

"What a snob Dick is!" drawled a very tall, very thin, aristocratic-looking boy.

"And for," added Scaife. "This sort of thing makes him loathed."

"It is a sell his being here."

All three fell to talking. The question still festering in John's mind was answered within a minute. The "brute" was Rutford. Towards the end of the previous term gossip had it that the master of the Manor had been offered an appointment elsewhere. Whereat the worthier spirits in the ancient house rejoiced. Now the joy was turned into wailing and gnashing of teeth.

"Is he a beast to us?" said John.

The freckle-faced boy answered affably, "That depends. His Imperial Highness—he kicked the new portmanteau hard—" will not find Mr. Richard Rutford a beast. Far from it. And he's civil to the Demon, because his papa is a man of many shekels. But to mere outsiders, like myself, a beast of beasts; ay, the very king of beasts, is—Dirty Dick."

And then—oh, horrors!—the door of No. 15 opened, and Rutford appeared, followed by a seemingly young and very fashionably dressed lady. The boys jumped to their feet. All, except Scaife, looked preternaturally solemn. The house-master nodded carelessly.

"This is Scaife, Duchess," he said in his thick, rasping tones. "Scaife and Verney, let me present you to the Duchess of Trent."

He mouthed the illustrious name, as if it were a large and ripe greengage.