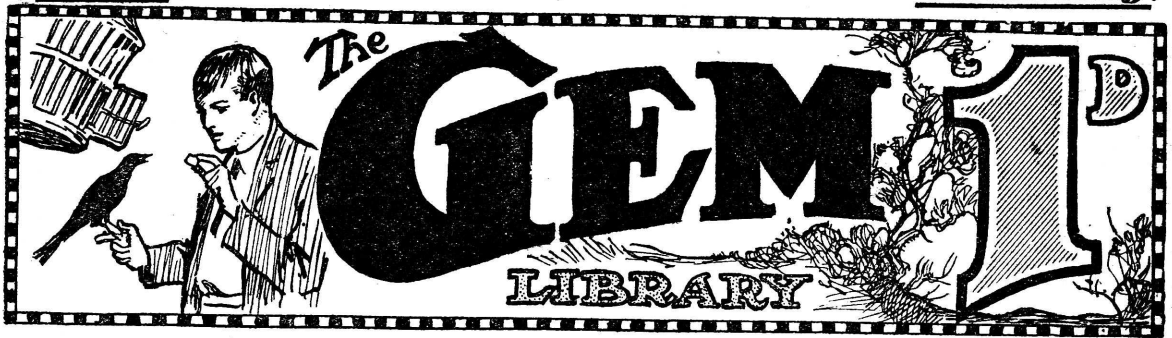


Every

Thursday.



Complete Stories for All and Every Story a Gem!

[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]



The School without Masters

A Splendid, New, Long Complete Tale
of TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

What Has Happened?

“I HAVE been stwuck
“Eh?”
“I have been stwuck—”
“Where?”
“Weally, Blake! I wepeat
that I have been stwuck—”
“And I repeat where?”
said Jack Blake, looking over

his chum with a scanning eye, as if in search of the spot where he had been stwuck.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and returned Blake's glance with one of lofty reproach.

“Weally, Blake,” he said, “I wish you would not play the giddy goat. I was wemarkin' that I have been stwuck—”

“But where?”

“Yes, where,” said Tom Merry cheerfully, “and what by, and by whom?”

“Weally, Tom Mewwy—”

“And did it hurt?” asked Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell was standing in the road outside the gates of St. Jim's, looking in the direction of Rylcombe. Blake and D'Arcy were in the old stone gateway.

“I wefuse to answah such a widiculous question, Tom Mewwy,” said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. “I wegard you as an ass. I have been stwuck by a thought—”

“Oh, I see!” said Tom Merry, laughing.

“It might have hurt, all the same,” said Blake seriously. “Gussy would get it in his weakest spot, you know.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

D'Arcy ignored Blake's little joke.

“I have been stwuck by a vevy peculiah wefflection,” he said. “You are aware that our wespicted Headmastah, Dr. Holmes, has departed for Southampton to take a little twip for his health.”

“Well, as we saw him off at the station to-day, we could hardly fail to be aware of it,” Blake said, with a touch of sarcasm.

“Pwecisely. You are also aware that Mr. Wailton and Mr. Watcliff, our wespicted House-mastahs, have gone with him to Southampton, to see him on the steamah for Fwance.”

“Yes, ass.”

“In fact, all the mastahs have made up a partay to see the Head as fah as Southampion, includin' all the Form-mastahs, and the head pwefects, Kildare and Dawwel and Monteith and Wushden.”

“Quite so.”

“Therefore—”

“Now we're getting at it,” said Blake. “I really believe Gussy is coming to the point at last, if there is any point in his remarks at all.”

“Weally, Blake—”

“Get on with the washing, my son.”

“What has stwuck me is this—that at the pwesent moment the school is without a mastah of any kind,” said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. “And all the pwefects are gone, with a few exceptions, and they don't amount to much. Nobody takes much notice of Knox or Bamford.”

“Quite so!”

“Well, I was thinkin'—”

“Hurrah!”

“You uttah ass! I was thinkin', suppose there was a wailway accident—”

“A which?” asked Tom Merry.

“A wailway accident,” said Arthur



Next Thursday:

“BURNT OUT,” and “THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON.”

Augustus D'Arcy. "Suppose there was a railway accident, and the mastahs couldn't get back to St. Jim's to-day?"

Blake whistled.

"My hat!" he said. "We could have a high old time, couldn't we? Fancy a school being left for two or three days without a master!"

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry. "Of course, as junior captain in the School House, I should have to keep order in the Lower School. I should see that you youngsters toed the mark."

Blake pushed back his cuffs in a suggestive way.

"I should like to see you keeping order in my study," he remarked.

"It would be my duty, my dear chap."

Blake snorted.

"It would be a jolly painful duty, then."

"Yaas, wathah! I should uttably wufuse to be kept in ordah by a Shell boundah. As leadahs of the juniahs, it would weally be our dutay to keep ordah, and we should have to make Tom Mewwy toe the line."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerily.

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy——"

"Rats!"

"Bai Jove! I——"

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Figgins, of the New House, strolling up with his hands in his pockets.

"Only Tom Mewwy playin' the giddy ox."

"Only Gussy giving an asimine performance as usual."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Put it to Figgins," said Blake. "Suppose there were an accident to the railway, and the masters and prefects all got detained at Southampton, wouldn't it be our bare duty to keep the Shell in their place?"

"Yes, rather," said Figgins promptly, "and we should do it, too. But there hasn't been any giddy railway accident, has there?"

"Well, no."

"What blessed Jonah thought of it, then?"

"I wufuse to be called a Jonah, Figgins."

"Oh, it was your idea, was it?" said Figgins. "Well in the event of anything of the sort happening, the New House would, of course, assert its position as cock-house of St. Jim's, and we should look after you School House chaps."

"Wats!"

"Rats!"

The chime from the clock-tower interrupted the altercation. Four quarters, and then four heavy strokes.

"Bai Jove! It's four o'clock."

The juniors stared at one another.

For it was known that the vessel upon which the Head was to leave Southampton, sailed at three, and the party that had gone to see him off were expected to catch the next train back to Rylcombe, which would bring them to the school at about half-past three!

"Four o'clock!" said Tom Merry.

"My hat!"

"They're late."

Monty Lowther and Manners, of the Shell, came down to the gates.

"Seen anything of them, you chaps?" asked Lowther.

"It's high time they were back."

"They must have missed the train," said Blake.

"That would only make them a quarter of an hour later if they waited for the next."

"Bai Jove!"

"It's very odd."

"Good old Jonah!" said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"There can't have been a railway accident," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "I don't believe it."

"Bai Jove! It would be howwid," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking very serious. "Of course, when I suggested it, I was thinkin' of an accident to the line—gettin' blocked up, or somethin' of the sort—not to the twain. It would be wotten."

"Accidents will happen," said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! But——"

Other fellows were coming down to the gates now. It was certainly very peculiar that the party did not return.

Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, had been very ill, and now that he had gone away, it was only a mark of affectionate esteem that the masters should go in a body to see him off. The run to Southampton by express was not a long one, and, under the circumstances, the school could be trusted to keep on its good behaviour. Besides, there were several prefects left to keep order. At the same time, it was very odd that Mr. Railton should have missed the train back.

Had the Head been taken suddenly worse? Or had there indeed been an accident on the line? Such things had happened, and might happen again.

A crowd gradually collected at the gates of St. Jim's, and

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some of the fellows were looking anxious, too. D'Arcy, to his annoyance, found himself looked upon in the light of a Jonah. He had first suggested the idea of a railway accident, and some of the fellows seemed to think, from that, that he was responsible for it.

Five o'clock pealed out from the tower.

The crowd gathered at the school gates were looking quite anxious now.

What had happened?

CHAPTER 2.

Startling News.

WHAT had happened?

That was the question that the St. Jim's fellows were asking themselves now. The return of the masters had been delayed an hour and a half. Missing a train would not account for that. There were several trains since that Mr. Railton's party might have taken, and arrived at St. Jim's before five o'clock.

Something had happened.

What was it?

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the last stroke of five died away. "Bai Jove, this is gettin' sewious!"

"My word!"

"This is what comes of having blessed Jonahs in the school," said Levison, of the Fourth.

"Weally, Levison——"

"Yah! Jonah!"

"If you are lookin' for a thick eah, you wottah——"

"Oh, chuck that, now!" said Monty Lowther. "This isn't a time for rowing. What can have become of the masters?"

"Must have been an accident."

"I'm going down to the railway-station to inquire," said Tom Merry resolutely. "Blessed if I know what can have happened; but something has."

And he walked away to the bicycle-shed for his machine. Three or four other fellows followed his example.

"I don't catch on to it at all," Blake remarked, as they were getting the machines out. "If there was an accident, the telegraph-wires are still there—why can't they send a wire?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a giddy mystery," said Herries

"They'll tell us at the station," said Tom Merry.

And half a dozen juniors went pedalling down the road to Rylcombe. Levison of the Fourth, stood in the gateway and watched them go, with a peculiar smile upon his face. He turned back when the cyclists were out of sight, and joined Mellish.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"It's odd," said Mellish.

"Very odd! Something's happened, that's certain—it looks as if the school's going to be left without a master for a bit."

"Looks like it."

"There's only Knox left to keep order in the School House," said Levison, with a grin. "Nobody cares for Knox."

"That is best known to yourself."

"There will be fun."

"Quite right."

Levison grinned.

"My hat, yes! There will be a high old time, I think, if the masters don't come back to-night."

The two cads of the Fourth were not the only ones who had that anticipation. There were a good many fellows at St. Jim's who realised, with a thrill, that the school was left without a master. And to judge by the whispered remarks and significant grins, the state of St. Jim's was likely to grow like that which obtained when there was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Tom Merry & Co. skimmed along the dusty country road, and soon reached the little sleepy railway-station in Rylcombe.

The old porter was surprised by a rush of eager juniors in search of information.

"Has there been an accident on the line?" Tom Merry demanded.

"No, Master Merry," said the old man, in surprise. "I ain't 'eard of any accident."

"Have the trains come in as usual?"

"Every one."

"You see, our masters haven't come back from Southampton," Tom Merry explained. "They were expected back before four o'clock, and now it's nearly half-past five."

"And we're getting wathah anxious about them, you know."

The old porter shook his head.

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"THE BOYS' HERALD," id.

"They ain't come back this way," he said, "and there ain't been any accident on the line. We should have heard of it here."

"My only hat!" said Blake, as they left the station. "What on earth does it mean? Is it that the Head has been taken seriously ill again, and they're staying with him?"

"But they'd wire. Mr. Raiton would wire, and some of them would come back, at least."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Kildare would come back, anyway. They wouldn't all stay with the Head, if he was ill in Southampton," Monty Lowther said, with a puzzled look.

"Quite wight."

"It's a giddy puzzle."

The juniors, utterly mystified, returned to St. Jim's. They could make simply nothing of the occurrence; it baffled them completely. Every master and the head prefects of both houses had gone—St. Jim's was left to its guidance, and it seemed that the school would remain so for the night.

What could it mean?

An eager crowd met the juniors as they pedaled up to the gates of St. Jim's again. Fellows of all Forms were there to hear the news. Wally D'Arcy—D'Arcy minor of the Third—was the first to sight them.

"Here they are!" he shouted. "What's the news?"

"None," said Tom Merry, jumping off his bicycle.

"No accident on the line?" asked Lefevre of the Fifth.

"They say no at the station."

"No news at all?"

"No."

"Well, it's jolly odd, that's what I say," said Lefevre.

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "What larks!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"What larks!" said Wally, with a chuckle. "Fancy a school without a master! My only respected Aunt Jane! What larks!"

"I shall insist upon your keepin' ordah, Wally."

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"Weally, you young wascal!"

"It can't be an accident, or we should have heard," said North of the Sixth. "Somebody would have sent a wire."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then why don't they come?"

"Blessed if I know!"

The mystery puzzled and bothered the boys of St. Jim's. In both Houses, in every Form, in all the studies and passages, only one thing was now discussed. What had become of the masters? Where were they?

The dusk was falling in the old quad, and a group of fellows were standing at the doorway of the School House, discussing the matter, when a lad in uniform was observed making his way towards the house.

It was the telegraph-boy from the village.

"A telegram!" exclaimed Gore.

"News at last!"

There was a rush to surround the telegraph-boy. He had a familiar buff-coloured envelope in his hand.

"Who's it for?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"For the school!" said the boy.

"What?"

"My hat!"

Sure enough the envelope was addressed simply to "St. Jim's, Rylcombe." The juniors looked at it as the boy held it up. Evidently some stranger had sent it, and not knowing whom to address it to, had sent it simply to St. Jim's.

What did it mean?

Was it news of some terrible accident? Somehow, the fellows did not think so. But it must be news—news of those who were missing.

"A prefect ought to open it," said Blake.

"Knox, Knox!"

Knox, the prefect, was coming out of the School House.

The fellows made way for him.

"It's a telegram," said Gore.

"Give it to me."

The prefect opened it. He glanced over the strip within, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Great Scott!"

There was a general shout of inquiry.

"What's happened, Knox?"

"Read it out."

The prefect read out the telegram.

"It's signed Johnson," he said. "Johnson's the name of the keeper of the hotel, where the Head and the others were going to dine before they went on the steamer. I believe."

"Yes, I remember," said Baker of the Sixth. "What's he got to say?"

"Here it is: 'Have learned that party accompanying Dr. Holmes did not leave steamer in time, and have sailed.—Johnson.'"

"Great Scott!"

"Bai Jove!"

"My only aunt!"

Knox lowered the telegram, and gave a whistle.

"My hat!" he said. "They've sailed for Dieppe—all of them—Head, masters, and prefects! The school's left without a master."

"By Jove!"

"And they won't be back till to-morrow night at the earliest," murmured Gore.

All was clear now.

The party accompanying the Head had naturally gone on the steamer to see him off, and to say good-bye there.

Perhaps the Head had become worse, and they might have been anxiously attending him, when the signal was given for shore folk to clear off. Or they might have been below at the time, talking over the Head's intended holiday, and wishing him a pleasant time. Whatever the cause, it was clear that they had not left the steamer before it departed, and they had been involuntarily carried off to sea.

It was an accident that might easily happen—in fact, that has happened many times. Now it had happened to the masters of St. Jim's.

But the school?

For twenty-four hours, at least—perhaps for longer—St. Jim's was left without a master!

It was an unprecedented state of affairs, and it was likely to lead to unprecedented happenings!

CHAPTER 3.

Good Intentions.

ST. JIM'S was in a peculiar frame of mind that evening.

A school without a master found itself in an unique position, and the juniors could not get their bearings at first.

In the School House, the larger of the two houses at St. Jim's, Knox was the only prefect left.

Into Knox's hands, naturally, fell the reins of authority.

Had it been Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, or Darrel or Rushden, authority might have been maintained unimpaired.

The respect the fellows felt for Kildare would have helped him in keeping things in order.

But Knox was little regarded. He was a bully and a tyrant, in the first place, and he had only retained his post as prefect by very carefully keeping his real character from the knowledge of the Head.

Knox was likely to regard the present occasion as an occasion for swanking, and that was not the way to keep order among fellows already inclined to be unruly.

Over in the New House matters might be expected to go differently. Baker of the Sixth was prefect there, and Baker was a steady and determined fellow, and popular. And Figgins & Co.—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—would probably back him up.

In the School House there was likely to be "ructions."

For Knox was on the worst of terms with the juniors, especially with their leaders, Tom Merry and Blake, and he had few friends, even in his own Form.

"There will be trouble, I guess," Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth remarked, as he came into No. 6 Study to tea.

Blake nodded.

"I imagine so," he said. "Knox isn't the chap to keep order. I have been thinking it over, and I want you chaps to back me up."

Lumley-Lumley looked at him inquiringly.

"You're thinking of a big rag while the masters are away?" he asked.

Blake laughed.

"No, I was thinking of the reverse of that," he said. "I was thinking that we ought to stand together to keep order."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I guess I'm agreeable to that," said Lumley-Lumley.

"I'm with you all the time, and we can make the others toe the line."

"Oh, all right," said Herries, after a pause. "We ought to go on just the same as if the masters were here, I suppose."

"That's the wheeze."

"I was thinking I might have Towser in the house just for to-night," Herries remarked, in a tentative sort of way.

"Bai Jove, Hewvies—"

"While the cat's away, the mice will play," grinned Lumley-Lumley. "That's the first step. It's against the rules, Herries."

"Well, you see, Towser likes to come in, and—"

"I object," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emphatically. "I object vewy stwongly. Towsah is a beast who has no respect whatever for a fellow's twousahs."

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NEXT WEEK:

"BURNT OUT."

Another Splendid, Long, New, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Play the game, Herries," said Blake. "You can't have Towser in. We're going to act just as if the masters were here."

Herries grunted.

"No need to stretch a thing too far," he said. "There's such a thing as playing the giddy ox, you know. Still, I don't care."

"That's wight, Hewwies. Stick to your pwinciples, deah boy, and you will nevah wegwet it."

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Hewwies!"

"I suppose we shall have to do prep. the same as usual to-night, then," Lumley-Lumley remarked slowly.

There was a long, long pause.

"Well," said Blake at last, "there can't be any classes in the morning without a master to take them, so what's the good of prep.?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I guess that's so."

Herries snorted.

"You stick to your blessed principles," he exclaimed. "If I'm going to stick to mine in the matter of Towser, you can stick to yours in the matter of prep. You'll jolly well do your prep. just the same as if the masters were here."

"Undah the circs.—"

"It's a case of principle," said Herries. "I stand by that!"

"Bai Jove, you know, Hewwies is weally wight. I suggest that we do the beastly pwep. all the same, deah boys."

"Oh, all right!" grunted Blake.

"I guess I don't mind."

The study door opened, and Reilly, of the Fourth, looked in. He grinned, and nodded to the chums of the Fourth.

"Faith, and this is a lark!" he exclaimed.

"What's a lark?" demanded Blake, with great severity.

Reilly started a little.

"Sure this is—the masters being away, I mane. Are ye going to do your prep, to-night, me bhoys?"

"Of course, we are," said Blake. "We are going to do our prep. without thinking for a moment of missing it because the masters are away. That's what I call playing the game. I'm surprised at the question, Reilly."

"Bai Jove!"

"I want it understood in the Fourth," said Blake severely, "that matters aren't going on anyhow because the masters are gone! It's up to us to keep perfect order, and show that we can be trusted alone. You catch on?"

"Faith, and I'm not going to do any prep.!"

"What?"

"I'm not going to do any prep.?"

"You're—not—going—to—do—any—prep.?" Blake said, in measured tones, shooting out each word as if it were a pellet from a catapult.

"Faith, no!" said Reilly defiantly. "What's the good of prep. when there's to be no classes in the mornin' intirely."

"It's a question of principle."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rats!"

"My hat," exclaimed Blake, "we'll jolly soon see whether you're not going to do your prep.!"

"The fellows are all saying the same," said Reilly, with a grin. "They're talking it over in the Form-room, and I came to see what you thought, intirely. Sure and it's not a stroke of worruk I'm going to do."

"It's a mattah of pwinciple, deah boy."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Weilly—"

"This is a case for an example," said Blake. "Collar the bouncer!"

"Faith, and I—"

"Collar him!"

Reilly retreated into the passage in alarm, but he was collared in the doorway. Blake and Herries and D'Arcy and Lumley-Lumley all obtained a hold upon him somewhere, and there was really no chance for Reilly.

"Ow!" he roared. "Help! Murther and fire! Ow!"

"Bump him!"

"Yaas, wathah! Give him the fwog's-march, deah boys, into the common-woom as a warnin' to othahs."

"Good egg!"

"I—oh—you—yow—ow—wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The four juniors rushed their prisoner along the passage and down the stairs. Reilly struggled and kicked furiously all the same, and they had all their work cut out to hold him. The boy from Belfast was a powerful junior, and he was a very tough handfoul even for four fellows. But he was got downstairs and rushed along to the common-room.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, meeting them in the passage. "What's the row?"

"We're keeping order!" gasped Blake.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you Shell chump?"

"Ha, ha! If that's the way you keep order, you'd better have a riot instead! It would be quieter."

"Oh, rats! Come on, you fellows!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ow! Rescue!" roared Reilly. "Yah! Faith, and I'll—ow—wow—wow!"

"Get the door open!" gasped Blake.

Herries flung the common-room door open. A crowd of juniors were inside, all talking at once. They all looked round at the strange sight of Reilly being rushed head-first into the room.

"My hat!" exclaimed Hancock. "What the dickens—"

"What the dickens—" said Levison.

"What the—"

"Faith, rescue!" roared Reilly. "Ow!"

Bump!

"What are you doing to Reilly?" shouted Macdonald.

"Bumping him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! Rescue! The spalpeens! Yow!"

Bump!

And with the last bump, Reilly was left sitting on the floor of the common-room gasping for breath.

CHAPTER 4.

Keeping Order!

THE juniors gathered round in great excitement. The Shell fellows in the junior common-room looked on and laughed. But the Fourth-Formers were more nearly interested. They knew why Reilly had gone to Blake's study, and from the manner of his return to the common-room, they could guess what attitude Blake & Co. were taking in the matter.

Reilly gasped for breath; and panted and gasped. His rapid march from the Fourth-Form passage to the common-room had quite winded him, with the bumping added at the end of it.

"Look here, what does this mean?" Mellish exclaimed.

"It means that we're going to keep order," said Blake. "We'll have peace in this House, if we have to fight every chap in the place for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! We mean bizney, deah boys."

"Faith," gasped Reilly, "and sure they say we're all to do the prep. all the same, and sure I won't do a stroke intirely."

"Not much!" said Mellish emphatically.

"No fear!" said Levison.

"While the cat's away, the mice will play, you know," Kerruish remarked. "No blessed prep. for me."

"And no lessons in the morning, either."

"Not much."

"Liberty, equality, and fraternity!" grinned Hancock. "No blessed prep. You can go and cat coke, Blake."

Blake sniffed.

"We marched Reilly back here as a lesson and a warning to others!" he exclaimed. "We mean bizney."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're going to keep order in the Fourth—in the School House part of the Form, at any rate, while the cat's away—I mean, while the masters are away."

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"We're jolly well not going to do any prep. to-night," said Kerruish.

"You are!"

"We're not!"

"We've started on Reilly," said Blake. "We don't mind bumping the whole Form, if necessary."

"Bai Jove, I'm quite weady to bump the whole Form, if you'll wait for me to change my jacket, deah boy."

Reilly staggered to his feet. He was still breathless, and he was very red and very wrathful.

"They—they've bumped me as a warning to the Form!" he gasped. "Now, let us bump them as a warning to themselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Collar them!"

"Hands off!" roared Blake. "I—oh—hands off! Yah!"

Blake hit out as the juniors rushed upon him. But he was overwhelmed by numbers. Lumley-Lumley and Herries and D'Arcy lined up with him, but a rush of twenty fellows swept them off their feet.

The four keepers of law and order went rolling on the floor of the common-room, and over them rolled and sprawled a crowd of excited, yelling juniors.

"Faith, and we've got them!"



"Will you show me the telegram?" cried Baker. "No," replied Knox. "Then I'll take it," exclaimed Baker, but even as he grasped Knox, the latter jerked the telegram from his pocket and threw it into the blazing coals on the fire.

"Bump them!"
 "Sit on their heads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwooh!" gasped D'Arcy. "Gewwoff, you uttah wottahs! You are wumplin' my jacket! Ow! You are uttahly wuinin' my twousahs!"

"We'll ruin your chivvy, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Roll them over!"

"Bump them!"

The four juniors struggled furiously in the grasp of the Fourth-Formers.

But they struggled in vain. The odds were too heavily against them.

They were rolled, and rumped, and bumped, and finally hurled forth from the common-room into the passage.

A roar of laughter followed them. Shell fellows and Third

Form fags joined in it. Truly, the aspect of Blake & Co. was not imposing.

They sat up in the passage, dusty, gasping, breathless, and perspiring. The juniors crammed the doorway of the common-room and jeered.

"Go home!"

"Faith, and have ye had enough intirely?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where's Gussy's glass eye?"

"Bai Jove, it's bwoken!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake staggered to his feet. He was furious.

"Come on!" he roared.

And he charged back at the crowded doorway.

Herries, Lumley-Lumley, and D'Arcy were after him in a

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 of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

second. The four of them hurled themselves upon the grinning crowd jammed in the doorway of the common-room.

But they could not get through.

They were hurled back, gasping and panting, in a heap on the linoleum in the passage. Blake was the first down, and D'Arcy rolled upon him. Lumley-Lumley and Herries were dropped across them.

There was a fresh roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haven't ye had enough, ye spalpeens?"

"Crawl away!"

The last piece of advice was too good not to be taken. Blake & Co. crawled away. They could do nothing else.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther met them at the foot of the stairs. The Terrible Three burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where have you been?" gasped Monty Lowther.

"Wrestling with a motor-car, or arguing with a lawnmower?"

"Ow!"

"Bai Jove!"

"They've been keeping order in the Fourth," grinned Tom Merry.

And Lowther and Manners yelled.

Blake held on to the banisters and gasped. His jacket was split up the back, his collar was torn out, his nose was crimson, and his hair a towzled mass. He certainly did look as if he had been through trouble.

"You silly chumps!" he gasped. "We've been keeping the youngsters in order, only—only—"

"They won't be kept," said Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you think you can manage it, you had better go and try your hand," roared Blake.

"Oh, we're going to keep order!" said Tom Merry. "We regard it as our duty."

"Yes, rather!" said Monty Lowther—"our bounden duty."

"Go it—then! You'll get jolly well bumped."

The Shell fellows laughed, and walked away to the common-room. Blake leaned against the banisters, breathing hard.

"Hold on!" he said. "Let's watch! I want to see how those Shell duffers are going to keep order."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the dusty quartette listened. They saw the Terrible Three enter the junior common-room, and they heard the sound of raised voices. Loud and long were the remarks, in a rising crescendo of excitement.

The sound of violent scuffling followed.

Blake chuckled.

"They're getting down to bizney," he remarked.

"Ha, ha! Yes! Look!"

"Bai Jove! Here they come!"

A dusty form came hurtling through the doorway of the common-room, to fall with a bump on the linoleum in the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's Lowther!" roared Blake.

Lowther lay gasping. There was a struggle in the doorway, and another form came sprawling out.

"Manners!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here's another."

"Tom Merry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry fell in a heap across Manners. Yet a fourth body came whirling through the doorway—Kangaroo, of the Shell, who had doubtless chipped in to help the Terrible Three. He tumbled along, and fell with his arms outspread, catching Monty Lowther in an involuntary embrace, and crushing him down to the floor again.

Then the door was slammed after them.

Tom Merry & Co. staggered up and gasped for breath. It was the turn of Blake and his chums to laugh—and they did! They roared!

CHAPTER 5.

A Table Game.

KEEPING order in the Lower Forms was an easy thing to talk about; but it was apparently a harder thing to do. Perhaps the chums of the School House had been a little "previous" in taking charge of the matter at all. Their intentions were first-rate. But the other fellows might be excused for wanting to know what business it was of theirs, anyhow.

That aspect of the case did not appear to have occurred to the Terrible Three, or to Blake & Co. But what had occurred to them very forcibly was, that the Lower Forms, in the School House at least, did not want to be kept in order, and did not mean to be kept in order.

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The school was without a master, and the mere thought of that was enough to set the youthful blood running riot in many veins.

The Head was gone, the masters were gone, the prefects even were gone—the boys were left to their own devices for twenty-four hours at least.

The excitement grew and grew.

The fellows could not settle down to anything, least of all to prep. Work was tabooed, by common consent.

Even Tom Merry & Co., virtuously determined as they had been to keep the other fellows up to the mark, somehow forgot to do their own prep.

As for Knox, he was not likely to be able to keep order. The School House prefect was not only extremely unpopular, but he had no nerve in dealing with anything in the nature of a crisis. The probability was that Knox would swank, and swank, until he met with some resistance, and then climb down suddenly. And a great many of the fellows knew it.

Later in the evening, Knox looked into the junior common-room.

There was a bullying expression upon his face, which showed that the knowledge that he was in sole authority in the School House had "got into his head," as Monty Lowther put it.

There was a great deal of talk going on in the room, and certainly more noise than usual; but if Knox had been a little tactful, he would have taken no notice of that. It was not a time to take special note of small matters.

But Knox had little tact.

"Not so much noise here," he exclaimed.

Every eye was turned upon the prefect at once. The juniors stared at him as if he were some curious animal that had wandered into their quarters.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake—Blake and the rest were in the common-room now, and not keeping order. That idea appeared to have been dropped, and by common consent, nothing was said about the ejections from the common-room a couple of hours earlier. "Hallo, here's Knox!"

"Not so much noise."

"Bai Jove!"

"Mind, I don't want any check from you rats!" said Knox. "I'll give you a hundred lines each to write out before you go to bed, if I have any of your nonsense."

"My word!" murmured Monty Lowther. "I can see myself writing them out, too—I don't think!"

"What-ho!" said Manners.

"I guess not," Lumley-Lumley remarked.

Knox stamped his foot angrily.

"Who knows?" asked Monty Lowther.

There was a laugh, and the prefect turned crimson.

"Lowther! Take a hundred lines!"

"Certainly," said Lowther; "where shall I take them?"

"Take two hundred lines!"

"With pleasure! Where—"

"If you say another word, Lowther, I shall cane you."

"Will you really?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox gritted his teeth.

"Come here, Lowther!" he shouted.

Lowther did not stir.

"Thank you—I prefer remaining where I am," he remarked.

"Come here!"

"No other time, old man."

"Lowther, I order you—"

"Dear me," said Lowther, "he orders me, Tommy!"

"Dear me," said Tom Merry, "he orders you, Lowther!"

"Dear me," said Manners, "chaps, he orders him!"

"Bai Jove, he orders him, you know!"

"My aunt," said Blake, "he orders him!"

"Orders him, you know!" said Kangaroo.

Knox simply snorted. It was the beginning of a "rag," and he knew it. The juniors were openly mocking him, and as he had started the trouble, he had no right to complain. He resolved to nip it in the bud, however.

He made a rush across the room towards Monty Lowther. The Shell fellow retreated round the big table, which was too large and solid for Knox to shift it out of the way.

From the opposite side of it, he smiled across at the prefect. Lowther rather prided himself upon an aristocratic calm of manner, and certainly he did not look nearly so excited as the Sixth-Former.

"Come back here, Lowther!" roared Knox.

"Thanks; I'm all right here!"

"I order you—as a prefect."

"And I decline—as a sensible chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox glared round at the laughing juniors. But that did not prevent them from laughing. They roared! The red and furious face of Knox seemed to amuse them. The

perfect clenched his hands, as if he would rush upon them, hitting out right and left. But he thought better of it. Some of the fellows looked as if they wanted an excuse for handling him; and he had too much sense still to afford them one.

He made a rush round the table after Lowther instead. Monty Lowther promptly darted round, and was at the opposite side by the time the prefect reached the spot where he had been standing.

Knox halted, panting for breath. The juniors simply shrieked. The sight of a big Sixth-Former, who had utterly lost his self-control, chasing a nimble junior round a big table was funny enough. Monty Lowther's coolness added to the comicality of the scene. As soon as he stopped, he assumed a languid pose, yawning as if a little bored by the performance, while Knox was sputtering and panting on the other side of the table.

"You—you hound!" yelled Knox. "I order you to come round."

The rag started again.

"I say, he orders me."

"You hear, you chaps—he orders him!"

"Bai Jove, he ordahs him, you know!"

"Shut up, you cheeky young imps!" roared the prefect.

"Bai Jove!"

"He orders us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox clenched his hands, and made a sudden run round the table again. Monty Lowther fled again, and round and round the table they went twice, the Shell fellow easily keeping his distance ahead of the senior.

Knox paused, partly from breathlessness, and partly because the wild yells of laughter made him realise what a ridiculous figure he was cutting.

He panted at Lowther across the table.

"You young villain—"

"I love him for his nice manners," murmured Monty Lowther, flicking a speck of dust from his sleeve, in a calm, negligent way.

"I—I—I'll—"

"Go hon!"

"I'll smash you!"

"Dear me, he's going to smash me, you chaps!"

"He's going to smash him!"

"Bai Jove, smash him, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox laid his hands upon the table, and made a sudden sprawl across it. He intended to take Lowther by surprise, and catch him before he could escape. But Lowther was watching him. He had not time to run round the table, but he dived under it, and came up on the other side, just as Knox came sprawling across.

Knox rolled off, on the floor, and stood where Lowther had been standing, gasping. But the table was still between them!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared.

"I—I—I—" gasped Knox. "Lowther, I—I shall report this to the Head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall report it to Mr. Railton immediately he returns."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I shall—shall—"

Words failed Knox. He made another wild rush round the table. Again Lowther eluded him. Then the angry prefect strode from the room, followed by roars of laughter from the juniors. The last authority left in the School House had had his first passage of arms with the juniors, and he had had the worst of it. It was not a good augury for the orderliness of the School House during the absence of the masters.

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CHAPTER 6.

To Your Knees!

"BED-TIME!" said Tom Merry, looking at the clock. Manners yawned.

"Well, we've had an exciting evening, and I'm tired," he remarked.

"Blessed if I'm going to bed!" said Gore.

"Why not?"

"What's the good of going to bed if you don't have to?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"What's the good of stopping up if you don't want to?"

he asked, in turn.

"Well, I do want to," said Gore, "and I'm going to, too."

"Same here!" yawned Levison. "We're jolly well not going to bed. This is Liberty Hall at present, and we're not going to bed."

"Besides, it's the prefect's duty to see that we do," Mellish remarked. "No reason why we should relieve Knox of his duties, as far as I can see. Let him come and make us go to bed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess that's a good idea," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

No one, in fact, wanted to go to bed. Those who were sleepy felt tempted by the unusual luxury of staying up late. It gave the juniors a singular sense of freedom and importance to sit and calmly watch the hand of the clock pass half-past nine, without making a stir.

"Quarter to ten," said Blake presently, with a yawn.

"Bai Jove! Who says bed?"

"Oh, blow bed!"

"Rats!"

"Knox hasn't been to remind us," grinned Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's not likely to come," grinned Herries.

But Herries was wrong in that. Knox put his head in at the door a few minutes later. He assumed a determined and authoritative air, but the shiftiness of his eyes betrayed how uncertain he felt about being obeyed.

"Bed-time!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, rats!" said Gore.

Knox pretended not to hear.

"Now, be off to bed!" he exclaimed.

Whether the juniors would have obeyed or not is a question, had not Tom Merry set the example. Tom Merry rose from his seat, and walked towards the door, and Manners and Lowther followed him at once. Blake & Co. joined them, and then the rest of the juniors followed.

Tom Merry having taken the lead, the whole of the Shell and the Fourth went up to their dormitories quietly.

Gore grunted discontentedly as he went into the Shell dormitory.

"Might have stayed up to midnight if we'd liked," he exclaimed. "Knox hasn't the nerve to send us to bed if we don't choose to go."

"What's the good of staying up yawning our heads off?" said Tom Merry, with a laugh.

"Well, it would show our giddy independence."

"Better get a beauty sleep."

"Yes, rather; we can be independent in the morning,"

said Manners, with a grin.

"Knox has been taken down a peg or two already," said Gore. "He—Ow! Oh!"

Gore broke off suddenly. Knox had quietly entered the dormitory, and Gore had not heard him. The prefect interrupted Gore with a terrific box on the ear, which sent him staggering half a dozen paces, till he fell heavily against a bed, and rolled on the dormitory floor.

"Ow!" gasped Gore.

There was a shout of anger from the Shell fellows.

"Shame!"

"Cad!"

"Brute!"

Knox glared round upon them.

"I'll give some more of you the same, if there's any cheek here," he said. "I've had enough of your impudence, you young sweeps."

Gore sat up on the floor. He was looking dazed and bewildered; his senses were swimming from the brutal blow.

Tom Merry strode towards the prefect.

"You coward!" he shouted.

"Merry—"

"You are a coward, a rotten coward, to hit a chap like that!" bellowed Tom.

"I—I—"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Knox did not reply. He ran straight at Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell did not budge. Knox was nearly twice as big as he was, but if he had been three times as big, Tom Merry would have stood his ground all the same.

He got in one heavy right-hander as Knox closed upon him, and the bully of the Sixth staggered for a second. Then his powerful grasp closed upon the hero of the Shell.

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Tom Merry was swung off his feet. It might have gone hard with Tom just then, but the other Shell fellows were by no means disposed to leave him at the mercy of the prefect.

"Rescue!" shouted Kangaroo. And the Shell rushed to the rescue. A dozen pairs of hands grasped Knox, and he was whirled away from his victim, and Tom Merry staggered free, gasping for breath.

Knox struggled in the hands of the juniors. "Let me go!" he shrieked. "Let me go!" "Rats!" "Hold him!" "Roll him over!" Two or three fellows helped Gore up, and sat him upon a bed. Gore was not a popular fellow, but Knox had gone altogether too far. Boxing ears, too, was strictly forbidden at St. Jim's, because of the injury it might cause to the brain. Gore was looking quite dazed and stupefied, and there was no doubt that Knox deserved punishment.

"Hold him!" said Tom Merry. "He's going through it for this." "Hurrah! Put him through!"

"You young hounds!" gasped Knox. "Remember I'm a prefect. You'll be called to account for it if you dare to lay hands on me."

"We've done that already," chuckled Monty Lowther. "So as the punishment is to come, we may as well make you sit up. Might as well have the game as the name."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "He's going to beg Gore's pardon on his giddy knees," said Tom Merry determinedly.

There was a yell of approval from the excited juniors. "Good egg!" "Bravo!" "To your knees!"

Knox struggled furiously in the grip of the Shell fellows. His face was crimson with rage. He was dragged down on his knees, and held there, in spite of his fierce resistance.

"I won't!" he roared. "Your mistake," grinned Clifton Dane. "You will." "I—I—I'll report all this to the Head."

"You will have some more to report, too, if you don't beg Gore's pardon," said Tom Merry. "Are you going to do it?"

"No!" roared Knox. "Get a cake of soap, Glyn." "Here you are!" grinned Bernard Glyn.

"Open your mouth, Knox." "I won't!"

"Give him some hard knocks and make him," said Monty Lowther.

"Prise it open with a cricket-stump," Kangaroo suggested. "Good!"

Knox opened his mouth involuntarily as the spiked end of a cricket-stump approached his jaws. The cake of soap was jammed in, and Knox spluttered and spluttered.

"Now, then," said Tom Merry grimly, "you'll beg Gore's pardon, you brute, or you'll eat that soap to the last atom. Choose!"

"Choo!" "Will you tell Gore you're sorry?" "Grooch!"

"Yes or no." "N—yes! Ow! Groooch! I'm sorry!" snorted Knox.

"Awfully sorry?" "Groooch! Yes."

"Take the soap away." The cake of soap was jerked away, leaving Knox spluttering lather. Tom Merry pointed to the door of the dormitory.

"Chuck him out!" he exclaimed. "I—I—I'll walk out," exclaimed Knox.

His tone was almost suppliant. All the bravado was gone now from the manner of the bully of the Sixth.

"Well," said Tom Merry considerably, "you can walk out if you like, if you buck up. Let him go, you chaps. I give you two seconds, Knox."

Knox did not need them. In one second he was outside the Shell dormitory, and the door had slammed behind him.

CHAPTER 7.

Late Risers.

IT was quite late before the Shell turned in. In the Fourth Form dormitory bedtime was nearer half-past eleven than half-past nine. The fellows played leap-frog in the dormitory, and chased one another round and over the beds. But before midnight they were tired out, and they turned in.

They slept soundly enough, naturally, after their unusual exertions and late hours. Few of them woke when the rising-bell sounded in the morning.

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Clang, clang, clang!

Taggles evidently was at his post at the usual time, in spite of the absence of the Head and all the masters.

Clang, clang!

Tom Merry sat up in bed and yawned, and rubbed his sleepy eyes.

"Hallo, you fellows! Time!" he called out

Snore!

"Lowther, old man, time to get up."

"Groo!"

"Manners! I say, Manners!"

"Grooch!"

"Oh, shut up, Merry!" came a sleepy voice from Gore's bed. "What's the good of getting up? I want a snooze."

"Same here!" mumbled Manners.

"Oh, get up!" said Tom Merry. "Don't be a slacker."

"Yaw!"

"You see, we agreed to keep to the rules, and set a shining example to the others," exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Groo!"

"Do you hear me, Lowther?"

Snore!

"Lowther! Wake up!"

"Settershiningzamplemorrow!" mumbled Monty Lowther.

And Manners gave a sleepy chuckle.

"Now, look here, you chaps," said Tom Merry, still without getting out of bed, however, "this won't do! It really won't!"

"Yaw-aw!"

"You see," went on Tom Merry, settling down in bed again and arranging his head comfortably upon his pillow while he spoke—"you see, it's our duty to set a shining example and—yaw—and to—to—in fact—yaw—get up."

"Groo!"

Snore!

"Berrergerrup!" murmured Tom Merry, dropping off to sleep again. "Berrergerrup, y-know."

And he slumbered.

Clang, clang!

The rising-bell died away.

Silence reigned in the still, morning air—and so did slumber.

It was not till nearly nine o'clock that Tom Merry opened his eyes again. Then he woke up with a start.

He sat up in bed and blinked round the dormitory. The bright morning sun was streaming in at the high windows and it smote dazzling upon his eyes.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "What on earth's the time?"

He groped out for his watch and looked at it. Then he started, and coloured with shame.

"Nearly nine o'clock!"

He jumped out of bed.

His head was heavy, owing to the late hours the previous night and the late rising of the morning. He was accustomed to perfectly regular hours of sleeping and waking, and to that, more than anything else, he owed his perfect physical fitness. He was feeling very unusually seedy this morning.

"Wake up!" he shouted.

Some of the fellows were already awake, and were stretching themselves, too lazy to get up, though they did not want to sleep.

"Hallo!" yawned Gore. "You getting up?"

"It's nearly nine!"

"Well, suppose it is?"

"Hang it all, it's disgraceful!" said Tom Merry. "Fancy staying in bed till nine in the morning. I feel jolly well ashamed of myself, I can tell you!"

"Well, there are no lessons this morning," said Croke. "I don't see why we shouldn't stay in bed till ten if we want to."

"Hear, hear!" said Gore.

"Oh, get up, and don't be such rotten slackers!" said Tom Merry disdainfully.

"Rats!"

"Lowther, Manners! Turn out, you lazy fatheads!"

"Oh, all right!" grumbled Lowther. "Keep your hair on!"

Lowther and Manners turned out. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn followed. Some of the other fellows remained in bed.

Tom Merry took his sponge and soaked it in water at his washstand.

"Anybody want helping out?" he asked.

"Look here, mind your own business, Tom Merry!" exclaimed Croke, with a snarl. "I'm not going to get up till ten o'clock."

"You'll have a headache if you stay in bed so late," said Tom Merry severely, "and it causes bad indigestion, too."

"I don't care."

"My dear chap, I can't stand by and see you expose yourself to such sufferings, merely from a little slacking."

"Lemme alone!"

"I'm going to save you from yourself."

"Keep off!" roared Crooke, as Tom Merry approached his bed with the dripping sponge in his hand.

"Time to get up."

"Mind your own bizney—ow! Oooch!"

Crooke roared as the sponge was squeezed over his face.

The cold water drenched his face and head and ran down over his chest, and the cad of the Shell rolled out of bed in a twinkling.

"You beast!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anybody else want helping?" asked Tom Merry, looking round blandly.

"Look here," said Gore, "I'm jolly well not going to get up yet. I'm tired, and I'm going to do as I like, too. If you bring that blessed sponge near me I'll land out with my foot, so I warn you."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Up you get!" he replied.

"Sha'n't!"

"Out with you, Gore!"

"Rats!"

"Who's captain of this Form?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Bosh!"

Tom Merry advanced upon Gore. Gore put his leg out of the bed and lunged at Tom's chest with his foot. The hero of the Shell caught his ankle with his left hand, and with his right squeezed the sponge along Gore's bare leg.

There was a wild gasp and a yell from Gore.

"Ger-r-r-r-ooooh! Yow! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Up you get!"

Gore rolled out of bed. He looked inclined for a moment to go for Tom Merry with his fists, but he thought better of it and turned sulkily to his clothes.

"Any more help required?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

Apparently no more help was required. The other Shell fellows turned out like lambs, and all betook themselves to washing and dressing.

Nine o'clock struck before they were finished.

"Nice time to go down!" growled Tom Merry, as they left the dormitory. "I'm jolly well ashamed of you all! What would the Head think?"

"The Head's in Dieppe, and I expect he's thinking about his health," grinned Lowther. "Railton and the rest are in Dieppe, too, and I expect they're thinking about getting back to Southampton. After all, we don't get the school without any masters every day, do we?"

"Jolly lucky for us, too, I rather think!" Manners remarked.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I believe those lazy bouders in the Fourth haven't stirred yet!"

"Oh, shocking!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Disgraceful!"

"Rotten!"

"No class!"

Tom Merry threw open the door of the Fourth Form dormitory.

True enough, the Fourth were not up yet.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sitting up in bed, rubbing his eyes, but the rest of the Fourth-Formers were still in horizontal attitudes.

Tom Merry looked in wrathfully.

"Well, if this doesn't take the cake!" he exclaimed.

"What do you youngsters mean by this, I'd like to know?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Wake them up, you chaps!"

"What-ho!"

Although the Shell had not been very enthusiastic about getting up themselves, they were naturally indignant at this shocking example of slacking on the part of the Fourth. With one accord they rushed into the dormitory to wake the Fourth-Formers up.

CHAPTER 8.

The Fourth Do Not Like It!

"GERRUP!"

"Turn out!"

"Slackers!"

"Lazy slackers!"

"Up you get!"

And the Shell fellows, while they thus adjured the Fourth, added actions to words. They dragged bedclothes off the beds, they spanked bare limbs with ringing, echoing spanks, and they pushed and rolled the fellows on to the floor.

There was no doubt at all that the Fourth were thoroughly

awakened. An earthquake could not have done it more effectually.

There were wild yells of wrath and protest. The Fourth showed fight up and down the dormitory. But unclothed fellows taken by surprise had little chance. They were rolled out, bumped, and spanked, the Shell roaring with laughter all the time.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he sat on the floor. "Bai Jove! Hands off, you wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep off, you feahful boundahs! I'm gettin' up!"

"Sure you're awake?" asked Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Perhaps I'd better squeeze this sponge over you to make sure—"

"Ow! Bai Jove! Gwoo!"

"Faith, and I'll smash ye entirely!" roared Reilly, as he was dragged out by the ankles. "Sure, I'll pulverise ye! Ow! Yow! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All awake?" asked Tom Merry blandly.

"Yah!"

"Cads!"

"Beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha! We've finished here! Let's go and see if the other chaps are getting up."

"Good idea!"

And the Shell fellows retreated to the door.

But the Fourth-Formers, having been so effectually awakened, were not disposed to allow them to depart so easily.

Blake collared a bolster and rushed to the attack.

"Go for them!" he roared.

"Yaas, wathah! Sock it to them, deah boys!"

"Hurray!"

"Down with the Shell!"

The Shell fellows had to turn and fight. The Fourth-Formers, with pillows and bolsters, swept down upon them furiously.

"Line up!" shouted Tom Merry.

There was a wild and whirling conflict, and the pillows and bolsters did great execution. The Shell fellows retreated into the passage, where the Fourth-Formers were not in a sufficient state of clothing to follow them. They crammed the doorway and yelled after the retreating juniors.

"Yah!"

"Yaas, wathah! Yah, deah boys!"

"Never mind, we've woke you up!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "And if this is what you call gratitude, I don't think much of it."

"Yah!"

"Wats!"

And the Shell fellows strolled downstairs, leaving the Fourth to dress themselves.

Downstairs, the school presented an unusual aspect.

Even the Sixth-Formers had availed themselves of their unusual freedom to stay in bed. A few of the seniors could be seen in the quadrangle, but only a few. And those who were up had evidently not considered it their duty to interfere with the new liberties of the juniors.

Tom Merry looked out into the sunny quad.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Fancy sticking in bed on a sunny morning! It's rotten! Might have been playing cricket, as there are no lessons!"

"I suppose there aren't any lessons, without any masters?" grinned Lowther. "Knox can't take the classes, anyway—not the lot of them."

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"It's a jolly change!" said Manners. "I shall take my camera out to-day."

"We ought to get up a cricket match," said Kangaroo.

"We ought to jolly well get some breakfast," said Tom Merry; "I'm hungry. By the way, I don't see any New House chaps out of doors."

"I expect Figgins & Co. aren't up yet," said Glyn, looking across the sunny quad, to the New House, beyond the elms.

"Lazy slackers!"

"Yes, rather! If they're not up after brekker we'd better go and rouse them out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Breakfast was not yet. The kitchen department was not disorganised by the absence of the masters, as Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame, was still at home, and she had her staff well in hand; but not knowing when the juniors would come down, Mrs. Mimms did not have breakfast ready. Tom Merry & Co. visited the house-dame's room, and thundered at the door.

"Mrs. Mimms—Mrs. Mimms!"

"Deary me! Come in! Whatever is the matter?" exclaimed the house-dame, as the door opened, and a crowd of juniors appeared.

"Hungry!" said Tom Merry.

"Master Merry——"
 "Where's brekker?" roared Manners.
 "Oh, Master Manners——"
 "Famished!" shouted Kangaroo.
 "Brekker!"
 "Buck up with brekker!"
 "We're hungry!"
 Mrs. Mimms smiled.

"I will order breakfast at once," she said. "You were not down as usual, and I did not know when you would be coming down. I will order it at once, my dear boys."

"Right-ho, Mrs. Mimms!" said Tom Merry good-humouredly. "Isn't Knox down yet?"

"Master Knox? Oh, no!"
 "Knox not down!" exclaimed Lowther. "My word! The prefect in charge of the House—chap who was swanking about like a little Czar last night—too lazy to get up, eh?"

"Did you call him, Mrs. Mimms?"
 "He was called twice, Master Merry."
 "And he wouldn't shift?"
 "No. He called out very rudely indeed."
 "The beast!"

"Yes, he said I might go and boil my head," said the house-dame indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "The beast!" said Monty Lowther. "Very rotten! Don't do anything of the sort, Mrs. Mimms."

"Master Lowther——"
 "Let's go and see Knox while they're getting brekker," said Tom Merry. "I'm shocked and disgusted at this conduct on the part of Knox."

"Yes, it knocks over the respect due to a prefect," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Oh, don't!"

"It's our duty to wake Knox," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "You see, he was doing his duty like anything last night, and it's only fair we should do ours this morning. Besides, I disapprove of slacking in a senior."

"Yes, rather!"
 "Here they are!" roared Blake's voice.

And a crowd of Fourth-Formers came tearing up, looking very warlike. Tom Merry held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Pax!" he exclaimed.
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy——"
 "Pax!"

"That's all very well!" said Blake wrathfully. "We're going to wallop you for your cheek."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "There's duty to be done," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Ass! What do you mean?"
 "I mean that Knox——"

Tom Merry's manner was so grave and deadly serious that the Fourth-Formers imagined for the moment that something serious had occurred.

"I hardly like to tell you," said Tom Merry.
 "Why, what is it?"

"Bai Jove! Is it an accident, deah boy?"
 "I hope nothing's happened to Knox," said Reilly.

"Faith, he was a baste intirely, but I hope nothing's happened."

"What is it, Tom Merry?"
 "It will shock you fearfully," said Tom Merry, with owl-like gravity.

"Get it over for goodness' sake!"
 "Well, then," said the captain of the Shell slowly and solemnly, "Knox——" He paused.

"Yes?" said Blake nervously.
 "Well, Knox has—has—has——"
 "Yes, yes!"

"Has—hasn't got up yet!" concluded Tom Merry.
 "Eh?"

"He hasn't got up yet."
 "You—you utter ass!" snorted Blake. "Is that what you were making that fuss about?"

The Shell fellows burst into a roar.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, you know, the cheeky ass was pullin' our beastly leg, you know!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake glared—and then he grinned.
 "Oh, all right!" he exclaimed. "If he hasn't got up we'll wake him. Come on!"

And the Shell and the Fourth crowded away with great unanimity towards Knox's room to wako him up.

CHAPTER 9.

Knocked Up and Knocked Down.

KNOX was still in bed, though it was now half-past nine. Knox was not an early riser when he could help it. It was his habit on ordinary mornings to stay in bed till the last possible moment, and then bundle on his clothes, give his face a rub that did duty for a wash, and run downstairs just in time for breakfast. Naturally, now that he was temporarily in the position of Head of St. Jim's, Knox allowed himself greater relaxations. He had stayed up late the previous evening, playing cards and smoking cigarettes with a choice selection of spirits after his own kind. He had gone to bed about one in the morning, and he had awakened with a headache when Mrs. Mimms called him. Now he had fallen asleep again.

Tom Merry tapped gently at his door.
 Knox snored on.
 "Bai Jove! Kick the door, deah boy!"
 Bang!
 Tom Merry kicked the door, and Knox started out of his sleep.

"Wh-w-w-what's that?" he gasped.
 "Knox!"
 "Eh?"

"It's half-past nine!"
 "Who's there?"
 "Merry of the Shell."
 "Go away!"

"It's time to rise, my son."
 "Go away!" roared Knox.
 "Are you getting up?"

"No! Mind your own business! No! Go away!"
 Tom Merry opened the door and looked in. Knox had risen on his elbow in bed, and his face was flushed and his eyes were dull. He had a heavy head that morning, and a very unpleasant taste in his mouth, and his temper was savage, not to say murderous. He glared at Tom Merry like a particularly savage rat.

"Can't be did!" said Tom cheerfully.
 "Merry——"

"It's half-past nine, nearly."
 "Yaas, wathah!"

Knox sat up in bed. He huddled the clothes round him, and glared at Tom Merry, and at the grinning juniors crowding behind him in the doorway.

"You see, we can't have these lazy habits in the Sixth," said Tom Merry seriously. "You know that the Sixth Form is the giddy palladium of a public school, and you're setting us a fearfully bad example."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "We refuse to be set a bad example——"
 "Hear, hear!"

"I quite agree with my fwiend, Tom Mewwy. We refuse to be set a bad example by the Sixth. We uttably decline anythin' of the sort."

"Knox, old man, get up!"
 "Don't be a slacker, Knox!"
 "Don't be a horrible example!"
 "Buck up, Knox!"

The prefect glared. A really good-tempered Sixth-Former might have been exasperated by remarks of this sort from juniors—and Knox was not good-tempered. True, he had interfered with the juniors on his authority of prefect, and he had no right to do that unless he was prepared to do his duty as a prefect—and a prefect's duty was not to lie in bed until half-past nine in the morning. Knox was really in the wrong, though whether Tom Merry & Co. were in the right or not we will not undertake to say. Right or wrong, Knox was in a towering rage, and he looked as if he could have massacred all the juniors at one fell swoop with keen enjoyment.

"Go out of my room!" he stuttered, at last.
 "Are you going to get up?"
 "You cheeky young hound!" roared Knox. "Get out! Get out of my room!"

"We uttably wefuse to get out, Knox, until we have received some assuwanee that you are goin' to stop this disgustin' slackin'!"
 "Hear, hear!"

"Undah the circs, Knox," pursued the swell of St. Jim's, "I must say that I weward you as a wotiah. I am sure that I am pwepared to wespsect a pwefect. I should weward it as doocid bad form to tweat anyone in autthowity with diswespsect, but you are not playin' the game, Knox. You are not settin' us a good example. I insist upon your settin' us a good example. It is your duty. I weward it as simply impewative for a fellow to do his beastly duty, you know!"

ANSWERS

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"Good old Gussy!"

"Pile it on!"

"Buck up, Knox!"

Knox seemed to be gathering himself for a spring like a tiger. It was pretty certain that there was no more sleep for him, in any case. He glanced round the room, as if in search of a weapon. His hand groped behind him and grasped a pillow.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wagged an admonishing forefinger at the senior.

"Undah the circs., Knox, you had bettah get up," he said. "I wegard it as impewative. And, in any case, we wefuse to leave you in bed. I wegard this slackin' as disgustin'!"

"Yes, rather!"

"You hear, Knox?"

Whiz!

Knox's arm shot forward, and the pillow whizzed from his hands and caught Arthur Augustus fairly upon his aristocratic visage before he could dodge.

Biff!

"Yawwooh!"

D'Arcy staggered back, and sat down upon the floor.

"Ow! Ow!"

The juniors yelled.

"Well bowled! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Ow! I—I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now get out of my room!" roared Knox, grasping the

bolster. "Do you hear? Get

out of my room before I get

up and go for you!"

"Can't be did!"

"Get out, I tell you!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Sorry, Knox, but we've

got our duty to do."

"Yaas, wathah!" said

D'Arcy, scrambling up.

"It's a question of dutay,

you know."

Knox almost foamed.

"I—I—I'll smash you up!"

he roared.

"Are you going to get

up?"

"No! Hang you all!

No!"

"Bear a hand, then," said

Tom Merry.

The grinning juniors

grasped the bedclothes, and

dragged them off the bed.

Knox clutched at them, but

the force was too great, and

he had to let go the bedclothes

or be dragged off with them.

He let go, and sat on the bed

in his pyjamas, crimson with rage.

"Getting up now, Knox?"

"No!" roared Knox.

"Collar him!"

The prefect hit out savagely, and kicked with both feet,

struggling and fighting like a wild cat as the juniors pounced

upon him.

Some of the assailants received hard knocks, and there

were loud howls of pain and wrath. But the odds were too

great. Knox was grasped in many hands, and whirled off

the bed, and bumped on the floor.

"Good!" panted Tom Merry. "Now, then, Knox, we've

knocked you up, and—knocked you down. We don't

expect any gratitude, but if you're not dressed and down in

ten minutes, we'll come back for you. We can't have this

rotten slacking in the Sixth. Come on, you fellows, take

the key out of the lock; we shall have to come in again if

Knox doesn't come down to brekker."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors trooped off, leaving Knox breathless and

gasping, and nearly beside himself with rage.

But the prefect thought he had better dress and go down.

He knew that Tom Merry & Co. would keep their word, if

he didn't; and he did not wish for another visit of the

juniors to his room.

The prefect was down inside the ten minutes, and there

was a scowl on his face like a thundercloud. The juniors

were at breakfast in the dining-room, and as Knox came in,

they all rose to their feet, and said with one voice:

"Good-morning, Knox!"

Knox stamped on to his place without replying. And the

juniors grinned and went on with their breakfast.

CHAPTER 10.

Skimpole's Lecture.

AFTER breakfast, Tom Merry & Co. turned out into the sunny quadrangle. It was a pleasant morning, sunny and breezy, and the quad, was very pleasant—far pleasanter than the class-rooms—there was no doubt about that. It was very curious to the juniors to stroll in the open air instead of going in to class, and very agreeable. Lessons, of course, there could be none, under the circumstances. There was no one to take a class, unless the prefects had taken them. And certainly any attempt in that direction, on the part of the prefects, would have been hotly resisted by the boys.

Whole holidays were not common at St. Jim's. The fellows had two half-holidays a week—Wednesday and Saturday. Sunday, of course, was a whole holiday, but then, on Sunday there was church twice, and several other regular duties, so that they really did not by any means have the day to themselves. Besides, the sacred character of the day made it impossible for them to be as free and joyous as on a week-day holiday. Founder's Day was a whole holiday, and there were a few others; but they were rare enough to make them very enjoyable. And this extra holiday was ripping—so all the fellows declared. The juniors especially were of opinion that a school without a master was likely to be a really great success, for a time, at least, and they enjoyed themselves to the utmost.

All Forms rejoiced in their new-found liberty, and both Houses. There was no occasion for the School House fellows

to go over and wake the New

House up, as it turned out.

When they came out after

breakfast, they found the

New House fellows in the

quad. Figgins & Co. were

looking particularly cheerful.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry,

as he met the great Figgins.

"What time did you go to

bed last night?"

"Usual time," said Figgins.

"My hat!"

"Baker insisted upon it,"

said Figgins. "Baker's a de-

cent chap, and we weren't

going to rag him. Knox is

differant. We couldn't stand

a chap like Knox in the New

House, you know."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Of course, we could have

ragged Baker if we'd liked,

as I hear you did your pre-

fect," Kerr remarked. "But

it's bad form, you know."

"Weally, Kerr—"

"I think a school without a master is a ripping idea," said

Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "I have been thinking that it

would be a splendid idea to celebrate the occasion by giving

a ripping feed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Trust Fatty to think of that," grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I think it's a jolly good idea," said Fatty Wynn.

"We could stand a big feed in the big school-room, and

have the whole school to it, while the masters are away."

"Bai Jove!"

"I suppose you are not doing any lessons this morning?"

Tom Merry asked.

"Rather not."

"No fear."

"Nobody to take classes," chuckled Figgins. "It's jolly.

Of course, it wouldn't do for always. We're sent here to

learn things, I suppose."

"Yaas, when you weflect on the subject, deah boys, it is

weally just as Figgay says, you know."

Clang, clang!

The juniors started and looked round.

It was the bell for classes, but as there were no classes at

St. Jim's that morning, the reason for the bell's ringing was

not clear.

Clang-ang-ang!

"My hat!" said Figgins. "It's a lark, I suppose. There's

nothing to go in for!"

Jangle-jangle.

"I wonder who it is, and what for?"

"Bai Jove! Let's go and see."

"The masters can't have got back—at all events, without

our seeing them. It must be some silly ass larking."

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"Let's go and see."

A crowd of fellows went into the School House to see. Others were coming from various directions, surprised and startled by the ringing of the class-room bell.

The ringing had ceased now, and as the juniors came along the Form-room passage, they caught sight of a junior in glasses, standing in the doorway of the Shell room.

"Hallo! It's Skimmy! Was it you ringing, Skimmy?"

Skimpole, of the Shell, blinked at them through his big glasses. There was a benevolent smile upon Skimpole's face. Skimpole was the genius of the Shell, and he cultivated the most extraordinary opinions on the oddest of subjects, and he was always willing to lecture upon those subjects when he could find any hearers.

"Yes, my dear friends," said Skimpole. "Pray come in."

"What's on?" demanded Figgins.

"The lecture."

"The what?"

Skimpole beamed.

"The lecture," he said. "Pray come in and take your places, my dear fellows."

And Skimpole trotted back into the Form-room. The juniors, amazed and wondering, followed him in. There was no one in the room beside Skimpole. The genius of the Shell mounted at the Form-master's desk, and rapped on it with his knuckles.

"My dear friends—"

"Who's going to lecture?" roared Heggies.

"I am."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"My dear friends," said Skimpole, "under the peculiar and really unprecedented circumstances of the school being left without a master, I regard it as an excellent opportunity for imparting some instruction in important matters to the ignorant and benighted. I regard you all as exceedingly dull and uninformed."

"What!"

"On the subjects I am going to touch upon, I mean," said Skimpole. "Take Socialism—"

"I refuse to take anythin' of the sort."

"Take Socialism. I have selected this as the subject of my lecture, and I am assured that, as there are no lessons to be done this morning, you will all be pleased at this simple and useful way of passing four or five hours—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Four or five minutes, perhaps," murmured Blake, "and then bump the lecturer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On subjects of social reform, and of the improvement of the race," said Skimpole, "there is benighted ignorance in all quarters. I seek to lighten this darkness as far as St. Jim's is concerned, and I am ready to place my unusual brain power and superior intelligence wholly at the disposal of my brethren."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Reflect, my friends," said Skimpole, warming to his subject—"reflect upon the condition of the down-trodden millions, trodden into the dust by the few who are rich, each of the suffering poor with an iron heel on his neck! Reflect—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Do Socialists have the same arithmetic as sensible people, Skimmy, or a different sort?"

"What an absurd question, my dear Merry! The same, of course!"

"Then I don't see how you work that out," said Tom Merry. "You say the millions are down-trodden."

"Certainly. They lie groaning—"

"And the few who are rich do the treading-down bizney?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And each of the down-trodden chaps has an iron heel on his neck?"

"Decidedly."

"Then how do you work it out? Suppose each of the rich goes for 'em with both feet," said Tom Merry, "even then they'd only have two heels apiece, and each of them could only tread down two chaps. Where do all the other heels come from?"

There was a roar of laughter.

"The only explanation is, that the rich must have as many legs as centipedes," said Tom Merry, "and experience shows nothing of the sort."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Got him there, you know."

"I was speaking metaphorically, Merry. You must not take what I say in a literal sense," said Skimpole.

"Oh, I see, metaphorical millions are trodden down by metaphorical rich," said Tom Merry. "If the treading is only metaphorical, too, I don't see what there is to grumble at."

"You are remarkably obtuse, my dear Merry. However, I will endeavour to enlighten you. Suppose there were two men on an island—"

"My hat, he's got to that now!" said Blake. "This is where the lecture stops!"

"You are quite mistaken, my dear Blake, I am only just beginning."

"Your mistake, Skimmy, you're ending," said Blake.

And with a rush the juniors surrounded the lecturer, and jerked him down from Mr. Linton's desk, and sat him down on the floor with a bump.

"Oh!" gasped Skimpole.

"Gentlemen," said Blake, "the lecture is now over, and so is the lecturer! Dismiss!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" gasped Skimpole. "My dear friends!"

But his dear friends were crowding out of the class-room, and the genius of St. Jim's was left to address the desert air.

CHAPTER 11.

Untold News.

"TELEGRAM!"

"Bai Jove!"

"From Dieppe, I expect," grinned Tom Merry, as a crowd of fellows surrounded the telegraph-boy from Rylcombe. "Who's it for, young shaver?"

"Master Knox, sir."

"Knox! Where's Knox! Knox!"

The prefect came out of the house, and the telegram was handed to him. He read it with a sour face.

"Is it from abroad, Knox?" Tom Merry asked.

The prefect scowled at him.

"Yes," he said.

"From Mr. Railton?"

"Yes."

"Oh! He has wired from Dieppe, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"Mind your own business," said Knox. And putting the telegram into his pocket, the prefect turned and walked back into the School House.

There was a roar of indignation from the fellows. They all wanted to know what was in the telegram, and naturally. Mr. Railton had undoubtedly wired to Knox the time of his probable return, and the juniors wanted to know when to expect the masters back. Anyone but Knox would have told them immediately.

Mr. Railton and his party, of course, would take the first possible boat back, and there was little doubt that he would be at St. Jim's again that evening at latest. But the juniors wanted to know just when.

"Show us the telegram, Knox!" roared Lefevre, of the Fifth. "That's what I say—show us the blessed telegram."

Knox made no reply. He went into the house, leaving the juniors angry and disappointed.

"Let's go and take it away from him," said Gore.

"Good egg! Come on."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"After all, he has a right to keep his own correspondence, if he likes," he remarked.

"But Railton must have intended us to know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Mako him show up!"

Tom Merry hesitated. There was little doubt in his mind that Mr. Railton had meant Knox to inform the boys of St. Jim's when his return was to be expected. He would not waste the money upon expressly telling him so in a telegram from a French town. But naturally he must have meant it.

Knox's object was pretty plain. The boys were taking matters very much into their own hands, and the prefect dared not interfere with them. He hoped that they would be caught in some act of lawlessness by the sudden return of the House-master.

If the school were in a riot, and Mr. Railton and the rest returned in the midst of it, Knox's object would be served.

The juniors knew that as well as Knox himself, and the idea naturally exasperated them.

They might be a little wild while the school was without a master, but they all wanted to "simmer down" and give Mr. Railton a dutiful and respectful reception when he came back to St. Jim's.

"I've got an idea!" exclaimed Figgins suddenly. "Baker is a prefect, and he has a right to ask to see the telegram."

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll ask Baker to make Knox show him," said Figgins, with a chuckle, "and Knox will have to do it! And then Baker will tell us."

"Good wheeze!"

Figgins dashed off in search of Baker. Baker was standing

in the doorway of the New House, talking to Sefton, of the Sixth. To judge by Sefton's expression, he was not having a pleasant time. As a matter of fact, Baker had discovered that Sefton had been of Knox's little party the night before, and he was giving Sefton his opinion on the transaction in exceedingly plain English.

"Baker," exclaimed Figgins breathlessly, "there's a telegram from Mr. Railton!"

Baker turned away from Sefton.

"Where?" he asked.

"It's come for Knox."

"What's the news?"

"Knox hasn't told us."

"Oh, all right," said Baker, "I'll see him!"

He crossed to the School House, with the delighted Figgins at his heels. Baker went into the School House, and the juniors followed him in a crowd. They wanted to see the interview if they could.

Baker knocked at Knox's study door, and opened it. Knox was sitting at the table, smoking a cigarette and practising dealing cards, in full view of the juniors as the door opened. He started and turned red, but whether it was the cigarette, or the fact that he was practising dealing from the bottom of the pack that confused him, we cannot say. Baker stepped into the study and closed the door, much to the disappointment of the juniors crowded in the passage.

"Bai Jove, Knox is an uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy. "Fancy his havin' the cheek to twy and cowwect us, and then cultivatin' those beastly habits himself. If the Head knew, he wouldn't be allowed to wemain a pwefect."

"No fear!"

"Baker isn't that sort," said Figgins, in a superior tone. "We shouldn't stand Knox in the New House, you know."

"Rats!"

"Wats!"

"We don't have that sort of thing over there," said Figgins loftily. "We simply couldn't stand Knox!"

"You'll stand knocks, and some jolly hard ones, if you don't cheese it!" said Kangaroo wrathfully.

"Look here—"

"Oh, cheese it, you New House waster!"

"School House fathead!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry. "Pax, you asses! There's going to be a row in the study, and that's enough."

"Bai Jove!"

There was no doubt about it. Through the closed door of the study could be heard two voices rising in angry altercation.

CHAPTER 12.

Prefect and Prefect!

BAKER had closed the door behind him as he entered to shut off from the view of the juniors the School House prefect, sitting there with cigarette and cards. Knox half-rose to his feet, looking at Baker with a bitter smile. Baker was a plain, rugged fellow, a splendid cricketer, and very direct and straightforward in his ways, quite unlike Knox, and the two had never been on good terms. Baker was trying hard to be civil now, though he could hardly restrain his scorn at the sight of the School House senior's occupation.

"What do you want?" asked Knox.

"You've had a telegram?"

"Yes."

"From Mr. Railton?"

"Yes."

"Will you show it to me?"

Knox slipped the cards into a drawer, and then rose. He leaned carelessly against the window-frame, and looked at Baker.

"What do you want to see it for?" he asked.

Baker stared.

"Naturally, I want to know when to expect the masters back," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"As a prefect, I suppose I am entitled to ask you?" said Baker warmly.

"I suppose so."

"Besides, you have no motive for keeping it a secret, I presume," said Baker, looking puzzled. "Mr. Railton must have meant you to tell all the school."

"I don't suppose he did. If he had wanted that, he would have said so. The telegram is to me, and I'm at liberty to keep it to myself, if I choose," said Knox tartly.

"Nonsense. The news was intended for all of us, and you know that perfectly well."

"I know nothing of the sort."

Baker drew a quick breath.

"Have you any motive for keeping that telegram to yourself?" he asked.

"Perhaps."

"I demand to see it."

Knox shifted uneasily.

"Suppose I show it to you, would you keep it to yourself?" he said.

"Why should I?"

"I'll tell you," said Knox slowly, "the juniors here have refused to obey me, or to regard me in any way. There is nothing but insolence and insubordination here."

Baker's lip curled.

"It's different in my House," he said.

"Well, that's how it is here. The young scoundrels have taken matters into their own hands, and have started running things to please themselves. They're going from bad to worse, and before the day's out, I expect them to have made a regular riot of it."

"Well?"

"Well, and when Mr. Railton returns, I want him to catch them at all, that's all!" said Knox viciously. "It's better than making a report to him, if he finds them playing the very dickens in the House."

Baker frowned.

"It looks to me as if you want to make trouble for the sake of getting your House-master down on the juniors," he said. "If they know when Mr. Railton is coming, they will make it a point to get into order by then, at all events."

"That's just what I'm not going to have. Railton can see them as I've had to see them—at their worst," said Knox, with a sneer.

"It's not playing the game, Knox."

"Thanks. I don't want your opinion about that."

"Look here, Knox, do you want to keep me and the rest of the Sixth in ignorance of when the masters will return, because you want to play this trick on the juniors?" Baker demanded roughly.

"I've explained my reasons."

"They don't satisfy me, and, as a senior, I've a right to know when the masters are coming back."

"If you promise to keep it to yourself—"

"The other Sixth-Formers will want to know."

"Yes, and then it will leak out, and all the blessed school would know it," said Knox.

"Very likely; and there's no good reason why all the school shouldn't know it, either!" retorted Baker. "What you are trying to do is to play a mean trick on the juniors, and I don't mind telling you so in plain English."

"Thank you!" said Knox, with a sneer. "And now you've told me, perhaps you'll have the kindness to leave my study."

"I want to know when the masters are returning, first."

Knox's jaw seemed to set grimly.

"I'm not going to tell you," he said.

"You have the telegram still?"

Knox's hand moved towards his pocket, and the movement was enough. The telegram was there, and there was no disguising it.

"Show it to me," said Baker quietly.

"I decline to show it to you."

"I demand to see it."

Knox shrugged his shoulders.

"Demand away," he said.

Baker drew a deep breath. His anger was rising, but he tried to keep himself in hand. He came a step nearer to Knox, and the prefect moved a step back towards the grate. His eyes were on Baker's all the time.

"I want to see that telegram!" said Baker.

"You can't!"

"You refuse to show it to me?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall take it from you," said Baker, between his teeth.

Knox backed away further towards the fire. His hand was in his pocket now, crumpling the telegram in his fingers.

"You won't!" he said.

Baker stood with his hands clenched. There was anger in his face, but he was still trying to restrain his temper, and to avoid trouble. He cared, much more than Knox did, for the effect a struggle between two prefects would have upon the juniors.

"Give me the telegram!" he said.

"I won't!"

"Tell me what I want to know—what I've a right to know."

"I won't!"

Baker said no more. He came springing forward.

"You'd better stand back," said Knox. "If you lay hands on me, there will be trouble, my fine fellow."

Baker paused for a moment.

"It's disgraceful enough, a fight between prefects," he said. "I want to avoid it. But I have a right to see that telegram—there's a crowd of juniors in the passage, and they all know that I've come here to see it. Do you think I'm

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NEXT WEEK:

"BURNT OUT."

going away, and going to let all the youngsters know you've refused me, and I haven't insisted. Besides, I want to know when the masters will be here. I want to have my House in order. Will you show me the telegram?"

"No."

"Then I'll take it, and the blame is yours."

Baker was upon the School House prefect the next moment. But even as he grasped Knox, the latter jerked the telegram from his pocket, and threw it into the midst of the blazing coals on the fire.

Baker uttered a cry, and sprang to save it. But Knox grasped him, and struggled, and forced him back.

The flimsy paper blazed up.

Baker exerted his strength, and hurled Knox from him. The School House cad was no match for the rugged New House prefect. Knox went with a crash to the floor, and Baker ran to the gate.

But it was too late! The telegram had been consumed, and only the white ash of it was left crumbling on the coals.

Baker clicked his teeth. He was intensely angry. He turned towards Knox, who had risen, dusty and shaken, with a very spiteful look upon his face.

"You cad!" shouted Baker.

"Will you get out of my study?"

"By Jove! I've a good mind to wade in, and give you the licking of your life, you mean cad!" Baker shouted, clenching his fists.

"Quite an interesting entertainment for the juniors outside," sneered Knox.

Baker's hands dropped to his sides again. That thought restrained him; there was no purpose to be served by licking Knox now, and it would be a disgraceful scene, lowering to the dignity of the Sixth—for nothing!

Without a word more, the New House prefect swung away to the door. He went out into the passage without looking at Knox, and closed the door behind him. He ran into the crowd of juniors, and there was a general shout.

"What's the news, Baker?"

"When are they coming back?"

"I don't know," said Baker shortly.

"But the telegram—"

"Knox has burned the telegram!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"But didn't he tell you—" began Kerr.

But Baker did not stop to be questioned. He strode from the School House with a clouded brow. The juniors dispersed, angry and disappointed, after howling some expressive things through Knox's keyhole. There was only one fellow at St. Jim's who knew when the masters were returning, and that was Knox—and Knox did not mean to say a word!

CHAPTER 13.

Lumley-Lumley Says No!

DINNER was served at the usual time in the dining-room in the School House. The juniors came to it with keen appetites—from rambling by wood and river. They found that that made them hungrier than "mugging" Latin in the Form-rooms. The morning had been spent most enjoyably, and some of the fellows were beginning to think that a school run permanently without masters would be a great institution.

There was an unusual buzz of talk over dinner. Discipline being relaxed, the fellows allowed themselves all sorts of freedom. They held conversations at the top of their voices across the hall, and pelted one another with bread. Dinner proceeded somewhat uproariously.

Knox did not interfere. Sometimes he looked at the juniors with a sour smile, but that was all.

Perhaps he was thinking of the return of Mr. Railton and his party, the hour of which only he knew.

The juniors had already ceased to worry about that.

The masters would return, and their unaccustomed liberty would be curtailed again; but until then they could eat, drink, and be merry.

And they did!

Dinner having been disposed of, somebody suggested a chorus, and the old walls of the School House rang with rousing voices.

Then the fellows poured out into the quadrangle.

Lumley-Lumley was going down to the cricket-pitch with Tom Merry & Co., when Levison twitched at his sleeve. The one-time Outsider of St. Jim's looked round.

"What do you want?" he asked abruptly.

"Just a word," said Levison.

"Go ahead, then!"

Levison glanced at Tom Merry and the others, who were standing by. They walked on at once and left Lumley-Lumley alone with Levison.

"Well," said Lumley-Lumley impatiently, "what is it? I've no time to waste, Levison."

"I won't keep you long. But what's the hurry?"

"I'm going to play cricket."

"Oh, cricket!" said Levison, with a sneer.

"Yes," said Lumley-Lumley, "and a better occupation, I guess, than you, and Mellish, and Crooke have got for this afternoon."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "we're getting up a little party—"

"What for?"

"It's a smoking concert."

Lumley-Lumley stared.

"A what?" he exclaimed.

"A smoking concert," said Levison coolly. "While the cat's away, you know."

"You silly ass!"

"I think it's a good idea. The masters are away, and there's no danger. We're going to have a smoking concert in the top room of the old tower—that's a quiet spot. We're going to have ginger-beer, and a taste of something else, and cigarettes—Crooke, of the Shell, is standing the smokes."

"The cad!"

"Crooke's coming, and Mellish, and Gore, and another fellow or two. Will you come?"

"No, I won't!"

"Look here, Lumley—"

"I've done with all that," said Lumley-Lumley. "I've told you so before, in plain English, I guess. You nearly got me expelled from St. Jim's once. I tell you I've done with it all. And you'd better have done with it, too."

"Rats!"

"Chuck up the idea, Levison, and come down to the cricket," said Lumley-Lumley earnestly. "It's more decent, and you'll feel better afterwards."

"More rats!"

"Well, I'm not coming to your precious smoking concert, that's all."

And Lumley-Lumley turned away.

"Hold on!" said Levison, in some alarm. "Mum's the word, you know; don't say anything to Tom Merry and the rest! They might interfere."

"I guess they would."

"Well, mum's the word. I was speaking to you in confidence, you know."

Lumley-Lumley hesitated for a moment.

"Well, all right," he said.

"You won't say anything?"

"No."

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Five of the six boys marked with a **X** on the photographs published on the back page of No. 165 of the GEM Library, having sent in their applications, have duly received the GEM Free Hampers. The names and addresses of the lucky winners, who attend the Stobswell Supplementary School, Dundee, and Wick Road School, Brislington, Bristol, are as follows:

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MASTER JOHN FORBES, 26, Bruce Street, Dundee.

MASTER JOHN MACDONALD, 4, Raglan Street, Dundee.

MASTER STEWART GIBB, 42, Catherine Street, Dundee.

WICK ROAD SCHOOL, BRISLINGTON, BRISTOL.

MASTER HERBERT HATHERELL, 12, Trelawney Road, Brislington, Bristol.

MASTER PERCY BENNETT, 21, Sandholme Road, New Brislington, Bristol.

At the time of going to press the third boy in the Wick Road School has not been identified by our Special Representative.



"Come back here, Lowther!" roared Knox. "Thanks, I'm all right here," replied Monty Lowther. "I order you, as a prefect!" "And I decline—as a sensible chap," said Lowther coolly. (See p. 6.)

"All serene! You're a fool not to come."

"Rubbish!"

Lumley-Lumley walked away after the cricketers. Levison shrugged his shoulders, and strolled towards the old tower. The grey, ivy-clad tower was a relic of the earliest building that had occupied the site of St. Jim's. A great part of it had crumbled away into ruins, but it still rose above the surrounding buildings, and the top of it commanded a wide view of the countryside. In the top room of the old tower the fellows sometimes gave little feuds, but certainly the room had never been used for a smoking concert before. That was a little idea of Levison's, and could only have been carried out while the masters were away from St. Jim's. The young blackguards were certainly "going strong" this time.

Lumley-Lumley was looking troubled as he joined the cricketers.

It was not so very long since he had been a black sheep of the black sheep, and a leader in blackguardism of this sort.

He had reformed, and once he had fallen again, and had nearly been expelled from St. Jim's for it. Since then he had gone straightforward, and turned his back upon temptation.

It was not about himself that he was thinking now. He was sure of himself—and the precious party in the tower did not tempt him at all. He was thinking of the foolish young rascals who were wasting time, and health, and money in their endeavours to pose as men of the world while they were still schoolboys.

"What's up?" Tom Merry asked him abruptly.

Lumley-Lumley coloured.

"Oh, nothing!" he said.

"You're playing?"

"I guess so."

Lumley-Lumley laughed a little.

"Did you think I was going off with Levison?" he asked. "That's all done with. Only, he's told me something that bothers me a little. Still, I guess that it's no bizney of mine."

And Lumley-Lumley made a gesture, as if dismissing the matter from his mind.

Tom Merry gave him a curious look, but asked no questions. The hero of the Shell was not of an inquisitive turn of mind.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Hallo, my sons! We're going to lick you this time!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Good!" he said. "We're ready, if you can do it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the junior cricketers started. And the thought of Levison and his little smoking party in the tower soon vanished from Lumley-Lumley's mind.

CHAPTER 14.

The Smoking Party.

MELLISH was waiting for Levison in the doorway of the old tower.

Levison joined him, and answered his inquiring look with a shake of the head.

"He won't come?" asked Mellish.

"No."

"The ass!"

"Oh, he's sticking to it!" said Levison. "I suppose he knows his own game best. Of course, it's all humbug. He's got an axe to grind."

"Of course," agreed Mellish.

"But he won't come now. Are the others gone up?"

"Yes—Crooke and Gore."

"Good! Let's go up, too."

"Hallo, kids!"

It was a cool greeting from Wally, of the Third—D'Arcy minor! The hero of the Third had just looked into the tower, and he seemed surprised at seeing the two Fourth-Formers there.

Mellish scowled.

"Get out!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Rats!" said Wally cheerfully. "I'm not in, for one thing, and I don't see why I should get out, for another. What are you young beggars up to?"

It was rather a cool question, considering that Wally D'Arcy belonged to a lower Form. It exasperated the two Fourth-Formers.

"You'd better buzz along," said Levison threateningly.

"Bosh!"

Levison and Mellish came quickly towards him. Wally backed away, but not quite in time. They grasped him, and dragged him into the tower.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Wally. "Fair play, you know."

"Bump the young cad!" said Mellish.

"What-ho!" said Levison emphatically.

"Here, hold on! Leggo! Chuck it! Ow! Oh!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

D'Arcy minor smote the ground, in a sitting posture, hard—three times in succession.

And he roared.

"Now, then, you young rotter, will you bunk?" demanded Mellish.

"No," yelled the exasperated Wally. "I won't! Yah!"

"Kick him out!"

Wally was dragged to the doorway of the tower, and slung round, and two feet were planted simultaneously behind him.

Wally spun out of the tower, and dropped on the ground on his hands and knees.

He was up again in a twinkling, with clenched fists and flaming eyes. The Fourth-Formers stood grinning in the doorway of the tower, and for the moment Wally looked as if he would charge at them recklessly. But he thought better of it.

"You worms!" he shouted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You measly rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally's words failed him. He swung away, and stamped off, and the two Fourth-Formers turned laughing into the tower.

"We've got rid of that prying young rotter, at all events," said Levison.

And Mellish nodded assent. They did not know Wally.

The Fourth-Formers ascended the spiral stair of the old tower. The thick wall was pierced with narrow windows, wide inside, but mere slits where they opened upon the air. Through the slits in the stonework they could see the wide green fields, and the winding river, and the grey old buildings of St. Jim's. But the two young rascals had no eye for scenery, and it was old to them, anyway. They

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tramped on up the winding stone staircase till they came out in the top room of the tower.

The roof had long ago gone, and the windows were crumbled. In rainy weather the room was drenched, but in fine weather it was very pleasant.

Crooke and Gore were seated there, on wooden benches, and Crooke had opened a cardboard box, which was crammed with cigarettes.

He grinned at the new-comers.

"What was the row down there?" he asked.

"Only a fag poking into the tower," said Levison. "We made it warm for him. We don't want anybody calling in just at present."

Crooke chuckled.

"Quite right," he remarked. "Have you got the matches?"

"Here you are!"

"And here's the ginger-pop," said Gore, opening a bag. "I've got a dozen bottles of ginger-pop, and one of something else."

"Good egg!"

And with a very mysterious air, Gore produced a smaller bottle, of glass, which contained an amber fluid.

The juniors looked at it with awe.

"What is it?" asked Mellish.

"Brandy!"

"Phew!"

"Makes the other stuff go down splendidly," said Gore.

"Does it?"

"Of course it does!" said Gore irritably. "It's—its splendid stuff!"

"Oh!"

"Try it!"

"I—I'd rather you had some first."

Gore laughed scoffingly.

"Oh, you're a soft ass!" he exclaimed. "Look here!"

He poured out a glass of ginger-beer and then removed the cork from the glass bottle. He poured out some of the liquid it contained, with a sweep of the hand, but as a matter of fact, he allowed very little to go into the ginger-beer.

"Now watch me," he said.

"You haven't got much there," said Levison.

"Well, no good overdoing it, you know."

"Rather risky going down the stairs here, if it got into your head," grinned Levison.

"Well, one can't be too careful."

"Let's see you drink it," said Mellish.

Gore drank some of the stuff.

In spite of himself, he made a wry face. He had not put very much brandy into the ginger-beer, but just enough to spoil the flavour, and make it nasty to the taste.

Of all the four young duffers in the tower, not one was there who would not have preferred his ginger-beer in its natural state. And they would much rather have had ices or jam-tarts than cigarettes. But nothing would have induced them to admit as much. They wanted to keep up to one another, and to themselves if possible, the solemn pretence that they were swaggering young blades, awfully doggish, and quite men of the world!

"You don't seem to be enjoying it," said Mellish.

"Oh, it's ripping."

"Well, you can give me some—mind, not too much. I—I like it awfully, only—only there's no sense in overdoing a thing, is there?"

"Oh, all serene!"

"Stop—that's enough for me."

"But I've put in hardly a taste!"

"Well, it's enough. I—I'll have some more later."

"Oh, be a man!" said Gore.

"Rats! I'm not going to get tipsy and tumble down those blessed stairs to please you! Drink the filthy stuff yourself," said Mellish, forgetting for the moment that he was a man of the world, and liked brandy in his ginger-beer awfully.

"Order!" said Crooke pacifically. "Who's going to smoke?"

"That's more in my line," said Mellish.

"Here you are, then."

"Light up."

The four juniors lighted up. They sat round the room, puffing at the cigarettes with an elaborate appearance of enjoyment.

"This is ripping," said Gore.

"Oh, splendid!"

"You see—Hallo, what's that?"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

It was the voice of Wally on the stone stair. The next moment Wally, and Jameson, and curly Gibson, and two or three others of the Third Form, looked into the room.

"My only Aunt Jane! They're smoking!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Fags on the Warpath.

THE smokers leaped to their feet.

In the first moment of alarm they feared that Lumley-Lumley might have given them away, and sent Tom Merry & Co. to look into the matter.

Their alarm subsided somewhat as they saw that the visitors were only fags of the Third Form.

But Wally & Co. had evidently come on business. They sauntered into the room, and a crowd of Third-Formers appeared behind them on the stone landing and the stairs below. The Third Form had turned up in force.

Gore and his friends glared at them.

"What do you fags want here?" demanded Crooke.

"Trouble," said Wally sweetly.

And the fags chuckled.

"Get out!"

"Rats!"

"We'll kick you out if you don't go!" yelled Crooke.

"Try it!"

The Shell fellow made a forward movement. Wally's jaw set squarely, and his fists clenched.

"Line up, chaps!" he said.

The fags were crowding in. There were a dozen of them in the room already, and more were behind on the stairs. The odds were hopeless—the four juniors were simply overwhelmed, if it came to a struggle.

"Well, ain't you coming on?" asked Wally, with a grin, as Crooke changed his mind, and held back from the attack.

"Look here, you get out of this," said Crooke.

"No fear."

"We came here for a quiet smoke," said Gore. "Get out!"

"We ain't looking for you two," said Wally cheerfully.

"Levison and Mellish are our mutton." They went for me a little while back, and gave me a bumping. They were two to one. Now we're a dozen to two, and they're going to have the bumping back—with interest. See?"

"You cheeky fag!" snarled Levison.

"Collar them, kids!"

"Get away!" shouted Levison. "I—I'll smash you if you lay your paws on me!"

"Collar him!"

Five or six fags rushed at Levison.

He struck out furiously, and Curly Gibson gave a roar, and rolled over. The next moment Jameson dropped on top of him. But Levison went down, then, with the fags piling on him.

Mellish was collared at the same moment, but he did not resist. He knew that the odds were too great, and his only desire was to avoid rough handling as far as possible. It might be cheek on the part of the Third to attack Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows, but they were doing it—there was no doubt about that—and Mellish wanted to get off as cheaply as possible.

Crooke and Gore, however, were not so patient. For Shell fellows to be ragged by Third-Form fags was simply intolerable. The two of them rushed at Wally & Co., hitting out. They were both powerful fellows, in comparison with the fags, and they drove the youngsters back for a moment.

But only for a moment.

Wally & Co. rallied, and by force of numbers, they overwhelmed the Shell fellows, rolling them on the stone floor, and rolling over them.

"Got 'em!" gasped Wally.

"Sit on their heads!"

"Hurrah!"

There was no doubt that Crooke & Co. had had the worst of it. They were sprawling on the floor, the four of them, with innumerable fags sitting upon them.

The smart set were helpless prisoners in the hands of the Third.

Wally rose to his feet and put his crumpled collar straight, and rubbed a bruised nose, and grinned.

"We've got 'em!" he remarked.

"Lemme gerrup!" spluttered Gore.

"No fear!"

"I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"Sit on his head if he won't shut up."

"Grorororoooooch!"

Jameson sat on Gore's head.

"Now," said Wally, "my idea is— My only Aunt Jane, what's the matter, Jimmy?"

"Yow!" roared Jameson, springing into the air.

"What the—"

"Yaroo!"

"What's happened?"

"Ow!" yelled Jameson. "He's—he's bitten me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroo! What are you cackling at, you silly ass? There's nothing funny in that! Yow! Oh! Yaroo!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Gerroff, you beasts!"

"They've been smoking here," said Wally, looking round at the cigarettes that were scattered on the floor. "My hat! And drinking, too! Rotters!"

"Blackguards!" said Curly Gibson.

"Worms!"

"We don't approve of this sort of thing," said Wally, with a serious shake of the head. "While the masters are away, it's our duty to look after the morals of the Fourth and the Shell."

The fags chuckled at the idea.

"There's nothing to cackle at," said Wally severely. "If the older chaps can't look after themselves, it's our bounden duty to look after them. And we're going to do it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yes, rather."

"The best idea is to make an example of them," said Wally. "Stand them on their hind legs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And tie their hands. You can tear up their handkerchiefs to tie them with, and you can use their neckties as well."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The four juniors were dragged up.

They recommenced struggling at once, but with a score of hands grasping them, they had no chance at all of getting loose.

Their hands were tied down to their sides, and then they gave in, and stood scowling and furious, and unresisting, in the midst of the chuckling crowd of fags.

"Good!" said Wally, surveying them. "Now, stick these blessed cigarettes over them—behind their ears, and in their hair and their button-holes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The four smokers were adorned with cigarettes. As Crooke had paid quite a little sum for that box of smokes, he was not pleased to see them wasted in this way. But the fags were not thinking of pleasing Crooke.

They pinned cigarettes on the smokers till they were simply bristling with them.

Then Wally uncorked the little glass bottle, and sniffed, and turned quite pale.

"What is it?" asked Jameson.

"Brandy!"

"My hat!"

"They can have it," said Wally, and he poured the contents of the glass bottle in equal portions over the heads of the four juniors.

The fumes of the liquor made the recipients feel quite sick, and they changed colour visibly. Wally finished by smashing the bottle on the floor. There was no doubt that D'Arcy minor was a most strenuous advocate of the temperance cause.

"What about the ginger-beer?" asked Jones minimus.

"They may as well have that, too. It may wash out the smell of the other stuff; it's horrid."

"Keep off, you beast!" roared Gore.

"Can't be did! It's your ginger-pop, and you're going to have it."

The ginger-beer was poured over the unhappy blades. They did not feel nearly so doggish now.

"Now bring them down," said Wally.

"What are you going to do?" howled Crooke.

"I'm going to show you to Tom Merry, as a warning that he's neglecting his duties," said Wally severely. "I'm going to point out to Tom Merry that I really haven't time to look after the morals of the Middle Forms, and he'll have to look after them himself."

"You cheeky young beast!"

"Rats! March the bounders out."

"Hurrah!"

The "bounders" were marched down the stairs and marched out. Smelling vilely of the liquor that had been thrown over them, wet and furious, panting with rage, the four smokers were marched out of the old tower, and the Third, with loud shouts, marched them off in triumph to the cricket-field, where Tom Merry & Co. were still playing.

CHAPTER 16.

Not So Doggish!

TOM MERRY had just bowled Figgins, and another batsman was coming in, when the noisy troop of fags appeared on the junior cricket ground. The School House fieldsmen waved their hands excitedly at the invaders.

"Get off the ground!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Keep back!"

"Keep off the grass!"

Wally & Co. took not the slightest notice of the shouting, or of the wild excitement of the field. They marched on with their prisoners.

"Get out, you young chumps!" shouted Tom Merry.

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NEXT WEEK:

"BURNT OUT."

"Get off the ground, do you hear?"

"Off! Get off!"

The cricketers gathered round excitedly. The fags marched on till they were right on the pitch, and the game had to be stopped. A shouting circle of cricketers surrounded them, brandishing their fists.

"You cheeky young bounders!"

"Get off the pitch!"

"Smash them!"

"Pulverise them!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Keep your wool on, my dear infants," said Wally cheerfully. "We've brought you something that belongs to you."

The four prisoners were bumped down on the cricket-pitch. They lay wriggling there, shedding cigarettes on all sides.

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Gweat Scott! What does this mean, Wally, you young wascal?"

Wally chuckled.

"It's a smoking-party," he explained.

"Bai Jove! A what?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"It's a smoking-party. We found 'em in the tower, and we've brought 'em to you," said Wally. "You can look after 'em. Of course, while the masters are away, we feel bound to look after the Shell and the Fourth a bit—"

Wally was interrupted by a shout, and several of the cricketers brought stumps and bats into play.

"Better cut," murmured Jameson.

"Kick them off the field!" shouted Lowther.

The fags marched off, poked at with bats and stumps, but yelling defiance as they went. They left Gore and Crooke and Mollish and Levison wriggling on the pitch. Tom Merry & Co. looked at them, and sniffed, and sniffed again.

"Beastly cads!" said Jack Blake. "My hat, what a giddy niff!"

"Bai Jove, they've been dwinkin'!"

"And smoking!"

"Rotters!"

"Let us loose!" growled Crooke. "Can't you untie these things, you silly chumps, instead of standing round like a lot of stupid owls, you dummies!"

"Bai Jove—"

"Untie them!" said Tom Merry scornfully. "If this is the way you chaps are going to amuse yourselves while the masters are away, the sooner they come back the better. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"Oh, mind your own bizney!" snapped Gore.

"They smell horrid," said Blake. "They want a washing. My idea is that they should have a washing, especially as they've interrupted the game."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yank them along to the fountain!"

"Good! Good!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let us alone!" roared Crooke. "If you dare to duck us, I'll—I'll—ch—ow!"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "Collar the cads!"

The cricketers seized the four hapless smokers. They were dragged off the cricket-field, and marched away, by no means gently, to the fountain in the quad.

There, in spite of their loud yells and fierce expostulations, they were ducked in the flowing water.

Splash! splash! splash! splash!

The four "bounders" went splashing in, and came out drenched and dripping, and looking very much like half-drowned mongrel dogs.

The smell of the liquor was certainly washed away, but the unhappy "blades" did not seem to feel any the better for their ducking.

They were dumped down, dripping, upon the ground.

"Now, cut off," said Tom Merry sternly, "and remember this, you jolly well won't be allowed to play the blackguard even if the masters are away. You'll get it in the neck if you try it again, so I warn you, fair and square!"

The young rascals had no nerve left to reply. They could only crawl dismally away, followed by the laughter and jeers of the juniors.

It was a lesson the smart set of the School House were not likely to forget in a hurry.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the cricketers walked back to the field. "Bai Jove, you know, I wegard that as simply disgustin'! It's all vevy well chuckin' pwep, or havin' a sing-song in the dinin'-room, but smokin' and dwinkin' is wotten. I wegard them as a set of wotten boundahs to take advantage like this of the Head's bein' away."

"Quite right, Gussy."

"Let's get back to the cricket," said Tom Merry. "We sha'n't lick the New House by dark, if we don't buck up."

Figgins grinned

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CHAPTER 17.

High Jinks.

FATTY WYNN turned on all the lights in the long, lofty room. From the windows the light gleamed out into the dusky quadrangle, and on the trunks of the old elms. Fatty Wynn was the first on the scene. He carried a large bag in his hands.

There was a big fire blazing in the grate at the end of the room, and it looked very cheerful. Taggles, the porter, came in, grunting under the weight of huge packages.

Taggles might have been Father Christmas, from the quantity of the supplies he was bringing in. He dumped down his load with a louder grunt than usual.

"Which it's 'eavy, Master Wynn," he remarked.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Fatty Wynn gleefully.

Taggles grunted again.

"Mighty 'eavy, for a man getting on in years," he remarked.

"You won't lick the New House by Christmas, if you buck up ever so much," he remarked.

And Figgins, as it happened, was right, for the dusk came on before the match could be finished, and the juniors left off playing with the result undecided. As they streamed back towards the school, through the dusk the uniform of the telegraph-boy was seen. He had a telegram in his hand, and he was just handing it to Knox, the prefect.

Tom Merry and his friends paused to look on.

"Another wire from Mr. Railton, I suppose," Tom Merry remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Any news, Knox?" called out Monty Lowther, as the telegraph-boy walked away, and the prefect turned towards the School House.

Knox glanced at him.

"Don't ask questions," he replied.

"Was that wire from Mr. Railton?"

"Find out."

And Knox crumpled the telegram in his pocket, and went into the house. Blake snorted.

"That chap wants a jolly good bumping!" he exclaimed. "I don't see why we shouldn't give him one, too."

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

"I wonder what was in the wire?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I suppose it was from Mr. Railton. Why should he wire a second time?"

Blake wrinkled his brows in an effort of thought.

"I don't see why he should wire a second time from France," he said. "But if he caught a boat back, and landed in Southampton or Newhaven, he would wire to tell Knox that he was coming. That wire may mean that he has landed, and is coming on by the next train."

"Bai Jove!"

Some of the juniors' faces grew long.

"Then the game's up," said Manners, with a sigh.

"Oh, I dare say it doesn't mean anything of the sort," said Figgins cheerfully. "The wire may mean that he's lost the boat, or it mayn't be from Railton at all. It may be from Knox's people to tell him his grandmother's got the measles, or something."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Or from some blessed bookmaker," said Marmaduke Smythe. "You know Knox! No good worrying till they come back, anyway."

"Wathah not."

"Whether they're coming or not, we can't let it interfere with the feed," said Fatty Wynn. "I've given the orders to Mrs. Taggles."

"Oh, of course not!" said Tom Merry. "And I'm feeling jolly well inclined for a feed, too. We had only a mouthful at tea-time."

"Yes, rather. I had nothing but a pork-pie and some ham and tongue, and a few sausages. I've been saving up my appetite for the feed, you see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway, we'll have the feed," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Let's get changed, and have the feed, and then we'll think about it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors were soon making great preparations. Fatty Wynn's idea of a really big, record-breaking feed in the biggest school-room had been hailed with enthusiasm and all the fellows, or, nearly all, had subscribed to it. Fatty Wynn had been entrusted with the task of giving the orders to Dame Taggles, and he had carried out the task nobly. There was no doubt that the feed would be a record, and the juniors were all looking forward to it. And so for the present all thought of the masters and their possible return was put out of every mind. As Fatty Wynn remarked, they had more important matters than that to think of now.

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"THE BOYS' HERALD," Id.

"Oh, you're not getting on in years, Taggy."

"Which I am, Master Wynn."

"Then, you're jolly lucky not to get the sack, ain't you, Taggles?"

Taggles snorted. He did not care to look at it in that light. But the frown faded from his rugged face as Fatty Wynn grinned and slipped a shilling into his hand.

"Thank you kindly, Master Wynn."

And Taggles stumped away.

The fellows were coming in now. Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners, of the Shell, were the first, and Kangaroo followed them, and then Blake and D'Arcy, and a crowd of the Fourth.

Then thick and fast they came, and more and more and more.

All the Fourth and the Shell, of both Houses, with few exceptions, came crowding in; and then came Wally, and a hungry crowd of the Third.

The appearance of the Third-Formers was greeted far from politely.

"Get out, you fags!" roared Kangaroo.

"Rats!" said Wally. "We've come."

"What have you come for?"

"The feed, of course."

"Fags are not admitted," said Blake.

Wally sniffed.

"Never mind," said Fatty Wynn hospitably. "There's plenty of grub—more than we can eat. Let 'em all come."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the heroes of the Third were allowed to come in. Mere infants from the Second Form took courage from that, and came in too. Fifth-Formers, forgetting for the moment, most conveniently, that they were seniors, and that between them and the Lower School there was a great gulf fixed, dropped in in twos and threes. Lefevre was the first, and he came in with a genial smile and a slightly nervous look.

"I'm going to have tea with you youngsters," he remarked, in a condescending sort of way. "I don't mind. That's what I say—I don't mind."

"You can stay if you like," said Tom Merry. "Help with cutting up the bread, will you?"

Lefevre hesitated for a moment, and then did as he was asked. Other Fifth-Formers came in, and were allowed to stay. In the enthusiasm of the moment nobody was inclined to be over particular, and there was no doubt that the celebration was going to be a really gorgeous one.

"It will make history at St. Jim's, this feed will," Fatty Wynn said impressively.

And Fatty Wynn was right.

It was a feed that could only be described as "ripping."

There were plenty of guests, but there were plentiful supplies for them, and there was never any danger of running short.

Cold fowls, and chicken pies, and ham patties, and cold beef and tongue vanished before the vigorous attacks of the juniors; and the seniors, too, did a very fair share towards abolishing the abundant supplies.

Then, when the more solid portion of the feed had been negotiated, came cakes and tarts, buns and dough-nuts, meringues and jellies, and cream and apples.

At last even Fatty Wynn could eat no more. He sat back in his seat with a fat and happy grunt.

"Well, it was ripping!" he said.

"And it would be extra ripping if Railton came in and found this going on," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't croak!"

"Yaas, don't be a beastly Jonah, deah boy."

Kangaroo jumped up.

"It's been a ripping feed!" he exclaimed.

"Hear, hear!"

"Who says a dance to follow?"

"My hat!"

"Splendid idea!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We can get up an orchestra," said the Cornstalk, beaming. "Tom Merry's gramophone can be brought down here, and he's got records of waltzes. Then Tom Merry can play the tin-whistle, and Manners can put in his violin, and make a regular row, you know, between them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good idea!"

The good idea was carried out at once. Tom Merry and Lowther rushed up to the study for the gramophone, and two or three fellows went to help carry down the records. Manners very willingly fetched his violin, and Kerr fetched his. Kerr was a splendid player, and Manners was quite passable. On second thoughts, the tin-whistle was omitted, and Herries' offer to chime in with a mouth-organ was declined with thanks.

Tom Merry presided at the gramophone.

He selected the waltz from "Faust" as the first item, and put on a loud needle. The well-known strains crashed out, and the dance commenced. It was necessary for the fellows

to dance with one another, as there were no ladies present, but they did not mind that in the least. In fact, they were a great deal less shy in choosing partners than they would have been under more ordinary circumstances.

In some cases, certainly, the fellows forgot whether they were taking the parts of the ladies or the gentlemen, and that led to disaster; but whenever anybody tumbled over, it only added to the general hilarity.

The gramophone crashed out, to the accompaniment of the fiddles, and the juniors went whirling round the big room in the mazes of the dance, amid wild yells and shouts and roars of laughter.

It was a celebration such as the ancient walls of St. Jim's had never sheltered before.

In the midst of it the door suddenly opened.

A gentleman in hat and overcoat stood on the threshold, looking in, with blank amazement in his face.

Behind him appeared others, all bearing the signs of travel.

In the wild excitement no one noticed the opening of the door at first, or saw the gentlemen standing there, staring in blankly.

The gramophone ground on, and the feet of the dancers thundered on the floor.

D'Arcy was the first to see. He uttered a sudden exclamation, and stopped.

"Bai Jove!"

The next moment Kangaroo and Lowther bumped into him, and he went over, and they went over him. Five or six more couples added themselves to the heap.

"Look out!"

"Cave!"

"It's Mr. Railton!"

The dance stopped.

The juniors stood as if frozen, staring at the imposing form and amazed face in the doorway.

The gramophone ground on dismally till the record was run down, and then it scratched and scratched. Tom Merry stood petrified, unable even to stop the gramophone.

Mr. Railton strode into the room.

"What does this mean?" he thundered.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Linton, following him in. "It is a-a-an orgy!"

"Quite an orgy," said Mr. Selby, the master of the Third.

"Disgraceful!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"You young bounders!" murmured Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and he tried not to grin; and Darrel and Rushden and Monteith tried not to grin, but without much success.

"This—is this most extraordinary!" said Mr. Railton. "To have a scene like this to greet me, when you knew I was returning at this hour."

"We—we didn't know, sir," stammered Tom Merry, finding his voice at last.

"What! I wired from Dieppe, and again from New-haven."

"We received no message, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Did not Knox tell you?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Railton pursed his lips.

"That is very curious," he said. "I hardly know what to say to you. You have all acted in a very outrageous manner. I—I will speak to you about this to-morrow. For the present, go to your dormitories."

And the juniors filed out.

"Well," said Tom Merry, as they went up to bed—"well, we stayed up pretty late last night, so it's only fair to go to bed early this evening. And we've had rather a day of it, too!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I wonder what's going to happen?" said Blake, with a grunt. "Knox ought to be—be—well, hung would be too easy for him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't think Railton will come down very heavy to-morrow," said Lowther. "I am almost certain I saw a twinkle in his starboard eye."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But the juniors of St. Jim's felt somewhat anxious the next morning when they came down. But their uneasiness was soon dispelled. Mr. Railton gave the whole school a severe lecture, and to judge by Knox's expression, he had already given him a lecture, of quite as severe a nature.

Then the matter was allowed to drop.

While the Head remained away for his health, Mr. Railton took his place as head-master of St. Jim's, and things went on in their normal groove under his sway. But it was long before the juniors ceased to talk and chuckle over the "high old time" they had enjoyed while the school was without masters.

THE END

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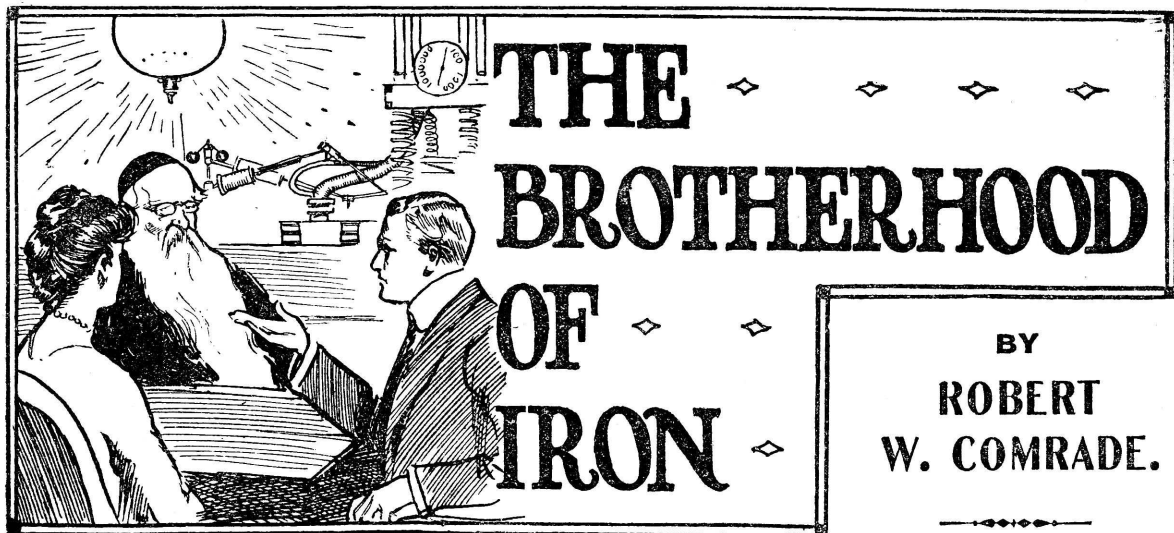
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"BURNT OUT."

[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Serial Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

A Thrilling Tale of Modern Adventure on Land and Sea.



THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON

BY
ROBERT
W. COMRADE.

INTRODUCTION.

Frank Kingston, a young Englishman, is engaged on a secret campaign against a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron, his aim being to break up the society by ruining the members of the Inner Council. He has the assistance of Miss O'Brien, an accomplished young lady, Professor Graham Polgrave, a clever scientist and inventor, Carson Gray, a detective, Fraser, a manservant, and a lad named Tim.

Kingston has brought nine Inner Councillors to book, one by one, when he hears of a plot to kidnap the Crown Prince of Balataria. Kingston learns that the prince is to be taken to the Iron Island, where he himself was once confined. He interviews the prince, and after warning him, he requests him to carry out the plans which he himself suggests. In due course the prince is kidnapped, and taken to the Brotherhood's yacht, the Unicorn, which is ready to sail for the Iron Island.

(Now go on with the story.)

Crawford Proves His Worth.

The prince's cabin was brilliant with electric light, and on a chair a complete lounge-suit lay ready for wear. The prince did not waste much time, but immediately undressed, dried himself, and donned the clothes prepared for him.

They fitted to perfection, and he felt considerably better for the change. The cabin was a comfortable one, and he looked round with interest. On a little table near one of the small, round portholes a box of choice cigars lay open, and he proceeded to light one of these.

"They evidently mean to make me comfortable," he murmured calmly. "I don't suppose I ought to grumble, for matters might have been considerably worse. But that aeroplane trip has had the effect of giving me a good appetite. I suppose I had better ring."

He crossed to the door, and tried the handle.

"Quite secure. I shall have to wait until somebody comes."

He rang the bell, and then seated himself in one of the easy-chairs. He had not to wait long, for after the lapse of about thirty seconds a key sounded in the lock, and the door swung inwards.

Captain Formby entered.

"I have answered the ring personally, your Highness," he explained, "as I wish to have a few words with you in private."

"Have them," said the prince sharply, "and get out!"

"I beg of you, prince, not to be so brusque. It will not serve you in the least, for I may as well tell you straight out that you are an absolute prisoner, and that all thoughts of rescue or escape are fruitless. The yacht is even now setting out for the Pacific, and will not call at any port until she reaches Spain."

Prince Zavier of Balataria smiled calmly.

"And when we get to Spain, I presume," he said, "I shall be in this cabin under lock and key?"

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"Exactly, if you do not comply with my wishes," replied Captain Formby, looking at his companion, almost in admiration. "I really must compliment you, your Highness, upon the cool manner in which you are taking your abduction."

"Since you say it is useless to resist, why should I attempt to do so? I assure you, captain, that I am not at all in a pleasant mood. An outrage such as this is unprecedented, and my anger has almost left me. I realise the uselessness of a scene, but I tell you this"—and the Crown Prince's eyes blazed—"every man who has had a hand in this business shall suffer to the fullest extent of the law!"

Captain Formby laughed sneeringly.

"Since you will not escape, I fail to see how your remark applies."

"Not escape!" cried Zavier, springing to his feet, and flinging the cigar on to the table. "Not escape, you say? You do not know me—you do not know the man you are dealing with. You will find that it was a serious day for you when you set to work on this dastardly business! But what is the good of talking? I told you I was not angry, and no outburst of mine can make any difference—at present!"

"I am glad you see the hopelessness of your position, prince!" exclaimed the naval officer. "I cannot explain why you have been kidnapped, or why you are aboard this yacht—"

"Do you think I do not know? Do you take me for a fool? Bah! What is the use of talking to you? I have been kidnapped for the purpose of enabling General Stolzenburg to continue his dastardly schemes in my country. I realise everything. My father will soon be dead, and when he dies I shall be king, and shall be in a position to throw Stolzenburg and his fellow-conspirators completely out of the Court—completely out of the country, if necessary! And to save that he has caused me to be kidnapped. But I shall escape, and foil all his plans!"

"You are talking wildly—"

"So you think!" exclaimed the prince, in a hard voice. "But I shall escape! No man can hold me! The injustice of the thing burns into my soul, and— But I am doing the very thing I said I wouldn't. Say what you've got to say, and leave me alone!"

Zavier calmed down suddenly, and picked up the cigar he had flung on the table. Captain Formby watched him with a curious smile on his face. Then he seated himself and faced the other.

"It will not take me long to state my business," he exclaimed briskly. "Look here, your Highness, I want you to thoroughly understand that it is not our intention to harm you in the least."

"Our intention?" repeated Zavier. "It does not need much thought to guess that Count von Brezen is mixed up in this matter. It was he, I am fully convinced, who hitched the rope to my belt while in the motor-car."

"There is no reason why I should conceal the fact. The

count is a prime mover in the matter—he is, in fact, the cause of it all. But do not run away with the idea that you are to be treated the same as an ordinary prisoner, because you are not. It all rests with yourself."

"How?" demanded the prince. "Tell me how?"

"Well, to speak plainly, your Highness, if you show the least obstinacy, you will be confined in this cabin during the whole voyage, and will be unable to enjoy any of the pleasures of the trip. Every man aboard this ship is aware of your identity, and a constant guard will be kept out in the passage. So, you see, it is quite useless for you to expect deliverance from anyone aboard."

"Go on!"

"I know you to be an honourable gentleman," continued the skipper, "and I have a suggestion to make to you. I fully realise how irksome it would be for you to remain below here, and, to come to the point, I wish you to give me your parole that if you are allowed to go on deck you will cause no outcry, or make no sign to any passing ship."

The prince looked up quickly.

"You wish me to give my word of honour?" he said. "Let me understand it fully. If you have my parole, I shall be allowed to walk on deck and behave generally as a free agent?"

"Exactly, your Highness. You will fully understand, however, that when we reach Corunna—the port we shall call at to take the count aboard—you will be required to remain in your cabin until we are at sea again. It would be unwise to allow you to be seen on deck."

"Of course," replied the prince. "I quite understand that. Well, I am not a fool, and I realise that what you say is the truth—I realise that I am helpless for the present. And, as I do not wish to be half-baked in these stuffy quarters, I give you my parole as a Royal Prince of Balataria that I will cause no outcry, or make any sign to any passing ship, however close she may be. I may add that I enjoy a sea voyage, and thank you for extending to me this privilege."

Captain Formby rose.

"The matter is settled, then. Your cabin hereafter will be left unlocked, and you may wander about the ship as though you were merely a passenger. I dare say you are feeling hungry, so I will send you down some supper previous to your retiring to rest."

"Your suggestion is a good one."

The next minute the captain had left, and Prince Xavier, although his eyes still showed the anger that was in his heart, congratulated himself on having gained his liberty. Very shortly afterwards a steward appeared with a tray, the latter bearing a really appetising meal.

The man set the tray down and arranged the table without a word. He gave only one glance at the prince, but made no sign—that would have been unsafe. For the steward was none other than Crawford, Frank Kingston's trusted ally. He had had some difficulty in getting the post of steward, but he knew how useful it would be to him should the prince wish to send any message ashore at Corunna.

Supper over, the prince lighted a fresh cigar and watched Crawford as he cleared the table. The latter was about to depart, when he was called back.

"Tell me, my man," said Xavier, "what is your name?"

"Crawford, sir."

"Well, Crawford, I like your looks, and— But tell the captain I wish to speak to him at once."

"Very good, sir."

Crawford went on his errand, rather puzzled. He knew that the prince was aware of his connection with Frank Kingston, and wondered what was in the wind—what Xavier intended. He gave his message, and Formby went below. He found his prisoner calmly seated before one of the open portholes.

"Ah, captain, I am afraid you have forgotten one little item!" smiled the Crown Prince, evidently in a better mood after his supper. "It has been my invariable custom to have the services of a valet to assist me at night and morning—to prepare my clothes, etc. Am I to attend to my own wants while I am aboard?"

"I am sorry, your Highness, but that point has escaped me," said Formby, smiling to himself at his polite mode of speech. "There are several men aboard who would be able to give you the assistance you require."

Prince Xavier yawned.

"The man who brought in my supper," he said, "seems to be quiet enough. The way he laid the table takes my fancy, and if you can see your way to spare him, he would suit my purpose quite well."

"Crawford, the steward? Well, I don't know— Yet there is no reason why you should not have him. Another man can take his place well enough."

"Thanks!" murmured the prince. "I was sure you would accede to my little request. Well, since there is no reason why I should remain up, I intend to turn in immediately. Can—er—Crawford, I think you said—can he come now?"

"Certainly! I will send him to you. Good-night, your Highness!"

"Good-night, captain, and thank you for the privileges you are allowing me. I quite realise that you have it in your power to put me in irons and feed me on bread-and-water, so I appreciate your courtesy."

Captain Formby smiled as he ascended the companion to the bridge. He was but complying with the orders he had received from the Chief before commencing the voyage. There was no reason why the prince should be ill-treated, and he was, after all, a very important personage.

"The captain sent me to you, sir."

Crawford stood before Xavier in the cabin. The latter looked at him and again yawned. The dull, monotonous thud of the engines sounded particularly loud as the Unicorn glided smoothly on its way to the English Channel.

"Yes, Crawford; you are to act as my valet during this voyage. I am glad I have secured your services for several reasons. To begin with, instead of assisting me to undress, I wish to say a few words to you."

Crawford's eyes gleamed for a moment. He saw the ingenuity the Crown Prince had displayed in securing him as confidential valet.

"Yes, sir."

"Before I do so, however, I want you to make sure that we are alone—absolutely to ourselves."

"We are, sir," whispered Crawford eagerly. "I know it. There's a couple of guards out in the passage, but they're too far away to hear anything what goes on in this cabin."

"And what are the apartments that adjoin on either side?" asked the prince, looking at the solid wooden partitions which constituted the walls.

"One side there's a store-room, which is always kept locked, an' the other is an empty cabin, which I know for certain is deserted. Besides, sir, nobody in the next room couldn't hear nothin' but a mumble of our voices."

Xavier looked up at the roof, then back to the floor.

"Yes," he said; "I think we can take it that we are by ourselves. Just glance outside the door, however, to see that the passage is clear."

Crawford did so, then entered the room again, and closed the door softly.

"Nobody within twenty yards, sir!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper. "Well, sir, I s'pose you've got something to say that's privit? Mr. Kingston told me as 'ow you would be aboard."

The Crown Prince Xavier bent forward, and looked full into Crawford's face.

"Then Mr. Kingston told you wrong," he said coolly. "Prince Xavier of Balataria is at this moment a good many miles away from here! Yes, Crawford; your guess is correct. I am—"

"The gov'nor!" gasped Crawford, in utter amazement. "Strike a light, sir; I was never more flabbergasted in my life, an' that's straight!"

What Happened at Corunna.

Frank Kingston smiled languidly.

"Don't allow your voice to rise too high, Crawford!" he exclaimed, looking amusedly at the man, who was open-mouthed with amazement. "I thought it wise not to reveal my identity until now."

"And do you mean to say, sir, that you've allowed yourself to be kidnapped instead of the prince—that everybody here thinks you're his Highness?"

"Yes, Crawford; everybody here is under that impression."

"But how did you do it, sir? An' where's the real prince?"

"You seem curious," exclaimed Kingston quietly; "and as you might as well know what has happened, I will tell you while I am getting undressed. There is a chance the captain may pop in, and it would never do for him to find me still engaged in conversation with nothing done."

To begin with, Kingston proceeded to remove his boots; he was not the sort of man to require anyone to do this for him.

"When the prince arrived at Professor Polgrave's house this afternoon," commenced Kingston, "we decided what to do. The professor very soon succeeded in making me a counterpart of his Royal Highness. It was I who left the house and went to the Hotel Metropole, and it was I who was in the motor-car which was on its way to the Duke of Loamshire's residence. I was, of course, prepared for everything that was to happen, and saw beforehand that my belt was of sufficient strength to stand the strain required of it."

"The strain, sir?"

"Yes, Crawford; since I was on land I have enjoyed the various pleasures of an aeroplane trip. I admit I was in a

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NEXT WEEK:

"BURNT OUT."

somewhat unusual position; but, nevertheless, I enjoyed it. Sir Reginald Newman is a first-class pilot."

And Kingston told Crawford of the abduction.

"But where's the real prince, sir?" asked the latter. "An' where's Fraser an' Tim an' Miss O'Brien? I thought—"

"You thought I was going with them on board the Coronet? Well, Crawford, that is not the case, as you know. Zavier left the professor's house in the disguise of a young man about town. He was told exactly what to do, and took the professor with him to the Coronet."

"An' who is in charge, sir?"

"Miss O'Brien has charge of the Coronet, but it is nominally under the command of Captain Morrison, who, with his crew, is now, to a certain extent, in my confidence."

"You've told him, sir?" Crawford whispered.

"Not all, Crawford, but just a little. The men are all honest, and can certainly be trusted. But have no fear. They know nothing that could do any harm were they to let it out, which is emphatically improbable. The Coronet has gone on ahead of this ship, and will be at Corunna when we arrive."

"But when Captain Formby sees her, bein' a British ship, won't he remember it afterwards? He's sure to see the Coronet, sir."

"Yes, Crawford, he's sure to see her; but at Corunna she will not be the Coronet!"

"Not the Coronet, sir?"

"No. On the way there the men will be busy altering her name—it will be done while the Bay of Biscay is being crossed—and when she arrives at the Spanish port her name will be the Carolina Star. She will be, to all intents and purposes, an American yacht, and Formby will not have the least suspicion."

"But it'll be a tough job, sir, to disguise her."

"On the contrary, Crawford, there will be nothing tough about it whatever. Her general appearance will not be altered, for her lines are similar to those of hundreds of other yachts. It is merely a question of altering the names on the lifebuoys, boats, etc. The men themselves will simply don the fresh jerseys and caps which have been provided."

"But why is she calling at Corunna, sir?"

"Because it is the only opportunity I shall have of speaking to Miss O'Brien and the prince," replied Frank Kingston calmly. "I must also see Fraser, and give him his instructions with regard to the submarine."

"But how can you, sir?" persisted the man. "You speak as though you were free, sir—free to go ashore as you like. You'll be kept under lock and key all the time we're at Corunna, sir, without even bein' allowed on deck. O' course, I could manage to take a message—"

"There will be no necessity for that, for I mean to go myself and pay a personal visit," replied Kingston. "Never mind how to-night; but I shall want you to help, Crawford. For the present, the best thing you can do is to retire to your own quarters. You had better give me a call not later than seven. I do not need it personally, but as the prince it is advisable."

"Very good, sir! Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night! And don't show any agitation or excitement whatever. The officers aboard the ship are constantly on the look-out, and any unusual attitude on your part might lead to unpleasant consequences. So keep a hold on yourself."

"I'll be sure an' do that, sir."

A moment later Crawford was gone, and Kingston slipped into his bunk, feeling rather elated at the undoubted success of his daring plans.

Crawford had had not the slightest suspicion of the truth, and Kingston was convinced that Captain Formby was just as totally deceived.

"By Jove," murmured Kingston, as he listened to the swishing of the water on the plates outside, "I thought the Zetman affair was extremely interesting, but this bids fair to rival it! I am absolutely in my element here, and it's simply a treat to be aboard ship once more. And the best of it is that while my plans are working as smoothly as glass, Von Brezen is under the erroneous impression that his are also. He has good reason to think so, I admit; but I will warrant he would do something desperate were he to know that the genuine Crown Prince of Balataria is further from his clutches than ever!"

Kingston chuckled to himself at the thought, and wondered how Dolores was getting on. He was not quite certain how he would get from the Unicorn to the Coronet; but that little matter did not worry him, and he turned over and went to sleep as calmly as though he were at the Hotel Cyril in London.

At a quarter to seven exactly he awoke, invigorated and refreshed. There was no sleepy look in his eyes as he tumbled from his bunk, and he walked straight across to the

porthole. The sun was shining brilliantly, and the sea was clear, blue, and sparkling. Tiny ripples raced past, and Kingston could easily see that the Unicorn was only travelling at a moderate speed.

Far away could be seen the steep cliffs of the shore. An ordinary person could not have distinguished much; but Frank Kingston with his amazing eyesight saw quite a host of minor details.

"Evidently we are passing down the Channel," he murmured to himself—"that is, if I am not mistaken, the coast of Dorsetshire. At all events, it seems familiar to me. I expect, and trust, that we shall make Corunna in good time. If we do, that will fit in with my plans to a nicety. The Coronet should be there not later than midday to-day, and will await until I arrive."

Very shortly afterwards Crawford appeared, and before breakfast Kingston was out on the deck taking a blow to give him an appetite.

Everybody was respectful to the "prince," and Captain Formby bade him good-morning quite cheerily.

As Kingston had surmised, they were indeed passing the coast of Dorsetshire.

After breakfast the yacht increased her speed considerably and continued her course practically without interruption during the whole day. The weather was delightful, and the sea unusually smooth. Many other ships were passed, some at quite close quarters. But Kingston sat on deck, calmly reading a novel, taking no interest in his surroundings. He appeared, indeed, to be enjoying himself.

The captain on the bridge, as well as the first and second officers, kept a sharp eye on him the whole time. But they had nothing to fear; he had given his parole, and would make no outcry. As a matter of fact, Kingston's plans would have been ruined had he informed another ship of his plight.

About midday Formby approached, and stood looking at the prisoner, with a half-sneer on his features. The Inner Councillor imagined that "Zavier" was completely cowed and resigned to his fate.

"I am glad to see you on deck, your Highness!" he exclaimed. "And I trust you to keep your word, and make no sign to any passing vessel. Should we see the slightest indication of treachery on your part, we shall instantly—"

"There is not the least reason for you to suppose that," interrupted Kingston sharply. His voice sounded hoarse and husky. "Before you start talking in that way, captain, you had better wait until I break my word of honour—which I have no intention of doing!"

"I was only making it quite clear to you," said Formby, a little taken aback at the other's pompous manner.

The next second Kingston sneezed violently, and coughed as though his throat were thick and painful.

"I am afraid, Captain Formby, I have developed a rather nasty cold!" exclaimed Kingston, looking up with watery eyes. "I am quite sure that by to-night I shall be the possessor of a most painful sore throat."

His words proved to be true—or apparently true—for at about five o'clock Kingston announced his intention of retiring to his cabin for the night. His cold had developed with remarkable rapidity, and his voice had now become practically a whisper.

He met the captain on the companion as he was descending. "I am retiring for the night, captain," he explained, with a large handkerchief to his face. "This cold has grown very rapidly worse, and I always believe in sleeping it off. There is nothing to beat it."

Formby looked at the prince critically.

"Yes," he said, after a moment, "you certainly seem to be pretty bad. As it happens, you will not be missing anything by remaining in your cabin, for to-night we reach Corunna, and I should require you, in any case, to be under lock and key."

"Have no fear about that," wheezed Kingston painfully. "By the time the ship reaches port I shall, in all probability, be fast asleep. You may set your mind easy, captain, I shall not go against your wishes."

He smiled wanly, and would have proceeded on his way; but Formby stopped him.

"I have some medicine in my chest!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps you—"

"Medicine? I never touch it when I have such a trivial complaint as a one-day cold. I assure you I shall be practically my own self to-morrow. However, I should take it as a favour if, instead of my usual dinner to-night, you send me down some hot broth—very hot."

"Certainly, your Highness. I will inform Crawford when I see him. He will have a key of your cabin, and will have instructions from me to keep your door locked. It is merely a formality, of course, but—"

Captain Formby shrugged his shoulders and passed on his way. He was quite convinced in his own mind that he would

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have no trouble with his prisoner. Prince Zavier had given his word, anyhow, and, with a sore throat, he would scarcely attempt any tricks. To safeguard such an event the door would be kept constantly locked, and the key in Crawford's charge. Formby was not to know that Crawford had any connection with the prisoner.

Kingston was soon in his cabin, and without further ado divested himself of his clothing and slipped into his bunk. To all appearances he was really suffering from a severe cold, but, as a matter of fact, he was as well as he had ever been in his life. He had a reason for acting in this manner—and a good reason.

When dinner-time came Crawford brought some extremely appetising broth. Kingston was hungry, and such a dinner was not very welcome. He sent about a third of it away, not because he did not like it, but just for appearance sake.

A short time later Formby himself locked in, and saw that the Crown Prince was lying with his back to the room, fast asleep. The door had not yet been fastened, for the Unicorn was still a couple or more hours' run from Corunna.

"You are proving quite an easy customer to deal with," Captain Formby told himself, as he stood looking at the sleeping form. "We shall leave Corunna by midnight, so I think there will not be much opportunity for you to give the game away—especially in your present condition."

He ascended to the bridge without delay, for presently he would be needed to take command of the ship. He knew that part of the coast perfectly, for he had, on many occasions, when in command of his own ship, navigated these waters.

Close on nine o'clock, just as the Unicorn was within sight of the brilliant revolving light of the Torre-de-Hercules—a large lighthouse—Crawford descended to Kingston's cabin. Being the valet he had free access in and out. The passage just opposite the cabin door was somewhat gloomy, and the two sentries, one on either hand, were quite at the far ends of the corridor.

Crawford turned the key quietly and entered. His master was still apparently fast asleep, but he turned round to ascertain who the visitor was. Crawford closed the door firmly and advanced.

"We're nearing Corunna, sir!" he exclaimed, in a low voice. "But what can you do, sir, with such a cold on you

Kingston smiled.

"Cold, Crawford?" he exclaimed. "I don't know what it is to have a cold. At present I am as healthy as ever I was in my life; but it is necessary for the furtherance of my plans that I should be afflicted with a nasty sore throat. And so, you see, I have got one!"

"Do you mean to say you've been swanking, sir?" exclaimed Crawford, in surprised accents. "My word, nobody wouldn't guess as you hadn't got a horrible cold."

"To repeat your own words, Crawford, I have been swanking," smiled Kingston. "Now, listen! There is a lot to do to-night. How long will the Unicorn remain in the harbour?"

"Not long, sir. Just time enough to fetch Mr. Lyle an' the count aboard. The skipper wants to do something in the town; but nobody else won't be allowed ashore, for we sail again at midnight."

"Midnight—eh? Splendid! That will leave me ample time to do what I want. Crawford, the Coronet will be in Corunna Harbour when we arrive, as you know, under the name of the Carolina Star. Miss O'Brien will be aboard, and Fraser also."

"But you can't speak to 'em, sir—you can't get to 'em," said Crawford, his pale little face expressing puzzled bewilderment. "I've got to lock you in 'ere, sir, an' there's two sentries—"

"Quite so," murmured Kingston calmly. "I fully understand that. You will go out presently and mention to one of the officers that I've asked for more broth. Bring this to me, as soon as the ship drops anchor. No; you had better wait until Formby has left for the shore—it will be safer."

"Well, sir?"

"I will now tell you what you have to do. First of all, though, where are your quarters situated?"

"For'ard, sir. I've got a little cupboard place in this same passage where I prepare your tray, sir, an' any other little things. It's only a small place."

"Do you stay in there for any length of time?"

"Sometimes, sir."

"Good! That is quite sufficient. If you are missing for half an hour or so, your absence will not be noticed, especially as your duties are solely in connection with attending to my wants. You have that little case I gave you before starting?"

"Yes, sir. It's in my box."

"Then bring it with you when you come with the broth. You did not understand why I wanted you to take charge of it. Now, however, you will do so. The box contains

several little phials and a hypodermic syringe or two. I procured them from Professor Polgrave, so you will probably guess to what use I shall put them."

"Disguises, sir. Fraser told me all about the old professor. Who will you disguise yourself as, sir? And even then, how can you get out of this cabin with the two sentries—"

"Pray wait a moment," drawled Kingston. "I have all my plans cut and dried, Crawford, so you need not worry yourself. To come to the point, I shall take your place, and you will take mine."

Crawford gasped.

"Don't look so surprised, man! It is quite a simple matter. It is because of this disguise that I have affected to be in the throes of a rapidly-developed cold. It will make things very much easier for you, and decidedly safer."

"How, sir? What have I to do?"

"Not much. When I come in with the broth I shall require you to undress and take possession of this bunk. Then I shall don your clothes and roughly disguise my features until they resemble your own. I have only to walk out with the empty basin, lock the door, and proceed to slip overboard."

"And me, sir—what do I do?"

"Simply remain in the bunk until I return. Pretend to be asleep, and should anybody come, merely whisper a mumbled reply to whatever they say. It is extremely improbable that anybody will come, but I believe in taking every precaution. I do not suppose you could simulate my own tones, so I have made things easy for you by developing a hoarse voice. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," whispered Crawford, looking at the other in open-eyed admiration. "Now you've told me what you're goin' to do it seems fairly easy. There's always a risk, though."

"No work of this description can be carried through without a certain amount of risk. That is, in fact, the very spice of it. I am looking forward to my visit to the Coronet to-night."

It was risky to prolong the conversation much further, so after a little fuller explanation, Kingston lay down again, and Crawford ascended to the deck. The man was somewhat excited, but, nevertheless, eager to get to work. He was true blue if ever a man was, and had plenty of dogged pluck. To look at him he did not seem capable of much, but Kingston had found him a thoroughly reliable assistant—a man to be trusted and depended upon to act at the right moment.

Corunna was now within sight. The Spanish town was a mass of twinkling lights, and in the harbour could be seen the mast lights of many vessels. The Bay of Corunna itself was comparatively deserted. The lower town, known as Pescaderia, was the fashionable quarter, and this could be easily seen by the brilliance.

Captain Formby and the first officer were on the bridge, while several sailors lounged about near the rail. There was nothing much to be done until the Unicorn reached her moorings.

"Ain't goin' to stop 'ere long, are we, mate?" asked one of the deck-hands, lounging up to Crawford, as he stood looking at the seaport.

"Not long, I don't think, Bob," replied Crawford, who was on good terms with nearly everybody. "We shall be out o' sight of land agen by mornin'."

"All the better!" muttered the other. "These 'ere furrin places ain't much to my likin', any'ow. I'm jest, injoyin' this 'ere trip—ain't you, mate?"

"Not 'arf!" replied Crawford truthfully.

Some time later all was bustle. The Unicorn came to rest quite near one of the quays, and Crawford's eyes gleamed for a moment as he saw, not a hundred yards away, the shape and brilliantly-lit portholes of a fairly large pleasure yacht—undoubtedly the Coronet—or, as she was now known, the Carolina Star.

Captain Formby wasted no time, for almost immediately he ordered the accommodation-ladder to be lowered, and a boat to be manned ready to take him ashore. Twenty minutes after coming to a standstill, the Unicorn was left without her captain, and Crawford proceeded to carry out his orders. None of the other members of the crew were interested in his doings, for he was now put on quite special duty.

Certainly, there was some talk among the men about the Crown Prince imprisoned below, but nobody ever thought of watching Crawford's movements. The time was just upon ten o'clock, and half the men were, of course, below, sleeping.

Formby had left word with the chief officer that he would be back within two hours, bringing with him his fellow councillors.

Crawford stopped purposely for a moment, with the

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steaming broth in his hand, to talk to one of the sentries in the corridor below.

"Who's that for, mate," inquired the latter—"the prisoner?"

"Yes," replied Crawford. "He's pretty bad just now. Cold's got hold of him quick, though he says he'll be all right in the morning."

"Well," grinned the sentry, "there ain't no fear of 'i' tryin' to escape to-night, is there?"

Crawford laughed at the very idea.

"No fear! He's too blessed ill to try tricks. This broth won't do 'im no good, I don't s'pose, but 'e's got an idea it will."

He passed on his way, and a few moments later was standing in Kingston's cabin. The latter had everything in preparation, and bade Crawford to undress himself with all speed. This the latter did, and although the garments were a little tight, they fitted Kingston fairly well.

"That's one thing done!" he exclaimed. "The next thing— But before I forget it: Are your quarters in the forecabin with the other men?"

"No, sir. I've got a little box of a cabin to meself—the same as the other stewards. It's just on the left—the first door, in fact—as you enter the passage leading to the fore-cabin."

"Good! That's all I want to know. Now sit in this chair and let me study your face while I disguise myself. Being dark I shall only find it necessary to do so roughly."

The next five minutes were ones that Crawford would remember for many a long day. It seemed incredible to him that Kingston could disguise himself so marvellously with nothing but the aid of a hypodermic syringe. As a matter of fact, it was marvellous, and Frank Kingston blessed the day that he had met Professor Graham Polgrave.

"There," he said at last, surveying himself with satisfaction. "What do you think of that, Crawford? It is rough, but I think it will serve."

"Rough, sir!" echoed Crawford, in an awed voice. "By gosh, if I met you all of a sudden, sir, I should think I was 'avin' a fit! Why, it's me—me exactly! And the voice, sir, it's just like me own!"

There was good reason for Crawford's surprised tones, for Kingston had in those short five minutes created a remarkable change. He looked Crawford to the life.

"No need to waste time in admiration!" he exclaimed briskly. "I claim no credit for what I have done, Crawford. It is these drugs—these drugs, pure and simple. Now slip into these pyjamas and tumble into your bunk. There is no necessity to disguise you. In the extremely improbable event of anyone coming, you must pretend to be three parts asleep, and keep your face to the wall."

Crawford did as he was bidden, and Kingston stood in the middle of the floor, surveying him with satisfaction. In a few seconds he had swallowed the broth, and there was nothing to keep him further on the Unicorn.

"Now," he exclaimed, "say a few words in a forced whisper, and take care not to drop your aitches!"

Crawford mumbled out a few words.

"Excellent! Nobody would know that it was not myself in the bed. I'm going now, Crawford, and I shall lock you in. Expect me back in about half an hour."

"Right, sir! Good luck, sir!"

A moment later Kingston was out in the passage, the empty bowl in his hand, locking the door. His attitude was precisely that of Crawford's, and he walked up the passage with every confidence in the world. Crawford had told him of the conversation with the sentry, and he paused for a moment as he passed him.

"He's drunk it all right, mate!" he exclaimed. "Says I ain't to disturb 'im for nearly an hour, when 'e wants a whisky an' 'ot water. My word, these 'ere toffs want some lookin' after!"

He passed on, and placed the bowl in the little room Crawford had told him of. Then he made his way up on deck.

With a swift, keen glance he took in the whole scene, and saw that that part of the ship was practically deserted. Several men were standing in a group forward, and a couple of officers were talking and smoking on the bridge. Midships, however, where he was standing, there was nobody to overlook his actions.

Quite coolly, and with not the least sign of stealth—for such a thing was too melodramatic for Kingston, who believed in doing things straightforwardly—he stepped to the rail. He glanced round swiftly, saw that he was clear of all observation, then looked across the water. The Coronet seemed to be quite close.

Ten seconds later the deck, amidships, was absolutely deserted.

Hazardous Work.

Frank Kingston did not find the water particularly cold, and he really enjoyed the swim across the harbour. At that time of night there was practically no fear of meeting any chance boat, and he grasped one of the ropes of the Coronet after having swum across with the greatest ease.

With extraordinary agility he clambered up to the deck, and stood for a moment shaking the water from him under the light of one of the side lamps. He had not been there a few seconds before a man rapidly approached. It was Fraser. He peered eagerly at the new-comer.

"Crawford!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "By gum, old man, what are you doing here?"

"I have come," replied Kingston coolly, "as I arranged to do beforehand. And, Fraser, you do not usually address me as 'old man'!"

"Lummy! It's Mr. Kingston!" exclaimed Fraser, recognising the voice. "I was certain it was Crawford, sir! But I can't believe— You look like him exactly!"

"Quite so, Fraser. Seeing that I took a considerable amount of trouble disguising myself as Crawford, I should be exceedingly displeased were I not a counterpart of your friend. But this talk is so much waste of time. Take me to Miss O'Brien and the prince. They are expecting me?"

"Yes, sir," replied Fraser eagerly, regaining his equanimity rapidly. "We all saw the Unicorn come in, and the professor was absolutely certain as you'd turn up before long. He said nothin' wouldn't stop you, an' nothing hasn't, sir!"

"When I make my plans, Fraser, I always do my best to carry them out. Now then, lead the way!"

Kingston followed Fraser with all his old, languid gait, and it seemed as though he had hours of time before him in which to perform his mission. But, although he did not appear to hurry, he was by no means slow. It was merely his manner which gave him the appearance of being languid and lazy.

"They're all in the saloon, sir," exclaimed the valet, stopping before a door.

"Very well, Fraser, lead the way in."

"In the saloon, sir? My quarters are—"

"I have some important plans to discuss, and as you are destined to play an active part, your presence is very necessary. Lead the way."

Fraser did so, a thrill running through him at Kingston's words. The saloon of the Coronet was a magnificent apartment, sumptuously furnished and decorated, illuminated by many electroliers and artistic side brackets. For a moment Kingston stood still, looking at the scene before him, a smile on his disguised features.

Dolores was seated on one of the lounges, a magazine in her hands. On the other side of the room, sitting face to face, were Professor Graham Polgrave and the Crown Prince Xavier of Balataria, the latter smoking a cigar, and evidently quite at his ease. He was disguised somewhat, and certainly did not look his own self in the careless yachting suit he wore.

"Why, Crawford," cried Dolores, arising to her feet suddenly. "What is the meaning of this? I understood that your master himself was coming! Has anything happened—has he been discovered?"

Kingston advanced, smiling.

"Really," he exclaimed, "you are unconsciously complimenting me on my disguise. Crawford himself is at this moment aboard the Unicorn. I have only taken his place temporarily to ensure a safe passage for myself when I return."

"Mr. Kingston," cried Dolores, grasping his hand warmly, "I should never have known it had you not spoken in your own voice. I was certain you would come, although it seemed utterly impossible."

"The impossible does not seem to enter Mr. Kingston's sphere!" exclaimed Professor Polgrave, springing to his feet.

"My brave rescuer, I am delighted to see you safe and sound—absolutely delighted! We are all curious to hear how you have got on. The Prince here, is particularly anxious to hear everything."

"The professor is quite right, Mr. Kingston," said Xavier, shaking hands with great vigour. "I am vastly interested in this matter, and thank you from the bottom of my heart for the assistance you are giving me in this time of trouble."

Kingston laughed and would have seated himself, but he suddenly remembered his sudden condition.

"I am afraid I am a little too wet to rest myself," he smiled. "Now, please understand, all of you, that every minute I am here I increase my danger. I cannot possibly satisfy your curiosity and tell you everything that has occurred since I left London, much as I should like to."

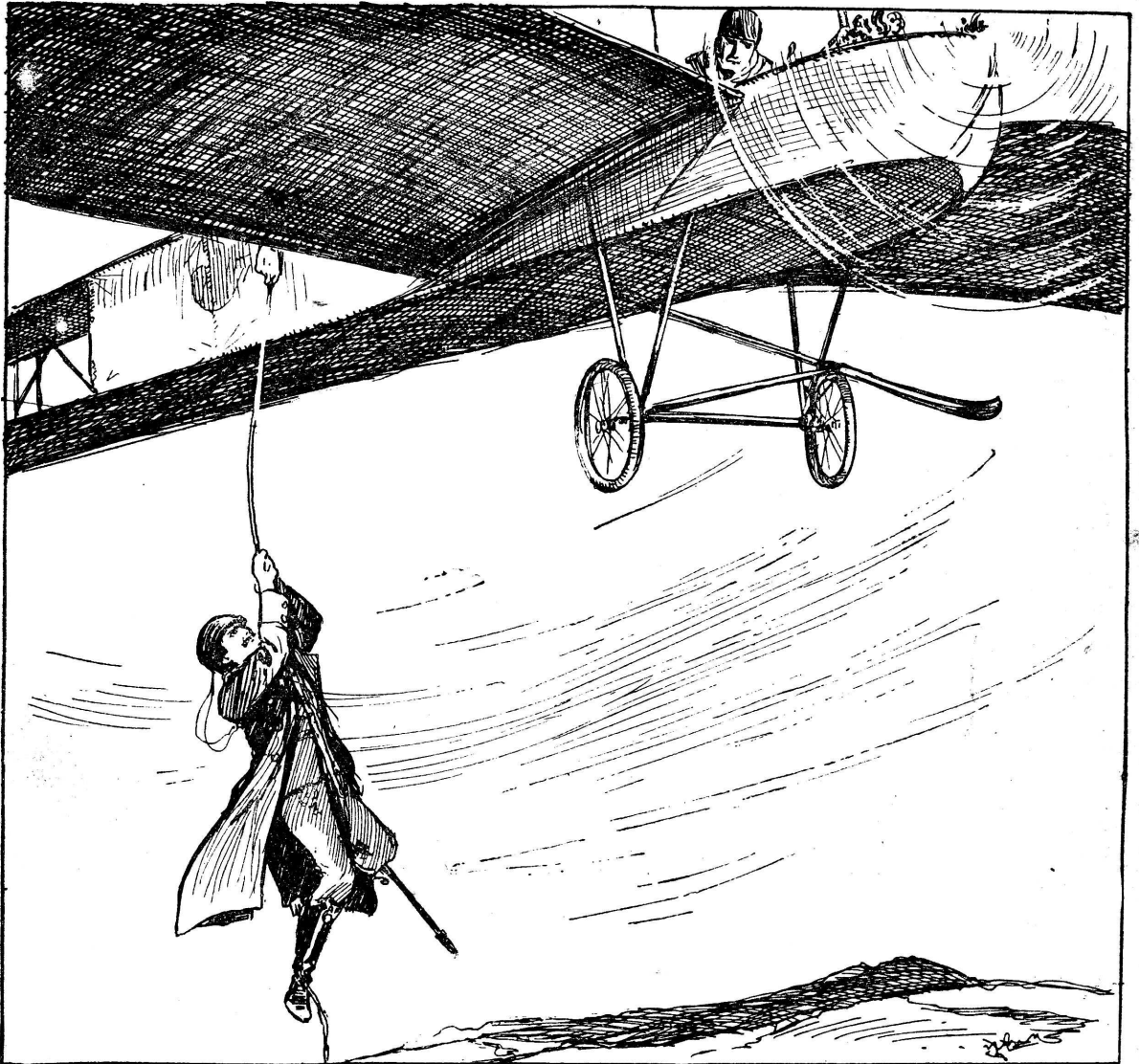
"Then we must wait!" exclaimed Dolores. "You cannot conceive, Mr. Kingston, how anxious we have been. It is

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"Don't struggle!" shouted a voice above the roar of the aeroplane's motor. "If you do, it will only mean death." (How the sham Crown Prince of Balataria was captured by the Brotherhood of Iron.)

splendid to see you here as though you were taking no risks whatever."

"Please set your mind at rest on that point, Dolores. I can confidently state that no hitch is likely to occur now. It is merely straightforward work. Since I last saw you, I have made all my plans, and I have paid this visit for the express purpose of giving instructions."

He stood there with his companions gathered round him in a group, eagerness displaying itself in the eyes of all of them. Even the old scientist seemed to be excited. He did not say much, for he realised how precious the time was.

"The count and Rupert Lyle are coming aboard the Unicorn to-night," said Kingston quickly. "They are under the impression that the prince is a prisoner aboard, and are setting sail without the delay of an hour for the Pacific."

"And you are going with them?" questioned Xavier.

"Yes. My work has only just started. By the way, professor, have you got that revolver in readiness?"

"Ah, yes, to be sure! It is here, all prepared!"

Polgrave fumbled in his pocket and produced a glittering pistol. It's shape was different to the usual, but it looked a formidable weapon. Kingston took it and stowed it away without examination.

"Thank you, professor," he said. "I cannot stop to examine it now, but I am confident it is perfect. To continue, the Unicorn will have left Corunna harbour by midnight. Now the Coronet is a faster vessel all round, so if

you start to-morrow, you can take a roundabout course, and manage to get well ahead of me by Friday. To-day is Wednesday, and if the weather is favourable, I shall act the day after to-morrow."

"Act!" repeated Dolores curiously. "How do you mean?"

"My time is limited—exceedingly limited, but I will tell you what I intend doing. It is all straightforward work, and by Friday I hope to be aboard the Coronet as my own self."

And Kingston proceeded to outline his plans. He spoke very quickly, and nobody interrupted him, knowing how precious the minutes were. He told them exactly what he wanted doing, and addressed himself mainly to Dolores, for she had, strictly speaking, the charge of the ship. Captain Morrison had been instructed to take his orders from her.

"And now," concluded Kingston, "that is all, Dolores. I have made everything clear?"

"Perfectly clear."

"Good! Now, Fraser, I have something to say to you. Tell me, first of all, is the submarine ready to depart at a moment's notice?"

"Absolutely, sir. Tim's abroad her now, just finishin' a little job I gave him. Why, sir, do you want the Dart immediately?"

"When the Unicorn sails from this harbour to-night, I shall require you, with Tim, to follow her aboard the submarine. Remain about a mile behind, and have the regula-

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tion periscope just above the surface. You will never be noticed from the yacht, and can keep us in sight the whole time. Under no circumstances allow the Unicorn to get beyond your range. You can carry enough petrol and stores to last yourself and Tim for six days?"

"Yes, sir, comfortably," replied Fraser eagerly. "But you'll act before that, won't you, sir?"

"In all probability I shall require your assistance on Friday, but it is best to be prepared. When you see the Unicorn come to a halt and the small boat put out to sea, you will know that your time for action has come."

Fraser wanted to hear no more. Once instructions were given him, he never required them to be repeated, and Kingston was quite sure that he could rely on his orders being carried out. He stood there now, saying a last few words before taking his departure.

Dolores, the Crown Prince, and Professor Polgrave, although they had many questions to ask him, although their curiosity was intense, made no attempt to prevent his leaving. He moved towards the door, smiling and cool.

"Pray do not worry yourselves," he murmured, with his hand on the door. "I have left myself a perfectly safe path to my cabin on the Unicorn. Expect to see me within a few days. I anticipate no hitch, and am quite sure that none will occur. Good-bye, all of you!"

He shook hands round, as though he were merely going on a short railway journey, and lounged out on to the deck. His companions looked after him in surprise and wonderment. It seemed incomprehensible to them how this very singular individual could be so extremely cool at such a time as this. He did not even hurry, but stood for a moment talking to Fraser against the rail.

Captain Morrison was on the bridge, but did not attempt to descend. Several of the men, too, looked at the couple standing on the deck with some curiosity. They opened their mouths a little in surprise as he clambered over the rail and disappeared overside.

Fraser stood there watching, and could faintly see his master in the darkness, striking out with extraordinary rapidity for the Unicorn, which lay rolling gently at her moorings, her numerous lights reflected brightly in the clear waters of the harbour.

"A marvellous man," declared Professor Polgrave, bustling out on deck, accompanied by Dolores—"a truly marvellous man! Ah, Fraser, where is your master? Gone? Good gracious me, Miss O'Brien, he does not waste much time!"

Dolores looked overside intently. Kingston however, had by now passed out of sight.

"I have never known him to waste a minute, professor," smiled the girl. "But why do you not call me Dolores? Surely we are friends enough for that?"

The old gentleman's face screwed itself up into a mass of creases as he smiled.

"If you will allow me to do so, it will give me excessive pleasure," he exclaimed. "Dear me, I declare I am quite in a whirl! All this excitement is making a young man of me! Somehow, Dolores, I do not fear in the least for our friend's safety. When I think of what he has done in the past, this present work is quite an easy matter for him to perform. Yes, he will do exactly as he says!"

The professor spoke in a tone of profound conviction, and Dolores, as she listened, was quite sure he was speaking the truth. The Crown Prince had joined them, and looked across the rippling water with thoughtful seriousness. He wondered why these people were doing so much for him, for he did not know everything concerning the Brotherhood of Iron. It was none of his business, anyhow, and being a gentleman, he was quite content to do as he was told.

He well understood the danger he was in, and that if he was to rule his own people, he could not return to Balataria until after his father's death. It was very hard, but there was no other alternative. General Stolzenburg was a scoundrel to his finger-tips, and would never allow Zavier to enter the country alive.

Meanwhile, the prince was not at all sorry for what had occurred. He was thoroughly enjoying this trip, and he knew that the people around him were sincere in their friendship. They were not doing this because he was a Royal prince, but because they knew his life was in danger. Zavier was no fool, and was well aware that his best policy would be to follow Kingston's instructions with absolute precision.

So everybody aboard the Carolina Star that night retired to their respective cabins quite contented of mind. Kingston's sudden visit had been a bit of excitement, but now things would go on as before for the next day or so. They could not help looking upon Kingston as a separate being—a man apart from his fellow-creatures. He performed his work with a nonchalant languor which was amazing. It

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was an impossibility to catch him unawares—to catch him napping.

He swam across Corunna Harbour with that noiseless, swift movement of his, and slid against the smooth plates of the S.-Y. Unicorn. He looked up cautiously, and saw that nobody was about. The place he chose to ascend was the same as he had used to descend. Very carefully he drew himself up one of the overhanging ropes, until his head was on a level with the deck.

Everything was the same. Nobody seemed to be about that particular part of the ship, although a little forward, on the bridge, he could see one of the officers reading a paper of some sort by the light of the telegraph-lamp. Forward a murmur of voices made itself heard, but just here all was silent and still.

Captain Formby would not be back yet for another hour and a half, for it was only just after ten-thirty, and the whole ship was, in consequence, half asleep. Kingston drew himself up, and grasped the rail.

"Now," he murmured to himself, with a smile.

Suddenly, without the least warning, he uttered a cry of alarm, and dropped back into the water. He struck with a great splash, and several men ran to the rail and peered overside.

"Hallo!" cried the officer on the bridge. "What's up there?"

"Man overboard, sir!"

"It's all right, mates!" gasped Kingston, splashing to the yacht's side. "I can get up all right! Love a duck, I'm soaked!"

Several men laughed at this piece of information, and watched interestedly as Crawford grabbed hold of a rope, and proceeded to hoist himself upwards. He was puffing and blowing, and the men, who had been a little alarmed, laughed as he clambered over the rail.

"All right, down there?" shouted the officer.

"Yes, sir," replied Kingston, shivering. "I've only got a duckin'. I was lookin' down into the water," he explained to the deck-hands collected round him, "bendin' over the rail like I always do, when suddenly I overbalanced."

"You ain't drunk, mate, are yer?" asked somebody.

"Drunk! No blessed fear. I'm mighty cold, though, I can tell you!" exclaimed Kingston, with chattering teeth. "Gave me a start when I found meself in the water. Let's get past, mates. I'm goin' to change these here clothes."

He pushed his way through, and made his way to Crawford's cabin, as though he had been there a dozen times previously. He marched straight in, and switched on the electric-light, the men going back to their original positions, thinking no more of the incident.

Kingston chuckled to himself as he slipped the clothes off, and proceeded to don one of Crawford's dry suits. His stratagem had been absolutely necessary, for it would have been absolutely impossible for him to walk back to his cabin wet through, the water streaming over everything. By pretending to fall overboard, he had cleared the path before him.

Within the space of four minutes he was ready. Lighting a cigarette—for on the Brotherhood's ship no strict discipline was kept—he walked out on deck. A few remarks were flung at him as he passed a group, but he only grinned and continued his way. Once inside the little cupboard-room which was situated in the passage below, he rapidly prepared a glass of hot whisky-and-water.

With this in his hand he passed the sentry—who looked at it with unmistakable envy—and inserted the key in the lock of his cabin.

"Brought the whisky, your Highness," he said, in a rather loud voice so that the sentries should overhear. "Hope you're feelin' a little better."

The door closed, and the watching men resumed their survey of the corridor wall. They both looked utterly weary, and were anxious for their relief to turn up. Crawford sat up in the bunk as Kingston switched on the light.

"Have you been, sir?" he whispered, gazing in surprise at his double's dry clothing.

"Been, Crawford? Yes, and here I am quite safe and sound. Now, come on, there is no time to waste in talk; slip these clothes on as fast as you like. I found them in your chest of drawers, and have left the others in a rather pitiable condition on the floor."

Crawford looked at his master in awe as the latter proceeded to tell him how he had returned to the Unicorn. Kingston was as cool as it was possible for a man to be, and was very soon attired in his own pyjamas. He handed the whisky to Crawford.

"Drink that," he exclaimed, "and then get back on deck! You are yourself again, and it would look peculiar if you stayed in here too long. Of course, nobody came while I was away?"

"Oh, no, sir! I was left quite to meself. But you're me, sir—I mean, you ain't changed your disguise."

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"I shall do that immediately. There is no necessity why you should remain, however. Get to your own quarters, and mention to one of the crew that you have done for the night. Crawford, we have pulled off this little deception together really well. You played your part admirably, and I shall not forget it when we reach home again."

"I never did nothin' at all, sir—"

"Oh, yes, you did, for without you I should have been unable to move a finger! Your presence aboard this ship has rendered my position almost farcical as regards being a prisoner. I should have been helpless alone—utterly helpless. Now, off you go, and don't forget to say a word or two about your tumble overboard. It was you who had a ducking, remember, not me!"

Crawford grinned as he opened the door and passed outside. Kingston heard the key turn in the lock, and sat down before the glass, smiling with satisfaction.

"My work is too easy," he told himself, taking the little hypodermic syringe from its case. "Everything is done for me, or, at least, prepared beforehand. Crawford is proving invaluable, for it is owing to his presence aboard that my task is so lightened. By Jove, I can practically see the end of this affair in sight! Still, there is a lot to be done before I return to England, and the first thing, row that I have no further use for it, is to get rid of this infernal cold!"

Frank Kingston had a wonderful memory, for, having obliterated his present disguise as Crawford, he rapidly made several injections which caused the muscles of his face to alter their natural positions until he was once more a counterpart of Prince Xavier of Balataria.

Then, after stowing away his little box of phials, he picked up the revolver which Professor Polgrave had handed to him. Although it had had a wetting, it was none the worse, and was by now practically dry. He looked at it quizzically, and turned it over in his hand.

"You, my friend," he murmured, "are destined to play a very important part in the next move of this interesting game!"

Merely Concerning a Water-Tank.

"By Jove, what a perfect morning! This looks promising for to-morrow, at all events."

Frank Kingston said these words to himself as he walked across the deck of the Unicorn at seven-thirty the following morning. He was attired in the lounge suit as before, and wore a thick woollen muffler round his neck—this latter merely for appearances' sake, as he was supposed to have a cold.

Several of the deck-hands looked at him insolently. They knew—or thought they knew—who he was, but being a prisoner they never thought of showing him respect. It was a novel experience for them to treat a Royal Prince as though he were dirt. Not that Kingston minded. As a matter of fact, he, in some peculiar manner, made the men feel foolish. He walked across the deck as though they didn't exist, and never even glanced at them.

The yacht was cutting through the water at full speed, and on every hand could be seen the boundless ocean. Far away to the south-west a couple of other craft were visible, and smoke on the horizon to the east told of still another. The sun was shining from a cloudless sky, and it was very evident that a hot day was in store for them.

Captain Formby was apparently still below, for there was no sign of him on deck, the second officer having charge of the bridge. The captain had come on board the previous night just after twelve o'clock, accompanied by Count von Brezen and Rupert Lyle. The latter was taking the voyage, not for business, but merely for the pleasure of it.

Kingston strolled up and down for close on half an hour, going once up to the bridge, and glancing at the glass. It was high, so there was no prospect of bad weather. He did not speak to the officer, but simply looked him up and down very calmly, then descended to the deck once more.

His breakfast was served at eight, and Crawford found that his charge had very quickly recovered from the bad effects of his cold. His voice was still husky, though not nearly so bad as it had been the night before.

"I'm certainly better, Crawford," exclaimed Kingston, with a smile.

Crawford grinned.

"It beats me, sir, how you make it look as though you are so bad, when there ain't nothin' up with you at all! But, beggin' yer pardon for askin', sir, what do we do next?"

"Nothing to-day, Crawford, but as for to-night—well, I will explain that later. Are you a good hand at shaving?"

"Pretty good, sir."

"Then some time during the day I will tell the captain that I want you to shave me. While you are doing so, I will tell you what has to be done. I do not wish you to remain in here too long when you simply bring my meals in.

Remember, it will be fatal for both myself and you if a breath of suspicion gets about."

"Yes, sir, I quite see that," replied the man. "I'll get out now, then, sir?"

"If you don't mind."

Crawford left, and a short time later, the Crown Prince Xavier, of Balataria, coolly ascended to the deck, smoking a cigarette, and carrying under his arm one of the latest novels. He seated himself under an awning amidships, and settled himself to enjoy the book and the fresh breeze that was blowing. The only thing he did not enjoy was the cigarette, for Kingston, undisguised, was a non-smoker.

Although he did not appear to look up or around him, he knew perfectly well that a very little way in his rear were the three Inner Councillors. After reading for five minutes or more he was disturbed by their footsteps approaching. He did not look up as they came to a halt before him.

"Good-morning, your Highness!" exclaimed Von Brezen deferentially. "I hear you have a nasty cold. I sincerely hope that it is much better this morning."

Kingston read on.

"I am afraid you did not hear me," went on the count, giving his companions a glance. "By your attitude, Prince Xavier, one might think I am an unwelcome fellow-passenger?"

"Prince Xavier" puffed a cloud of smoke upwards, as though he were utterly oblivious of the other's presence.

"He means to take no notice of us!" exclaimed Lyle, with a sneer. "Still, I cannot say that I expected better treatment from him!"

"Oh, so that is your attitude, is it, my fine prisoner?" exclaimed the count, changing his tone suddenly. "The least you could do is to recognise our presence."

Without warning, Kingston dashed his book down and rose to his feet. His eyes were blazing furiously, and his whole attitude was one of suppressed rage.

"I do not wish to create a scene," he exclaimed, his voice vibrating with anger, "but unless you leave me alone, I shall certainly do so! You scoundrels, what harm have I done you that you should treat me in this way—that you should kidnap me and carry me away on this yacht?"

"Steady, steady!" put in Formby sharply. "Don't get excited!"

"You tell me not to get excited!" cried Kingston, acting magnificently. "What man would not be, under the same circumstances? I do not wish to speak to one of you. I realise how helpless I am—how completely in your hands you have me, and as long as you leave me alone I will submit quietly. But once you remind me of what has happened, what is likely to happen, I will—"

"Now, then!" interrupted Count von Brezen. "The skipper here tells me you have given him your parole, yet you are talking of treachery—"

"Treachery?" echoed Kingston, with a bitter laugh. "You are a fine man to talk of treachery, Count von Brezen! You, my own countryman! You are worse than anybody—worse than General Stolzenburg himself. You traitorous scoundrel, I feel as though I could take you by the neck and throttle the life out of you! Bah, leave me to myself, and I shall be no trouble whatever! Before you came, I was quiet, and will be in future if I do not see your face too often!"

Kingston finished up abruptly, seated himself again, and took up his book, breathing hard. This outburst of his had been very necessary, for it would have looked peculiar had he, as the prince, met Von Brezen without anger.

The three Inner Councillors glanced at one another, and the count would have continued the conversation had not Formby interjected.

"No," he said, "there is no reason why you should continue this wrangle, count. The prince has been a model prisoner up to now, and I do not wish to be forced to resort to strong measures."

"Very well, I will do as you wish. He is a captive, although he apparently thinks he is still in his own Court, and is still able to give his orders as he chooses."

The count went off in a huff, and Kingston chuckled inwardly as he picked up the book from his lap and commenced to read.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully enough, and by nightfall Kingston had almost got rid of his "cold." The Unicorn had passed several other ships, but none close enough to necessitate Kingston's removal below; for, in spite of his parole, his captors would not trust him implicitly.

His shave was not to take place until he retired to rest at nine o'clock, but that, if anything, suited Kingston's purpose all the better. The captain had not the slightest suspicion with regard to Crawford, for he was, and always had been, a most enthusiastic member of the Brotherhood. This was, of course, merely his outer attitude. Inwardly he loathed the whole organisation, and was absolutely staunch and true to Frank Kingston.

The latter had no further trouble with Von Brezen, for

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NEXT WEEK.

"BURNT OUT."



the count, acting under the advice of his fellow councillors, let the prisoner do as he wished.

Crawford cleared away the supper things smartly, and then proceeded to get ready to shave his master's face, for Kingston was, after all, Crawford's master. The latter was paid a regular salary for his services.

The portholes were open wide, and the swish of the Atlantic sounded cool and refreshing to Kingston's ears as he sat there awaiting for the temporary barber to turn up. The captain and his friends were in the saloon, troubling themselves in no way about the prisoner. They knew he could not escape even if he wished to.

"Now, Crawford, it's rather later than I expected, but those plans must be discussed to-night," exclaimed Kingston, when the man had closed the door tightly, and announced that they were quite alone. "Tell me, first of all, where is the supply of water for the use of the crew kept?"

"Why, sir, in one of the store-rooms below."

"No, I do not mean that. I mean the supply that is used daily. I presume there is a small tank which is filled daily in the galley? Is that so?"

"Yes, sir, now you mention it, I remember. There's a fairly large tank there that's filled up every night. But what are you going to do with that, sir?"

"I'll tell you in a moment. Can you get to it easily—get to it to-night, before you retire to your cabin?"

Crawford thought for a moment.

"Yes, I think so, sir," he replied. "The cook gets to his bunk as soon as the saloon have finished supper, and he has washed up. That'll be about half-past ten, sir, because although dinner's served at seven, the cap'n generally has a little whisky and a few biscuits at about ten."

"Good! Now, Crawford, when you have finished shaving me, I shall hand you a little bottle, the contents of which you are to empty into the water-tank. Before doing so, however, see that there is no more than five gallons of water in the tank, and not less. I do not mean to say you are to measure it, but judge it roughly with your eye."

"But what's it for, sir? A drug?"

"Exactly—a drug. When the men are served out their rations to-morrow morning, their tea, or whatever they have, will have been made with this drugged water. The effect will be that those who drink will become, half an hour afterwards, totally unconscious. This unconsciousness will last for perhaps an hour, during which time I shall be able to carry through my scheme."

It did not take Kingston long to set Crawford up with an outline of what was to happen

on Friday morning—the morrow. The glass was still high, and there was every prospect of fine weather. Crawford was absolutely amazed at the utter audacity of Frank Kingston's scheme.

"But it can't work, sir," he protested. "It can't possibly work. There's all the other officers about."

"And the other officers, my dear Crawford, will receive my full attention. Make no mistake on that point. Your part to-night is easy enough to perform, but if you fail the whole thing fails. So you see how important it is that you do it thoroughly."

"I'll be as easy as pie to shove this bottle of stuff into the water-tank. By gosh, sir, the men'll be surprised to-morrow when they find themselves droppin' off!"

"Well, I trust to you, Crawford, and I'm quite confident that you'll carry the thing through properly. The rest of the scheme has to be played by myself, so don't you worry about it. I know quite well what I am doing."

"Of course, sir, I know that. After all, when I come to think of it, it won't be such a hard job for you. You ain't like an ordinary man. Fraser's told me lots about you, sir, that's made me gasp."

Kingston laughed.

"You realise, of course, that you will have to be rendered unconscious for half an hour to-morrow morning? It would never do to leave you out, for that would be giving the game away."

"Of course, sir," agreed the man readily enough. "As long as I have your word for it, I don't care twopence. But I don't want to die just yet, sir."

"You won't die," smiled Kingston; "you can take my word for that. Well, I think that's all we need discuss to-night, so the sooner I get to sleep the better. Should the captain or Von Brezen pay me a visit, I should like to be in my bunk, apparently as submissive and quiet as I profess to be."

Five minutes later he was alone, and Crawford went about his duties full of wonder and admiration at the methods of his extraordinary master. His own part—that of tinkering with the water-tank—was slight, but Kingston would require all his singular coolness and audacity to carry it through successfully.

And even then there were risks galore. It was the absolute daring of the thing which made failure seem remote. Kingston himself seemed to trouble about it no more. He very calmly undressed, and very calmly climbed into his bunk.

Before fifty seconds had elapsed after the switching off of the light he was wrapt in peaceful slumber, utterly oblivious of his surroundings, and of what was to come to pass the following day. His plans were all cut and dried, so why trouble himself until the moment for action was at hand?

Tap!

"Come in!"

The door of Frank Kingston's cabin opened, and Crawford appeared, carrying the tray which bore the former's breakfast. He set it down on the table, then looked at his disgrised master eagerly.

"They've had it, sir!" he exclaimed, in a whisper. "In half an hour's time there won't be no one on deck but the officers. Them below—the engineers and stokers—won't come up for over an hour yet, so you'll have plenty of time to do the job."

"And how about the deck-hands—the watch below?"

"They only went off duty a couple of hours ago, sir, so you needn't trouble about them at all. You'll be comin' on deck soon, sir, I suppose?"

Frank Kingston drew the tray towards him and languidly unfolded his serviette. Then he looked at Crawford with a quiet smile on his features. He was every bit at his ease, and seemed in no way perturbed at the thought of what was to come.

"As soon as I have finished breakfast, Crawford," he answered. "By that time, I presume, most of the men will have succumbed to the effects of the drug. When the last man has done so you must appear on deck and shout out the fact to the captain. That will be a signal for me."

"Very good, sir. I'll go an' keep an eye on things."

Crawford left the table, and Kingston finished his breakfast with that quiet unconcern which he invariably displayed when an important matter was about to be dealt with. Then he lit a cigarette, tucked his novel under his arm, and sauntered out into the corridor.

He found the deck looking a little more deserted than usual, and the sun blazing down with its accustomed fierceness. Not a cloud marred the clear blue of the sky, or a sail the clearer blue of the sea, and a very gentle breeze fanned coolly into his face as he walked to the awning which had been erected for his special benefit.

(Another thrilling instalment of this serial next Thursday.)

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