wrote to me all last term, though I wrote twice to him!”

“I suppose that would be why Heriot asked you both to breakfast,” said Jan, very thoughtfully, as they began walking back together. “I mean, you both coming from the same school.”

“What? Oh, yes, of course it was.”

Jan threw one narrow look over his shoulder.

“Of course it was!” he agreed, and walked on nodding to himself.

“But he didn’t know Evan Devereux, or he’d have known that an old friend was nothing to him!”

“I wouldn’t be too sure,” said Jan with gentle warmth. “I wouldn’t be too sure, if I were you.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### LIKES AND DISLIKES

By the beginning of October there was a bite in the air, and either fives or football every afternoon; and before the middle of the month Jan began now and then to feel there might be worse places than a public school. He had learnt his way about. He could put a name to all his house and form. He was no longer strange; and on the whole he might have disliked things more than he did. There was much that he did dislike, instinctively and individually; but there was a good deal that he could not help enjoying, over and above the football and the fives. There was the complete freedom out of school, the complete privacy of the separate study, above all the amazing absence of anything in the way of espionage by the masters. These were all surprises to Jan; but they were counterbalanced by some others, such as the despotic powers of the præpostors, which only revived the spirit of sensitive antagonism in which he had come to school. The præpostors wore straw hats, had fags, and wielded hunting-crops to keep the line at football matches. This was a thing that made Jan's blood boil; he marvelled that no one else seemed to take it as an indignity, or to resent the authority of these præpostors as he did. Then there were boys like Shockley whom he could cheerfully have attended on the scaffold. And there was one man he very soon detested more than any boy.

That man was Mr. Haigh, the master of the Middle Remove; and Jan's view of him was perhaps no fairer than his treatment of Jan. Haigh, when not passing more or less unworthy pleasantries, and laughing a great deal at very little indeed, was a serious and even passionate scholar. He had all the gifts of his profession except coolness and a right judgment of boys. His enthusiasm was splendid. The willing dullard caught fire in his form. The gifted idler was obliged to work for Haigh. He had hammered knowledge into all sorts and conditions of boys; but here was one who would get up and wring the sense out of a page of Virgil, and then calmly ask Haigh to believe him incapable of parsing a passage or of scanning a line of that page! Of course Haigh believed no such thing, and of course Jan would vouchsafe no explanation of his inconceivable deficiencies. Pressed for one, indeed, or on any other point arising from his outrageously unequal equipment, Jan invariably sulked, and Haigh invariably lost his temper and called Jan elaborate names. The more offensive they were, the better care Jan took to earn them. Sulky he was inclined to be by nature; sulkier he made himself when he found that it exasperated Haigh more than the original offence.

Loder, the captain of his house, was another object of Jan's dislike. Loder was not only a præpostor, who lashed your legs in public with a hunting-crop, but he was generally accounted a bit of a prig and a weakling into the bargain, and Jan thought he deserved his reputation. Loder had a great notion of keeping order in the house, but his actual tactics were to pounce upon friendless wretches like Chips or Jan, and not to interfere with stalwarts of the Shockley gang, or even with popular small boys like young Petrie. Nor was it necessary for Jan to be caught out of his study after lock-up, or throwing stones in the quad, in order to incur the noisy displeasure of the captain of the house. Loder heard of the daily trouble with Haigh; it was all over the house, thanks to Shockley & Co., whose lurid tales had the unforeseen effect of provoking a certain admiration for "the new man who didn't mind riling old Haigh." Indifference on such a point implied the courage of the matador – to all who had been gored aforetime in the Middle Remove – save and except the serious Loder. Passing Jan's door one day, this exemplary præpostor looked in to tell him he was disgracing the house, and stayed to inquire what on earth he meant by having such a filthy study. The epithet was inexact; but certainly the study was ankle-deep in books and papers, with bare walls still bristling with the last tenant's nails; and it was not improved by a haunting smell of sulphur and tallow, due to the recent firing of the shilling box of wax matches.

“It says nothing about untidy studies in the School Rules,” said Jan, tilting his chair back from his table, and glowering at his interrupted imposition.

“Don’t you give me any cheek!” cried Loder, looking dangerous for him.

“But it does say,” continued Jan, quoting a characteristic canon with grim deliberation, “that ‘a boy’s study is his castle,’ Loder!”

Jan had to pick himself up, and then his chair, with an ear that tingled no more than Jan deserved. But this was not one of the events that rankled in his mind. He had made a swaggering præpostor look the fool he was; no smack on the head could rob him of the recollection.

With such a temper it is no wonder that Jan remained practically friendless. Yet he might have made friends among the smaller fry below him in the house; and there was one unathletic boy of almost his own age, but really high up in the school, whose advances were summarily repulsed because they appeared to Jan to betray some curiosity about his people and his home. It was only human that the lad should be far too suspicious on all such points; the pity was that this often made him more forbidding and hostile in his manner than he was at heart. But in all his aversions and suspicions there was no longer a hard or a distrustful thought of Evan Devereux, though Jan and he had not spoken since that first Saturday, and though they often met upon the hill or in the street without exchanging look or nod.

Otherwise his likes were not so strong as his dislikes, or at any rate not so ready; and yet in his heart even Jan soon found himself admiring a number of fellows to whom he never dreamt of speaking before they spoke to him. Head and chief of these was *Cave major*, who was already in the Eleven, and who got his football colours after the first match. How the whole house clapped him in hall that night at tea! The only notice he had ever taken of Jan was to relieve him of Carpenter’s yellow-back novel, which the great man read and passed on to another member of the Fifteen in another house. To the owner of the book that honour was sufficient solace; but neither new boy had ever encountered quite so heroic a figure as the great Charles Cave. Then there was Sprawson – Mother Sprawson, to Cave and Loder – reputed a tremendous runner, but seen to be several things besides. Sprawson amused Jan immensely by carrying an empty spirit-flask in his pocket, and sometimes behaving as though he had just emptied it; he was rather a bully, but more of a humorist, who would administer a whole box of pills prescribed for himself to some unfortunate urchin in no need of them; and yet when he drew Jan in the house fives, and was consequently knocked out in the first round, nobody could have taken a defeat or treated a partner better. Then there were Stratten and Jellicoe. Stratten seemed a very perfect gentleman, and Jellicoe a distinct though fiery one; they were always about arm-in-arm together, or playing fives on the inner court; and Jan enjoyed watching them when he could not get a game himself on the outer. At closer range he developed a more intimate appreciation of Joyce, with his bad language and his good heart, and of Bingley and his joyous interest in violent crime.

As for old Bob Heriot, he completely upset all Jan’s ideas about schoolmasters. He was never in the least angry, yet even *Cave major* looked less dashing in his presence, and the likes of Shockley ludicrously small. Not that his house saw too much of Heriot. He was not the kind of master who is continually in and out of his own quad. His sway was felt rather than enforced. But he had a brisk and cheery word with the flower of the house most nights after prayers, and somehow Jan and others of his size generally lingered in the background to hear what he had to say; he never embarrassed them by taking too much notice of them before their betters, and seldom chilled them by taking none at all. The Shockley fraternity, however, had not a good word to say for poor Mr. Heriot. And that was not the least of his merits in Jan’s eyes.

On Sunday evenings between tea and prayers it was Heriot’s practice to make a round of the studies, staying for a few minutes’ chat in each; and on the second Sunday of the term he gave Jan rather more than his time allowance. But he seemed to notice neither the stark ugliness of the uncovered walls, nor the heavy fall of waste paper; and though he did speak of Jan’s difficulties in form, he treated them also in a very different manner from that employed by the captain of his house.

The truth was that Haigh had said a good deal about the matter to Heriot, and Heriot very little to Haigh, whose tongue was as intemperate out of school as it was in form. But to Jan he spoke plainly on this second Sunday evening of the term.

“It’s obvious that you were placed a form too high. Such mistakes will occur; there’s no way of avoiding them altogether; the question is, shall we try to rectify this one? It’s rather late in the day, but I’ve known it done; the Head Master might allow it again. It would rest with him, so you had better not speak of it for the present. I mean, of course, that he might allow you to come down to Mr. Walrond’s form, or even into mine.”

At which Jan displayed some momentary excitement, and then sat stolidly embarrassed.

“It would be a desperate remedy, Rutter; it would mean your being a fag, after first escaping fagging altogether; in fact, it would be starting all over again. I don’t say it wouldn’t make your work easier for you during the whole time you’re here. But I shall quite understand it if you prefer the evils that you know.”

“It isn’t the fagging. It isn’t that I shouldn’t like being in your form, sir,” Jan blurted out. “But I don’t want to run away from Mr. Haigh!” he mumbled through his teeth.

“Well, you’d only have to fight another day, if you did,” said Heriot, with a laugh. And so the matter went no further; and not another boy or master in the school ever knew that it had gone so far.

But the being of whom Jan saw most, and the only one to whom he spoke his odd mind freely, was the other new man, Carpenter, now Chips to all the house. And Chips was another oddity in his way; but it was not Jan’s way at any single point. Chips had always been intended for a public school. But in some respects he was far less fit for one than Jan. To be at this school was to realise the dream of his life; but it was not the dream that it had been before it came true, and the dreamer took this extraordinary circumstance to heart, though he had the character to keep it to himself. Jan was the last person to whom he would have admitted it; he still stood up for the school in all their talks, and gloried in being where he was; but it was none the less obvious that he was not so happy as he tried to appear.

Chips’s troubles, to be sure, were not in form; they were almost entirely out of school, just where Jan got on best. Chips’s skin was thinner; the least taunt hurt his feelings, and he hid them less successfully than Jan could hide his. He was altogether more squeamish; lying and low talk were equally abhorrent to him; he would not smile, and had the courage to confess his repugnance under pressure, but not the force of personality to render a protest other than ineffectual. Such things ran like water from off Jan’s broader back; he was not particularly attracted or repelled.

One bad half-hour that the pair spent together almost daily was that between breakfast and second school. It was the recognised custom for fellows in the same house and form to prepare their construe together; this took Carpenter and Rutter most mornings into Shockley’s study, where Buggins and Eyre *major* completed the symposium. On a Virgil morning there would be interludes in which poor Chips felt himself a worm for sitting still; even when Thucydides claimed closer attention there was a lot of parenthetical swearing. But Chips – whose Greek was his weak point – endured it all as long as the work itself was fairly done.

One morning, however, as Jan was about to join the rest, Chips burst in upon him, out of breath, and stood with his back to Jan’s bare wall.

“They’ve gone and got a crib!” he gasped.

“What of?”

“Thicksides.”

“And a jolly good job!” said Jan.

Chips looked as though he distrusted his ears.

“You don’t mean to say you’ll use it, Tiger?”

“Why not?”

“It’s so – at least I mean it seems to me – so jolly unfair!”

Chips had stronger epithets on the tip of his tongue; but that of “pi” had been freely applied to himself; and it rankled in spite of all his principles.

“Not so unfair as sending you to a hole like this against your will,” retorted Jan, “and putting you two forms too high when you get here.”

“That’s another thing,” said Chips, for once without standing up for the “hole,” perhaps because he knew that Jan had called it one for his benefit.

“No; it’s all the same thing. Is that beast Haigh fair to me?”

“I don’t say he is – ”

“Then I’m blowed if I see why I should be fair to him.”

“I wasn’t thinking of Haigh,” said Chips. “I was thinking of the rest of the form who don’t use a crib, Tiger.”

“That’s their look-out,” said the Tiger, opening his door with the little red volume of Thucydides in his other hand.

“Then you’re going to Shockley’s study just the same?”

“Rather! Aren’t you?”

“I’ve been. I came out again.”

“Because of the crib?”

“Yes.”

“Did you tell them so, Chips?”

“I had to; and – and of course they heaved me out, Tiger! And I’ll never do another line with the brutes!”

He turned away; he was quite husky. Jan watched him with a shrug and a groan, hesitated, and then slammed his door.

“Aren’t you going, Tiger?” cried Chips, face about at the sound. “Don’t mind me, you know! I can sweat it out by myself.”

“Well you’re not going to,” growled Jan, flinging the little red book upon the table. “I’d rather work with an old ass like you, Chips, than a great brute like Shockley!”

So that alliance was cemented, and Chips at any rate was Jan’s friend for life. But Jan was slower to reciprocate so strong a feeling; his nature was much less demonstrative and emotional; moreover, the term he had applied to Carpenter was by no means one of mere endearment. There was in fact a good deal about Chips that appealed to Jan as little as to the other small boys in the house. He was indubitably “pi”; he thought too much of his study; he took in all kinds of magazines, and went in for the competitions, being mad about many things including cricket, but no earthly good at fives, and not allowed to play football. He had some bronchial affection that prevented him from running, and often kept him out of first school. “Sloper” and “sham” were neither of them quite the name for him; but both became unpleasantly familiar in the ears of Carpenter during the first half of his first term; and there was just enough excuse for them to keep such a lusty specimen as Jan rather out of sympathy with a fellow who neither got up in the morning nor played games like everybody else.

Nevertheless, they could hardly have seen more of each other than they did. They went up and down the hill together, for Chips was always at Jan’s elbow after school, and never sooner than when Jan had made a special fool of himself in form. Chips was as little to be deterred by the gibes of the rest on the way back, as by the sullen silence in which the Tiger treated his loyalty and their scorn. If Rutter had recovered tone enough to play fives after twelve, Carpenter was certain to be seen looking over the back wall; and as sure as Jan went up to football in the afternoon, Chips went with him in his top-coat, and followed the game wistfully at a distance. Down they would come together when the game was over, as twilight settled on the long stone street, and tired players shod in mud tramped heavily along either pavement. Now was Chips’s chance for the daily papers before the roaring fire in hall, while Jan changed with the rest in the lavatory; and as long as either had a tizzy there was just time for cocoa and buns at the nearest confectioner’s before third school.

The nearest confectioner's was not the fashionable school resort, but it was quite good enough for the rank and file of the lower forms. The cocoa was coarse and thick, and the buns not always fresh; but the boys had dined at half-past one; tea in hall was not till half-past six; and even then there was only bread-and-butter to eat unless a fellow had his own supplies. Jan had not been provided with a hamper at the beginning of the term, or with very many shillings by way of pocket-money; he would have starved rather than write for either, for it was seldom enough that he received so much as a letter from his new home. But it did strike him as a strange thing that a public-school boy should habitually go hungrier to bed than a coachman's son at work about his father's stables.

Milk and "dog-rocks" were indeed provided last thing at night and first thing in the morning; but if you chose to get up late there was hardly time for a mouthful as you sped out of the quad and along the street to prayers, buttoning your waistcoat as you ran. This was not often Jan's case, but it was on the morning after the match between his house and another in the first round of the Under Sixteen. Heriot's had won an exciting game, and Jan was conscious of having done his share in the bully. He was distinctly muscular for his age, and had grown perceptibly in even these few weeks at school. His sleep was haunted by an intoxicating roar of "Reds!" (his side's colour for the nonce) and stinging counter cries of "Whites!" Once at least he had actually heard his own nickname shouted in approval by some big fellow of his house; and he heard it all again as he dressed and dashed out, on a particularly empty stomach, into a dark and misty morning, with the last bell flagging as if it must stop with every stroke; he heard it above his own palpitations all through prayers; on his knees he was down in another bully, smelling the muddy ball, thirsting to feel it at his feet again.

It chanced to be a mathematical morning, and Jan felt thankful as he went his way after prayers; for he was not in Haigh's mathematical, but in the Spook's; and the Spook was a peculiarly innocuous master, who had a class-room in his quarters in the town, but not a house.

"The Thirteenth Proposition of the First Book of Euclid," sighed the Spook, exactly as though he were giving out a text in Chapel. "Many of you seem to have found so much difficulty over this that I propose to run over it again, if you will kindly hold your tongues. Hold your tongue, Kingdon! Another word from *you*, Pedley, and you'll have whipping in front of you – or rather behind you!"

The little joke was a stock felicity of the Spook's, and it was received in the usual fashion. At first there was a little titter, but nothing more until the Spook himself was seen to wear a sickly smile; thereupon the titter grew into a roar, and the roar rose into a bellow, and the bellow into one prolonged and insolent guffaw which the cadaverous but smiling Spook seemed to enjoy as much as the smallest boy in his mathematical. Jan alone did not join in the derisive chorus; to him it sounded almost as though it were in another room; and the figure of the Spook, standing before his blackboard, holding up a piece of chalk for silence, had become a strangely nebulous and wavering figure.

"The angles that one straight line makes with another straight line," began the Spook at last, in a voice that Jan could hardly hear, "are together equal ... together equal ... together equal ..."

Jan wondered how many more times he was to hear those two words; his head swam with them; the Spook had paused, and was staring at him with fixed eyes and open mouth; and yet the words went on ringing in the swimming head, fainter and fainter, and further and further away, as Jan fell headlong into the unfathomable pit of insensibility.

He came to earth and life on a dilapidated couch in the Spook's study, where the Spook himself was in the act of laying him down, and of muttering in sepulchral tones, "A little faint, I fear!"

Jan had never fainted before, and in his heart he was rather proud of the achievement; but he was thankful that he had chosen the one first school of the week that was given over to mathematics. He would have been very sorry to have come to himself in the arms of Haigh. The Spook was a man who had obviously mistaken his vocation; but it was least obvious when mere kindness and goodness were required of him. Jan was detained in his study half the morning, and regaled with tea and toast and things to read. Heriot also looked in before second school, but was rather brusque and unsympathetic (after the Spook) until Jan ventured to say he hoped he would be allowed to play

football that afternoon, as he had never felt better in his life. Heriot said that was a question for the doctor, who would be in to see Jan during the forenoon.

The doctor came, and Jan could not remember the last time a doctor had been to see him. This one sat over him with a long face, felt his pulse, peered into his eyes, looked as wise as an owl at the other end of his stethoscope, and then began asking questions in a way that put Jan very much on his guard.

“So you’ve been playing football for your house?”

“Yessir – Under Sixteen.”

“I suppose you played football before you came here?”

“No, sir,” said Jan, beginning to feel uncomfortable.

“Weren’t you allowed?”

This question came quickly, but Jan took his time over it as coolly as he could. Obviously the doctor little dreamt that this was his first school. On no account must he suspect it now. And it was true, as it happened, that his father had once and for all forbidden Jan to play football with Master Evan, because he played so roughly.

“No, sir.”

“You were not allowed?”

“No, sir.”

“Do you know why?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, I think I do,” said the doctor, rising. “And you mustn’t play here, either, at any rate for the present.”

Jan shot upright on the sofa.

“Your heart isn’t strong enough,” said the doctor.

“My heart’s all right!” cried Jan, indignantly.

“Perhaps you’ll allow me to be the best judge of that,” returned the doctor. “You may go back to your house, and I shall send a line to Mr. Heriot. There’s no reason why you should lie up; this is Saturday, you’ll be quite fit for school on Monday; but no football, mind, until I give you leave.”

Jan tried to speak, but he had tied his own tongue. He could not explain to the doctor, he could not explain to Heriot. He did not know why he had fainted for the first time in his life that morning; he only knew that it was not his heart, that he had never felt better than after yesterday’s match. And now he was to be deprived of the one thing he liked at school, the one thing he was by way of getting good at, his one chance of showing what was in him to those who seemed to think there was nothing at all! And another Under Sixteen house-match would be played next week, perhaps against Haigh, who had also won their tie. And all he would be able to do would be to stand by yelling “Reds!” and having his shins lashed by some beastly præpostor, and hearing himself bracketed with Chips as a “sham” and a “sloper” – and knowing it was true!

That was the worst of it. His heart was all right. It was all a complete misunderstanding and mistake. It was a mistake that Jan knew he could have set right by going to Heriot and explaining why he had never played football before, and why it was barely true to say that he had not been allowed.

But Jan was not going to anybody to say anything of the kind.

## CHAPTER IX

### CORAM POPULO

On the notice-board in the colonnade there was a sudden announcement which no new boy could understand. It was to the effect that Professor Abinger would pay his annual visit on the Monday and Tuesday of the following week. Neither Carpenter nor Rutter had ever heard his name before, and, on the way up the hill to second school, they inquired of Rawlinson, the small fellow in his own house whom Haigh had begun reviling on the first morning of the term.

“Who’s Abinger?” repeated Rawlinson. “You wait and see! You’ll love him, Tiger, as much as I do!”

“Why shall I?” asked Jan, who liked Rawlinson, and only envied him his callous gaiety under oppression.

“Because he’ll get us off two days of old Haigh,” said Rawlinson, capering as though the two days would never end.

“Don’t hustle!”

“I’m not hustling. I take my oath I’m not. Grand old boy, Abinger, besides being just about the biggest bug alive on elocution!”

“Who says so?”

“Jerry, for one! Anyhow he comes down twice a year, and takes up two whole days, barring first school and private work; that’s why Abinger’s a man to love.”

“But what does he do? Give us readings all the time?” asked Chips, one of whose weaknesses was the inane question.

“Give *us* readings? I like that!” cried Rawlinson, shouting with laughter. “It’s the other way about, my good ass!”

“Do we have to read to him?”

“Every mother’s son of us, before the whole school, and all the masters and the masters’ wives!”

Chips went on asking questions, and Jan was only silent because he took a greater interest in the answers than he cared to show. The ordeal foreshadowed by Rawlinson was indeed rather alarming to a new boy with an accent which had already exposed him to some contumely. Yet his ear, sharpened by continual travesties of his speech, informed Jan that he was by no means the only boy in the school whose vowels were of eccentric breadth. It was a point on which he was not unduly sensitive, but, in his heart, only too willing to improve. He was, however, more on his guard against the outlandish word and the rustic idiom, which still cropped up in his conversation, but could not possibly affect his reading aloud. The result of the last reflection was that Jan subdued his fears, and rejoiced with Rawlinson at the prospect of a break in the term’s work.

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