

Then his house-master, Rutford, had told John where to buy his first straw hat.

"You can get one without an order at the beginning of each term," said he, in a thick, rasping voice. "But you must ask me for an order if you want a second."

Then he had shown John his room, to be shared with two other boys, and had told him the hour of lock-up. And then, after tea, came the walk down the hill, the tip, the firm grasp of the sinewy hand, and a final—"God bless you."

Coming to the end of these reflections, confronted by the inexorable future, and the necessity, no less inexorable, of stepping into it, John passed through the gate. His heart fluttered furiously, and the lump in the throat swelled inconveniently. John, however, had provided himself with a "cure-all." Plunging his hand into his pocket, he pulled out a cartridge, an unused twenty-bore gun cartridge. Looking at this, John smiled. When he smiled he became good-looking. The face, too long, plain, but full of sense and humour, rounded itself into the gracious curves of youth; the serious grey eyes sparkled; the lips, too firmly compressed, parted, revealing admirable teeth, small and squarely set; into the cheeks, brown rather than pink, flowed a warm stream of colour.

The cartridge stood for so much. Only a week before, Uncle John, on his arrival from Manchuria, had handed his nephew a small leather case and a key. The case held a double-barrelled, hammerless, ejector, twenty-bore gun,