

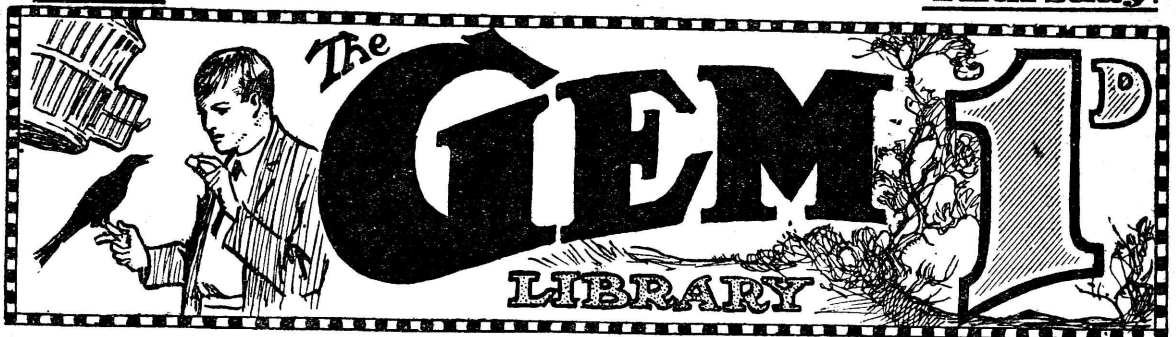
NEXT  
THURSDAY:

"The Mysterious Document."

Another Splendid Tale of Tom Merry & Co.  
at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Every

Thursday.



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[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.]



# BURNT OUT!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

## CHAPTER 1. A Midnight Mystery.

"GWEAT SCOTT!"

It was dark, very dark, in the Fourth Form dormitory, in the School House at St. Jim's. Midnight had chimed out, and the juniors were all fast asleep. Silence and slumber reigned in the great buildings of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, suddenly awoke.

What had awakened him he hardly knew. He had an impression that a light had flashed upon his face, and he opened his eyes, and started up upon his elbow, with his mind still confused by sleep. And as he lay blinking into the darkness of the dormitory, there came a flicker of light upon his face again.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy sat up in bed.

That a light had flickered for a moment in the dark dormitory he was certain, but all around him was black now.

What had happened?

The thought of possible burglars did not immediately cross the mind of the junior. He was more inclined to suspect that someone was "japing" him.

He strained his eyes to look into the gloom.

"I wegard you as a silly ass, whoever you are!" he exclaimed. "Pway go back to bed, and stop playin' silly twicks!"

There was no reply, but there came a fluttering gleam of light again, and D'Arcy caught the glimmer of it on the windows of the dormitory.

"You uttah ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pway stop your silly pwanks! Bai Jove! I suppose it is one of the Shell boundahs—Tom Mcwwy pewwaps! Tom Mcwwy, I wegard you as an ass!"

There was a grunt from a neighbouring bed

"Groo! What's that row?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Go to sleep!" mumbled Blake, of the Fourth. "'Tain't rising-bell yet!"

"I am quite aware of that Blake. It is nowheah neah wisin'-bell. But—"

"Shurrup, then!" said Blake sleepily.

"Weally—"

"Go-sl-p!"

"Somebody is playin' a twick! I— Bai Jove! There it is again!"

Again that peculiar flicker of light.

"Wake up, Blake, deah boy!"

"Rats!" mumbled Blake.

"Digby, deah boy, wake up!"

Snore!

"Hewwies, old man—"

Snore!

"I say, Lumlay-Lumlay—"

Snore!

"Bai Jove! Look heah, you lazay slackahs, wake up! 'Wats! There's somebody playin' a twick! There! You jape!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Jack Blake sat up in bed.

"Gussy!" he roared.

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"Shut up!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Go to sleep!"

"Wats! There's somebody playin' a twick! There! You see it for yourself!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, as the flicker of light danced across the dormitory again.

Jack Blake did see it this time. He opened his eyes wide in surprise.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

Next Thursday:

"THE MYSTERIOUS DOCUMENT," & "THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON."

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CHAPTER 2.

A Little Mistake.

"I wegard it as—"  
 "Wake up, you chaps!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "There's somebody in the dorm.—a burglar or a giddy joker!"  
 "Yaas, wathah!"

Blake was out of bed in a moment. He had a little electric torch in his jacket-pocket, and he groped for it in the dark. He found it in a few moments, and switched the light on. The bright white ray of light gleamed out.

"Good!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arev. "Hewwies, Dig, Weilly, Lumlay, wake up! Wake up, Kewwuish, you boundah! Jump up, Hancock! Burglahs!"  
 "Oh, rats!"  
 "Bosh!"  
 "Rubbish!"  
 "Go to bed!"  
 "Weally, deah boys—"

"There's somebody in the dorm.," said Blake. "Get up, Herries!" He jerked the bedclothes off Herries, and Herries started up with a roar. "Get to the door, Herries, and see that he doesn't get away!"

"Look here—"  
 "Look alive!" roared Blake. "If it's a Shell bounder, we'll swamp him with cold water for disturbing us! It may be a burglar coming here for Gussy's eyeglass, of course!"

"Weally, Blake—"  
 "Buck up!"

Several candles were lighted. The whole Fourth Form dormitory was awakened by this time, and most of the fellows turned out. Mellish and Levison remained in bed. If it was a burglar, they had no desire whatever to encounter him.

But most of the juniors entered into the search with zest.

With Blake's electric lamp and half a dozen candles and a bicycle lantern the dormitory was quite illuminated, and the juniors searched it from end to end, looking under the beds and behind the washstands and into every corner that could have concealed any intruder larger than a rabbit.

But they found nothing.  
 From end to end of the dormitory they searched, while Herries stood on guard at the door to make sure that the mysterious intruder did not escape.

But nobody was found.  
 There was no trace of a midnight marauder, no burglar, and no humorous junior. Blake ceased the search at last and snorted.

"It was some chap here, then, playing a silly jape on us?"

"Yaas, wathah—somebody in the Fourth!"  
 "Oh, rats!" said Hancock, getting back into bed. "I don't believe there was a light at all—you dreamed it!"

"Weally Hancock—"  
 "I didn't see any blessed light!" said Levison.  
 "Faith, and I didn't, either!" said Reilly. "Are ye sure that ye didn't drame it intirely, Blake, my boy?"

Blake sniffed.  
 "Don't be an ass!" he replied. "I saw a light of some sort, and so did Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "It was some giddy ass japing!" said Digby. "That's all. Let's get back to bed!"

Digby had only returned that day from France, where he had been staying for some weeks, and he was tired. He scrambled into bed again, and was asleep in a minute.

Blake made a few forcible remarks concerning the damage he would do to the japer's features if he found him out, and then turned in himself.

The lights were extinguished, and the juniors settled down to sleep again.

And then, as Arthur Augustus laid his head upon the pillow, there came that mysterious flicker of light once more, and he started up with an exclamation.

"Gweat Scott!"  
 "My hat!"  
 "The light!"  
 "I saw it then!"  
 "And I!"

Jack Blake sat up, his heart beating.  
 "You fellows saw the light?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "Yes, certainly!"  
 "Faith, I saw it reflected on the window!"  
 "So did I!"

"Are you all in bed?" asked Blake.  
 An affirmative answer came from every fellow in the dormitory. Blake felt a creepy sensation about his spine. It was almost ghostly, this recurrence of the mysterious light. What did it mean? There was no stranger in the Fourth Form dormitory, and yet the moment the boys were in bed again that mysterious light began to flicker and dance in the gloom.

JACK BLAKE sat with his eyes staring into the darkness of the long room. His heart was beating quite painfully. The mystery was oppressive. Unless it was a ghostly visitation, where did that mysterious flicker of light come from?

There it came again!  
 Suddenly, from black darkness, a wave of indistinct light seemed to rise and waver and flicker. It gleamed on the high windows, and fell redly for a moment across the white coverlet of Blake's bed.

Then it died away.  
 "Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.  
 Blake caught his breath.  
 "Listen!" he muttered.

There was a sound of shuffling footsteps in the passage outside the dormitory, and then a faint sound as the door opened.

The juniors listened with thumping hearts.  
 Someone had entered the Fourth Form dormitory in the dark!

They sat up in bed, invisible in the darkness to the intruders, and listened, shivering, with hearts going like hammers. They were silent, listening, waiting to hear what might be heard further.

From the gloom came a low, whispering voice.  
 "They're all asleep!"  
 Blake started.

He knew that voice. It was the voice of Tom Merry, of the Shell—the junior captain of the School House.

Blake snapped his teeth. He thought he understood. Mutual japing between the Fourth Form and the Shell frequently enlivened things at St. Jim's.

Blake rolled silently out of bed, and grasped his pillow. He stepped noiselessly towards the voices.

"Yes; they're asleep!" It was Monty Lowther's voice in reply to Tom Merry. "Is it worth while calling them?"  
 "The kids would be no use!" said a third voice—that of Manners.

"But—" began Tom Merry. "I— Oh! Yah! Yaroo!"

Blake, guided by the whispering voices, had reached them, and he smote out with the pillow, with a mighty swipe.

Tom Merry caught the pillow with the side of his head, and staggered across the dorm., and bumped on the floor.  
 "Ow!" he yelled. "Yow!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

He swiped out again.  
 Manners caught the pillow this time, and rolled over with a yell. Monty Lowther was blinking in the darkness, trying to make out what was happening, when Blake smote him in his turn, and he sat down with sudden violence.

"Yow!"  
 "Yah!"  
 "Oh!"

Blake yelled.  
 "Tumble up, Fourth! Collar the bounders!"

The Fourth-Formers were already tumbling out of their beds in the dark. Somebody lighted a candle. A crowd of fellows in night-shirts and pyjamas rushed upon the Shell intruders.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were seized in a dozen pairs of hands as they were scrambling to their feet.

"Bai Jove! We've got 'em!"  
 "Hurray!"  
 "Got the giddy japers!"  
 "Bump them!"  
 "Yaas, wathah!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry struggled furiously. But four or five sturdy Fourth-Formers had hold of him, and his struggles were not of much use.

"Bump them!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"  
 Bump!

Tom Merry bumped on the floor. Manners and Lowther bumped beside him, and they yelled. The Terrible Three were having a terrible time. They were bumped again, and they yelled once more.

"Stop it!"  
 "You fatheads!"  
 "We came here—"  
 "—to call you—"  
 "Bump them!"  
 Bump!

"Yaroo!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now then, you bounders!" said Blake breathlessly.  
 "Now you know what to expect when you come japing in our dorm. in the middle of the night! We'll teach you

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to flicker blessed lights about the place and make Gussy nervous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"You chumps!" roared Tom Merry. "We came here to waka you——"

"Ha, ha, ha! You've woke us all right!"

"We-we-we——"

"Wee-wee-wee——" mimicked Blake. "Doesn't he sound like a Frenchman or a blessed guinea-pig? Wee-wee-wee!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We-we came here to call you, because——"

"Because you wanted to play a wotten pwank," said D'Arcy. "You showed a wotten light somehow, and quite startled us——"

"Wo didn't, you ass! We never had a light!"

"Oh, dwaw it mild, deah boy!"

Blake uttered an exclamation.

"Wasn't it you, Tom Merry, who had the light—honour bright?"

"Of course it wasn't, ass!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors looked amazed. They knew that Tom Merry's word was sacred, and he had said that he showed no light. The mysterious light was still unexplained, then.

"My only hat!" said Blake.

"Gweat Scott!"

"But why did you come to wake us up, then, if ye're not japing?" demanded Reilly.

"Because there's a fire!"

"A fire?"

"Yes, ass! A fire, chump—a fire, fathead—a giddy fire, you duffers!" said Tom Merry, with emphasis crescendo.

"Bai Jove!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### To the Rescue!

**A** FIRE!"

Jack Blake blew out the candle. He thought he understood at last. The candle went out, and the dormitory was in darkness. Blake watched the window.

"Bai Jove, Blake, you've blown out the candle——"

"Ring off, Gussy——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Look!" exclaimed Blake suddenly.

The mysterious light glimmered on the dormitory again.

Blake saw it reflecting on the glass of the window, as he had seen it before, but now he understood.

The mysterious light came from without.

As there was no building overlooking the big School House, it had naturally never occurred to the juniors that the light came from outside; but when they knew there was a fire all was clear.

The light of a conflagration reflected in the sky glimmered on the windows of the dormitory. The fire was undoubtedly at a distance—perhaps as far as Wayland—and only when the flames rose high in the wind would the light be cast as far as St. Jim's. That accounted for the mysterious light rising and falling, and dying away in the darkness.

"My hat!" exclaimed Hancock. "Not at St. Jim's, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, ass! If the fire were here in the school you'd have heard of it without us calling you. It's over in the direction of Wayland."

"Bai Jove. It must be an awf'ly big blaze to reflect as fah as this."

"Yes, rather."

"It mayn't be as far off as Wayland," said Tom Merry. "It's in that direction—the same direction as Mr. Browning-Jones's new school."

"Bai Jove!"

"It may be the new school——"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Blake. "My hat! Poor old B.-J.!"

"Yaas, wathah. It's wuff if he's bein' burnt out, you know. He was the ownah of the place, you know, and he may lose all his tin."

"How did you know it was a fire?" asked Blake.

Tom Merry sniffed.

"Looked," he said. "I woke up and found a light shining on the windows——"

"Bai Jove! So did I!"

"And I looked out——"

"I nevah thought of that, you know."

"You wouldn't!"

"Weally, Tom Mowwy——"

"And I saw the blaze over the wood," said Tom Merry.

"I saw it only a minute—it only shows when the wind's blowing in this direction, I think."

"We're wasting time here," said Monty Lowther.

"So we are," Tom Merry agreed. "Look here, we're going to see the fire!"

"My hat!"

"You'll get into a row, breaking bounds at this time of night," said Levison.

"Well, this is not an ordinary case. I think we may be able to render assistance—every hand to the mill, you know, at a time like this. I'd call the masters, only——"

Blake chuckled.

"Only they mightn't let you go."

"Exactly! Of course, I shouldn't go, only I think I might help. My idea is to call Kildare just as we're going."

"Good!"

"We came to call you chaps in case you might like to come, too——"

"What-ho!" said Blake emphatically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Get into your duds, then—quick!"

Blake and Digby and Herries and D'Arcy dressed themselves quickly enough. Reilly followed their example, but the other fellows went back to bed. A long tramp through a dark wood at midnight, with the probability of a flogging afterwards for breaking bounds at night, did not tempt them.

Even D'Arcy dressed quickly on this occasion, and did not stop to arrange his necktie before the glass. The juniors were ready in five minutes.

Then they quitted the dormitory. Kangaroo—Harry Noble of the Shell—joined them in the passage, and the nine juniors hurried downstairs. They stopped outside the door of Kildare's room.

Tom Merry hesitated there for a moment.

"I suppose Kildare would like to be called when there's a fire going on," he remarked. "It's a chance for the St. Jim's Fire Brigade."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry knocked at the door, and opened it.

"Kildare!"

There was a sound of steady breathing in the room. The captain of St. Jim's was fast asleep.

"Kildare!" Tom Merry kicked on the door! "Kildare!"

A startled voice came from the gloom.

"What's that? Who's there?"

"I'm here——"

"Merry?"

"Yes, Kildare. There's a big fire going on—you can see it from your window. I think it's Browning-Jones's private school that's ablaze."

"By George! Thank you for calling me, Merry!"

Kildare jumped out of bed at once.

Tom Merry pulled the door shut, and the juniors hurried away. They did not intend to give the Sixth-Former time to ask them what they had risen for, and where they were going. They were going to the scene of the fire—only to render assistance, of course.

"Kildare'll wake the masters, and they can decide what to do about it," Tom Merry remarked. "I think somebody ought to go and give help. We shall be the first in the field, that's all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we'll be ahead of the New House this time," grinned Kangaroo, as he opened the hall window. "Figgins & Co. aren't awake, I fancy."

The juniors dropped out of the window one after another and ran across the dusky quadrangle towards a well-known spot by the school wall, where a slanting oak-tree made it easy to climb.

The old quadrangle of St. Jim's, in the shadow of its ancient elms, was very dark and gloomy. Half-past twelve rang from the tower as the juniors scudded across in the dim shadows.

They glanced towards the New House—the rival House of St. Jim's. All the windows were dark save when they occasionally caught a red reflection from the distant fire.

The School House juniors chuckled. Figgins & Co., their deadly rivals of the New House, would be left behind this time. The School House fellows would tell them about the fire in the morning, and Figgins & Co. would be willing to go out and kick themselves for having slept through it all.

"Here's the tree," said Tom Merry, groping in the shadows for the old trunk.

His hand came in contact with something soft and warm, and he gave a jump.

"Wh-h-h-what——"

"Ow, you ass!" came a voice from the darkness. "What are you pinching my chivvy for? Ow! Leggo!"

"Fatty Wynn!"

"Yes, ass!"

"Figgins & Co.!"

Three dim figures loomed faintly in the gloom beside the oak-tree. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—Figgins & Co. of the New House. Figgins burst into a laugh.

"You School House chaps awake, too?" he exclaimed.  
 "We—we thought you were asleep!" stammered Tom Merry.  
 "We were just thinking—"  
 "Just thinking the New House was left out of it!" chuckled Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you see—"  
 "Fatty Wynn discovered the fire," said Figgins. "He got up to get something to eat soon after twelve, and he saw the reflection in the sky. We're going to give assistance. We intended to tell you chaps all about it in the morning—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "Let's get on," said Kerr.  
 "Yes, come on."

"Yaas, wathah! We're wastin' time, you know."  
 The juniors climbed the school wall and dropped into the lane. Tom Merry glanced back from the top of the wall, and saw many lights dancing in the windows of the School House. Kildare had evidently thought it advisable to wake the place. Probably there would be numerous contingents from St. Jim's on the scene of the fire before long, but Tom Merry & Co. would be first in the field.

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake. "Sprant!"  
 "Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors sprinted, flitting swiftly through the darkness of the lane, and dashing at a steady trot along the towing-path by the river. And as they ran on the red glare of flamelight grew redder and brighter in the sky. All doubt as to where the fire was was now at an end. It was not so far as Wayland, and a farmhouse would never have made such a conflagration. It was the private school of Mr. Browning-Jones, Master of Arts of Oxford—one of the finest fellows the St. Jim's juniors knew. And in the hope of being able to help him they ran their hardest to reach the scene of the fire.

**CHAPTER 4.**  
**The Fire.**

**R**ED against the midnight sky the flames blazed up as the juniors of St. Jim's arrived breathless on the scene.

There was a sound of shouting—loud voices, trampling feet, and crashing of falling wood and brickwork. The school was in a blaze from end to end.

Mr. Browning-Jones, the master of the private school, was a young man fresh from Balliol, and when he had first opened his little school within a short distance of St. Jim's the "Saints" had put their backs up immediately.

They had agreed to regard it as a piece of pure, unadulterated cheek on the part of Mr. Browning-Jones, and they had taken no pains to conceal that opinion from "B.-J."—in fact, they took some trouble to acquaint him with it.

"B.-J." had taken it with quiet good-humour. In spite of the resentment of the St. Jim's fellows, the young schoolmaster had risked his life to pull Tom Merry and Gore out of the mill-stream on the Ryll.

That brave deed wrought a change in the sentiments of the Saints towards the hitherto obnoxious Browning-Jones. From that hour he was a hero.

The Saints agreed to tolerate the private school—and indeed, it was a very little place, of no pretensions whatever compared with St. Jim's, and they could afford to tolerate it.

Mr. Browning-Jones had less than a dozen pupils, all about the same age, whom he was preparing for exams., and so far as the Saints had seen them, they seemed decent enough fellows.

Having made up their minds to forgive Mr. Browning-Jones, the Saints did their best to make up for their previous rudeness to him; and both parties were now on the best of terms. There had been a fight or two among the boys, but that was only what was to be expected.

Much as they had resented the first establishment of the private school, the St. Jim's fellows were sorry enough to see it burning, and they were sorry enough for Mr. Browning-Jones.

They had an idea that "B.-J.'s" savings were invested there, and that the fire might be a very serious business for him.

Tom Merry & Co. were thinking of these things, as they came panting up the towing-path, and turned into the lane where the school stood.

The new brick building, which had been standing for so short a time, was belching flame and smoke from almost every window.

There was a crowd in the playground, composed of boys belonging to the school—most of them half dressed—and

country people who had been called out of their beds by the fire.

There was no fire-engine on the scene; the nearest was at Wayland, and probably the news of the fire had not even reached that town yet.

Tom Merry looked round quickly for Mr. Browning-Jones. The young schoolmaster was not to be seen.

"Where's B.-J.?" muttered Figgins.  
 "Bai Jove! He's not here!"  
 Tom Merry turned pale.

"He can't be in—in there," he muttered, with a startled glance towards the burning building.  
 "Great Scott! Surely not."

"They wouldn't be standing round looking on, if a man were inside, I suppose," Kangaroo exclaimed. "We'll see."

The crowd glanced round at the sight of the St. Jim's boys. Tom Merry ran up to a slim, pale-faced lad of about sixteen, who was gazing at the fire with fixed eyes, apparently fascinated by the sight. Tom shook him by the shoulder. He knew the boy by name—his name was Ralph Stansen. The lad did not move his gaze from the fire as Tom Merry shook him; he seemed unable to tear his eyes from the terrible sight.

"Stansen!" exclaimed Tom Merry.  
 The lad shook his hand off.  
 "Where is Mr. Browning-Jones?"

Stansen gave a start.  
 He raised his right hand and pointed towards the house.  
 "Not in there."  
 "Yes."

"Good heavens!"  
 Stansen said no more. He seemed to be scared out of his wits by the danger his master was in, yet to have no nerve to attempt a rescue. Tom Merry looked at him sharply.

Stansen was half a foreigner, as his name implied, and Tom Merry, little as he had seen of him, had noticed that he was somewhat different from the other boys. He was the eldest of B.-J.'s pupils, and so might have taken the lead in attempting the rescue of the schoolmaster, but he stood motionless, as if stunned by the catastrophe.

Tom Merry turned from him scornfully.  
 "Where is your master, Halkett?" he exclaimed, addressing a younger lad.

"He's in there," said Halkett, in a shaking voice. "He's gone in for the last chap—young Walker. We thought everybody was out, and when Mr. Jones called over the names, Walker didn't answer."

"And Mr. Jones—"  
 "Went in for him," said Halkett, shivering. "He told us all to stay here."

"Bai Jove!"  
 "How long ago?" asked Tom Merry.  
 "Two or three minutes."

The St. Jim's fellows looked at one another in horror. The house was a mass of flames, and Mr. Browning-Jones had been in there for two or three minutes.

What had happened to him?  
 "Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! Poor old B.-J."

"In there—in the fire!" said Figgins. "Why—"  
 "Look!"

There was a wild shout. Through the volume of smoke from a high window, a face glimmered, and a hand was waved. The St. Jim's fellows burst into a shout.

"B.-J!"  
 "Hurrah!"  
 Mr. Browning-Jones had a boy in his arms. From the still, inert look of the latter, it was easy to see that he had fainted, or had been overcome by the smoke.

He pushed the insensible lad out on the window-sill, and waved his hand again. Two or three sturdy countrymen ran to the spot, with a blanket in their hands. They held the blanket firmly by the corners for the boy to drop in.

Mr. Browning-Jones leaned far out of the window. Smoke was bursting out thickly round him, and flames could be seen penetrating the black volumes of the smoke.

The heat where he stood must have been terrific. His face was black with smoke, and rolling with sweat. But his movements were firm and steady.

He leaned out as far as he could, and lowered the boy as low as possible.  
 "Stand firm!" he shouted.

"Yes, sir!"  
 "We're ready."

The insensible lad came shooting down, and was caught in the blanket. The blanket sagged down and almost touched the ground with the impact, but not quite. A dozen hands grasped the lad and removed him to safety.

Tom Merry gasped.  
 "Good old B.-J.! That was splendid!"



Tom Merry and Co. rushed in just as the match flamed up in the incendiary's hand. "You madman!" gasped Tom Merry in horror. "Stop!"

"Now yourself, sir!"

"My hat! He's gone!"

The young schoolmaster had disappeared from the window.

Crash!

Crash!

Flames and sparks shot out of the window in clouds. Blacker and blacker the smoke poured out.

The lookers-on stood transfixed with horror.

They knew what that crash meant.

The floor had fallen in where Mr. Browning-Jones had been standing. Had the young man retreated from the spot in time, or was he still there when the floor went through? Had he been precipitated into the burning gulf below, or was he still struggling for life in the midst of the blinding smoke?

The crowd were silent, pale as death.

"He will be burnt—he will be burnt!" muttered Stansen.

And he fell like a log to the ground, in a dead faint.

No one even looked at him—he lay where he fell. All eyes were upon the window bursting with flame.

Where was Mr. Browning-Jones?

Tom Merry licked his dry lips.

"He saved my life, Monty," he muttered.

Monty Lowther turned a quick look of alarm upon his

chum. He read Tom Merry's meaning in his face, and grasped his arm.

"Tom, are you mad? You're not going in there!"

"I am!"

"It's madness—it's death!"

Tom Merry was white as chalk.

"I don't care; he didn't care, when he jumped into the mill-stream for me! I'm going in! Give me your jacket to put round my head."

"But—"

"I'm going."

Tom Merry took the irresolute Lowther's jacket, and as he wrapped it round his head, to protect his face from the flames, there was a shout from the juniors.

"Stop!"

"You can't go!"

"It's madness!"

Tom Merry did not reply. He shook off two or three detaining hands, and ran towards the great doorway, belching black smoke and tongues of flame.

"Good heavens!" muttered Manners, white to the lips.

"It's madness!"

"Tom, come back—come back!"

But Tom Merry had disappeared into the smoke.

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CHAPTER 5.

Bravo, Tom Merry!

**B**LACK, choking smoke—smoke, bitter, acrid, suffocating! Burning heat, as of a thousand furnaces—blazing, burning heat!

Tom Merry reeled as he ran in.

The hall of the house was thick with the pungent smoke, and tongues of flame licked the walls—heat and smoke and flame. How long could he endure it?

Where was Mr. Browning-Jones?

If he had survived the fall of the dormitory floor, he must have made for the stairs, to attempt to descend.

The fire had evidently broken out on the dormitory side, for there it was raging with the greatest fury; and on the side of the entrance the smoke was thick, but the flames had not obtained such a hold.

Tom Merry had been in the house on one occasion, when he had had tea with Mr. Browning-Jones, and he knew where the staircase lay.

He fought his way towards it through the blinding smoke.

His foot stumbled against the lower stair, and he groped blindly for the banisters, and found them, and mounted.

He tried to shout, but the jacket over his head muffled his voice; and if he had pulled it aside, he knew that the smoke would overcome him at once.

There was no sound in the burning house save the roar and crackle of the mounting flames.

No footstep—no cry for help! Where was Mr. Browning-Jones?

Tom Merry plunged desperately up the stairs.

The heat was terrible.

But he fought on desperately. Something in his path almost threw him down; he stumbled, and clutched at the banisters. Then he stooped in the thick smoke, and groped on the stairs, and his hands grasped at a human form.

He had found what he sought.

Mr. Browning-Jones had fought his way as far as the staircase, and there the smoke had overpowered him, and he had fallen insensible.

Tom Merry grasped the fallen man. He knew that it must be the schoolmaster; there was no one else in the house.

Mr. Browning-Jones was evidently insensible, for he made no movement; he was like a log on the stair as Tom Merry grasped him. The Balliol man was a powerfully-built fellow, and Tom Merry knew that he could not hope to lift him and carry him.

He grasped Mr. Browning-Jones by the shoulders, and dragged him down the stairs. The feet of the insensible man rattled from step to step as Tom Merry dragged him.

They reached the paved hall, where the tiles were cracking under the heat. Desperately, Tom Merry dragged the schoolmaster towards the doorway. It was by instinct more than anything else that he knew the direction.

His strength was going now. Mr. Browning-Jones was heavy; but to Tom Merry, exhausted by heat and exertion, choked by the fumes round him, he seemed almost impossible to drag. But with superhuman efforts he dragged the dead weight to the door.

He stumbled on a step, and knew that he was in a doorway. His senses were going now, and he was reeling; but he knew dimly that safety was at hand, and he made a last tremendous effort.

Down the steps he dragged the schoolmaster; and as he emerged through the veil of smoke, he was seen by the crowd.

There was a wild yell,

"Here he is!"

"Rescue!"

A crowd rushed to his aid.

Blake grasped Browning-Jones, and Figgins seized Tom Merry. They were the first on the spot.

In a few seconds both were dragged out of reach of the fire.

Black volumes of smoke poured out of the doorway after them.

Crash! Crash!

Myriads of sparks flew out in the clouds of smoke, and a dull blaze of red shone from the great doorway. The juniors shivered as they saw it. The ceiling of the hall had fallen in, and had Tom Merry been a minute longer over his terrible task, he and his burden would have been buried beneath the masses of fallen brickwork and burning beams.

Tom Merry dropped into the cool grass, his head on Lowther's knee. Manners had dashed to the fountain to fill his cap with water.

He dashed it into Tom Merry's face.

For a moment or two Tom Merry did not know what was happening. The burning school, the starry sky, the anxious faces, swam wildly round him.

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But as the cool water trickled over his heated face, he recovered; his eyes opened wildly, and he gasped for breath.

"Safe, old chap," said Manners, half hysterically. "Safe, old son! Oh!"

"Where's B.-J.?"

"He's here."

"Safe?"

"Safe as houses!"

"Thank goodness! Give me something to drink."

Kerr had obtained a mug from somewhere. He held it to Tom Merry's lips, and the hero of the Shell drank a deep, delicious, cooling draught of water.

"Thanks!" he gasped.

Kerr moved across to Mr. Browning-Jones. The young schoolmaster was still insensible. The Scottish junior bathed his face, and poured water in at his still lips, and in a few moments "B.-J." was himself.

He stared wildly at Kerr.

"What has happened? Oh, I remember!" He started to his feet. He reeled, but two or three of the juniors supported him and held him up. "I—I fell down inside the house, I believe. How did I get out here?" exclaimed the young schoolmaster.

"You were brought out, sir," said Monty Lowther.

"By whom?"

"Tom Merry."

"What!"

"Tom Merry fetched you out, sir."

Mr. Browning-Jones came towards Tom Merry, as he sat exhausted in the grass, with his head resting on Lowther's knee. The young schoolmaster's face was working with deep emotion. Tom Merry met his eyes with a smile.

"You went into the burning house for me, Merry?" said Mr. Browning-Jones.

"Yes, sir."

"My dear lad, you risked your life; it is a miracle you were not overcome! I fell on the staircase, I remember. Did you find me there?"

"Yes."

"And dragged me out?"

"Yes, sir; the others helped when I got you to the doorway."

"My brave lad! You've saved my life—and it might have cost you your own! I shall never forget this, Tom Merry."

"I sha'n't forget that you saved mine, sir."

Mr. Browning-Jones pressed his hand, and said no more. He stood firmly enough now; his weakness had passed. He looked towards the burning school. The roof was falling in on all sides now, and myriads of sparks were shooting towards the stars.

The young schoolmaster knitted his brows as he looked.

It was a terrible sight to all; but it was more to Mr. Browning-Jones than to the others.

For the burning school represented very nearly the total of Mr. Browning-Jones's worldly possessions; and the flames that were soaring skyward spelled ruin for the Balliol man.

CHAPTER 6.

The Refugees!

**K**ILDARE, the captain of St. Jim's, came up at a run. There was crash on crash from the burning house now, and showers of sparks were falling. The fire had passed its zenith; it was beginning to die down. The school was gutted.

Kildare paused, panting. He seemed surprised to see Tom Merry & Co. there, and he fixed a very expressive glance upon Tom Merry's scorched, sooty face.

"You young rascals!" he exclaimed.

D'Arcy jammed in his eyeglass, and turned it upon Kildare.

"Weally——" he began.

"What are you doing here?"

"Lookin' on, deah boy."

"I hope you will excuse the juniors for coming over," said Mr. Browning-Jones. "If Tom Merry had not come, I should be lying there at the present moment."

Kildare started.

"Did Merry——"

"He brought me out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I'm jolly glad he came," said Kildare. "I'll mention it to his House-master, and save him a licking. Can we do anything to help you, sir? That's what we've come over for; and there are a good many of our fellows on the road."

Mr. Browning-Jones shook his head.

"Thank you! I fear it is past help. The place will burn itself out."

"I'm afraid it looks like it, sir. The fire seems to have got a hold on the whole show, from end to end."



"Yes," said Mr. Browning-Jones, looking puzzled. "It is very remarkable, too; I cannot imagine in the least how it happened."

"Do you know how it started, sir?"

"Not in the least. I was suddenly awakened by the alarm of fire. The smoke had wakened a boy in bed. The fire started in the box-room close to the dormitory, I think. There was none too much time for the boys to get out; and one of them was overcome by the smoke, and had to be fetched out. It is an astounding happening. There are, of course, no fires in the school at night, and I cannot in the least imagine how it came to be started."

And Mr. Browning-Jones looked hard at the dying fire, as if he would penetrate the mystery that was concealed by the volumes of smoke.

"Must have been an accident, sir," said Kildare.

"Oh, of course! Anything else is unimaginable. Thank Heaven there have been no lives lost!" said the young master.

"What are you going to do now, sir? Can we be of any assistance, I mean? We should all like to help."

"I must get some shelter for my boys. I suppose we shall have to walk into Wayland, and knock them up at the inns

Kildare interrupted.

"Don't do anything of the sort, sir. Come to St. Jim's. They will all be glad to welcome you there; and Mr. Railton told me specially, before I left, that anything we could do would gladly be done."

Mr. Browning-Jones hesitated.

"It is making a very great demand upon Dr. Holmes," he said.

"Not at all, sir. Dr. Holmes is away now, but Mr. Railton, our House-master, is Head in place, and he will welcome you just as Dr. Holmes would. I am sure he will be disappointed if you should tramp all the way into the town instead of coming to St. Jim's. Take my word for it, sir."

"You are very good. If you are sure Mr. Railton—"

"I am certain of it, sir."

"Then I will bring my boys to St. Jim's for the remainder of the night," said Mr. Browning-Jones. "I am only anxious to get them under shelter as soon as possible. My boys, we are going to St. Jim's for the night. You are all here?"

"Yes, sir," said Halkett. "Stansen seems very queer, sir."

"Stansen! What is the matter with him?"

"He fainted, sir."

"He was not hurt?"

"No; only funk, I think, sir," said Halkett. "I—I mean he was frightened, sir."

Mr. Browning-Jones crossed over to the foreign lad. Stansen's face, which was always pale, was paler than ever now, and there was a drawn, hunted look about it. His eyes looked anywhere but at his master.

Mr. Browning-Jones dropped a hand kindly upon his shoulder.

"Cheer up, Stansen," he said. "All danger is over now."

The boy looked shifty at him without replying. His teeth seemed to be chattering.

"We are going to St. Jim's," said Mr. Browning-Jones.

"You will stay there to-night, Stansen; pull yourself together, lad! There is nothing to be afraid of now."

"Yes, sir," stammered the lad.

But the frightened look was still about his face.

The boys fell in to march to St. Jim's, accompanied by Tom Merry & Co.; and, needless to say, the Saints were kindness itself to the refugees. Now that the excitement was over, the "B.-J." boys, as the juniors called them, were inclined to regard the whole affair as something in the nature of a "lark."

To be burnt out, and to march through a wood in the middle of the night afterwards, was an experience that did not fall to the lot of every schoolboy.

"Where will you shove us?" Halkett asked, as he walked along between Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"There are eleven of us, you know."

"We'll let you have our beds, deah boys, and we'll wuff it," said D'Arcy. "I don't mind wuffin' it. I can sleep on a sofah, so long as it is a large and comfy sofah, and there are chairs awrangd all round it, and there are plenty of cushions and pillows and things, and lots of blankets. I have wuffed it before, and I can wuff it again. I don't believe in a chap bein' soft."

Halkett chuckled.

"We'll look after you all right," said Tom Merry. "We'll make you more comfy than you'd be in the inns at Wayland, anyway. But I say, it's a queer thing about that fire."

"Yes, ain't it?"

"Some of you chaps having a midnight brew in the studies?" asked Kangaroo. "I knew a fire started that way once—though it was put out again."

Halkett shook his head. He was a fair-haired, pleasant-faced youth, with a very frank and pleasing way of speaking. "No," he said. "We were all in bed, and fast asleep, when the alarm was given. I forget who gave it. One of the fellows sat up in bed and yelled out that there was smoke in the room—"

"It was I," said Price; "and it was nearly choking me when I woke up, look you."

"But how did it start?" asked Blake.

"Nobody knows."

"I think B.-J. said it started in a box-room near the dorm.," said Price. "But how, nobody knows. It's a giddy mystery."

"Awfully queeah!" said D'Arcy.

"Yes, it is awfully queer."

"It's impossible to imagine that anybody set the fire going on purpose," Figgins remarked. "I suppose the insurance people will want to know all about it; so it's bound to come out, whatever the cause was."

"I never heard that it was insured," said Halkett.

"Not insured."

"I don't believe it is."

Tom Merry whistled.

"That will come mighty rough on your master, then," he said.

Halkett nodded.

"I suppose it will—and it's a rotten shame, for B.-J. is the best fellow breathing," he said. "He's simply ripping. You saw the way he saved young Walker—not that young Walker was worth the risk—"

"Oh, rats!" put in young Walker.

"It's a rotten shame if he has to cut," said Halkett, "and we shall never get a master again half so decent."

"Oh, rot!" said Stansen. "And I dare say Browning-Jones has got the loss pretty well covered, too."

Halkett looked at his school-mate unpleasantly. It was easy for the Saints to see that there was no love lost between the two.

"You don't know anything about it, Stansen," said Halkett tartly, "and if you say a word against B.-J., I'll knock it back down your throat, and some of your teeth with it, you cad!"

Stansen muttered something in reply, and fell back to the end of the line. Halkett turned rather apologetically to Tom Merry.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I can't stand that chap! He's a rank outsider—a beastly worm! He's the only chap at our school who doesn't like B.-J."

"Why doesn't he like him?" asked Blake.

"Oh, because he's a worm, I suppose," said Halkett.

"He's mean, and a liar, and B.-J. is down very heavy on lies. Then he smokes, and it's suspected he drinks—you see, he's had a bad training before he came to us, and I believe B.-J. took him in hand to try and reform him, at the special request of his father. His father's an awfully rich Swedish merchant in London—a Swedish chap who settled and married in England, you see, and I dare say he's very decent; but that chap is a rank rotter. Nobody can stand him. Walker says he saw a bottle of brandy in his locker yesterday when he opened it."

"So I did," said Walker.

"He was scared out of his wits by the fire," went on Halkett. "You saw how he fainted. He wasn't in any danger from the start—he must have been the first up, because he had time to dress himself to the last button—and he was certainly first out of the house. But he fainted, as you saw. Awful funk."

And Halkett dismissed Stansen from the talk. But Tom Merry glanced curiously, more than once, at the half-foreign lad. He caught more than one savage look from Stansen to Halkett, though the latter did not appear to observe them. Whatever other qualities Ralph Stansen had, there was no doubt that he hated Halkett, and that he was a very thorough hater.

## CHAPTER 7. New Fellows.

MR. RAILTON stood at the doorway of the School House at St. Jim's as the weary party arrived. The stalwart House-master of the School House was acting as Head during the absence of Dr. Holmes, and he—as Dr. Holmes would have done, had he been there—gladly extended the hospitality of St. Jim's to the refugees.

"Quite right, Kildare—quite right!" he exclaimed. "I am very glad you have brought our friends here."

He shook hands with Mr. Browning-Jones, and bade the boys welcome in a few words. The Balliol man was looking somewhat subdued. He could not help thinking of what the fire meant to him.

But he thanked Mr. Railton warmly. The House-master rapped out orders quickly. The half-clothed B.-J. boys were taken at once upstairs, and they tumbled into the beds left vacant by Tom Merry & Co., and several other fellows turned out to make up the number. That the St. Jim's juniors were only too willing to do; their hospitality to the fellows who had been burnt out was unbounded.

For the juniors who were displaced, extra beds were made up at more leisure. The special guest chamber in the Head's house was assigned to Mr. Browning-Jones.

Half an hour after the arrival, St. Jim's was quiet again. Far off along the Ryll, the last flicker of the fire was dying out, and the ruins of the little school were sending up a column of thick smoke to the stars.

At St. Jim's, the refugees slept, though it is probable that it was some time before sleep closed the eyes of Mr. Browning-Jones.

At dawn, the young schoolmaster was up, and he strode away to the scene of the fire before anybody else at St. Jim's had left his bed. He returned in time for breakfast, and he breakfasted with Mr. Railton in his study.

Mr. Railton was very kind and sympathetic; but there was little he could say to console the young schoolmaster for his terrible loss.

"I suppose little has been saved?" he asked.  
The young man shook his head.  
"Practically nothing," he said. "The place was too far from the town for any assistance to be rendered in time. A few articles of light furniture were taken out, and that is all. Even my papers have been destroyed."

"It was a most remarkable thing—you have no idea how the fire started?"

"None whatever."  
"And you were not insured?"  
"Not for a shilling."  
"That is very unfortunate."  
"I don't know," said Mr. Browning-Jones thoughtfully. "The outbreak is so utterly inexplicable, that if I had been insured, I am afraid that unpleasant suspicions would have arisen."

Mr. Railton started.  
"You mean—"  
"I mean that it seems almost impossible that the fire can have broken out accidentally," said the young schoolmaster. "Of course, it must have done so, but if a motive had been possibly assignable for incendiarism, I fear that incendiarism would have been suspected."

"But as there is no insurance—"  
"As there is no insurance, and as I am totally ruined by the occurrence, there can be no suspicion," said Browning-Jones, with a rather painful smile.

"Not so far as you are concerned," said the School House-master, "but is there no one whom you could possibly suspect?"

"Impossible. Who should set my school on fire?"  
"Certainly it would be difficult to say."  
"Besides," added Mr. Browning-Jones, "the fire certainly started in the box-room near the dormitory. It started within the house—if there was incendiarism, it was the work of an inmate."

"And that is impossible?"  
"Quite. Only my boys, and myself, and three servants, occupied the house. The servants were perfectly reliable, commonplace persons, attached to me. And one would hardly look for an incendiary among boys of fifteen."

"I suppose not."  
"No, the fire was an accident," said Mr. Browning-Jones thoughtfully. "How the accident happened I cannot say—the police may discover. They are there now, and some of them, I think, suspect incendiarism—though able to assign no possible motive for it. The fire was so sudden and complete that it really seems to have been planned; of course, it was chance only."

"Of course," assented Mr. Railton.  
He was looking very thoughtful.  
"And now, what are your plans?" he went on. "Excuse my asking, but I want to be of some help to you if possible."  
"I suppose I must send the boys back to their homes," said the young man, with a sigh. "My school is burnt down, and I have no prospect of building another. Even so, the delay would be too great—my pupils, by that time, will be scattered far enough."

"You might hire a building, and continue your teaching while the place is being rebuilt," Mr. Railton suggested.  
"Possibly; but the rebuilding is an impossible thing. All the money I had was sunk in that place, and all is gone."

"It is terrible."  
"I have friends who will help me; but—"  
"But do not be in too great a hurry to send your pupils home," said Mr. Railton. "You have acquainted their parents with their safety—"

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"By this morning's post, certainly. The parents will receive the information of the fire from my letters in the first place. But—"

"Then let them remain here."  
"Here!"

"Certainly," said Mr. Railton. "Let the boys remain here, at St. Jim's, for a few days at least, while you are considering what to do. They can be put into the Forms that suit them, so that their studies need not be interrupted; and it will be an easy matter to arrange for their accommodation between the two Houses. If, after a week or so, you think you have no resource but to send them back to their parents, you can do so. But if any good fortune befriends you, here they are, ready for you."

Mr. Browning-Jones's face showed the emotion he felt.  
"You are very, very kind," he said.

"Not at all. I am only making an offer which I am certain Dr. Holmes would make if he were here."

"It is trespassing too much upon your kindness."  
"Nonsense."

"I can only say that I accept your offer, and I am grateful," said Mr. Browning-Jones. "I accept it for a week, in hope that I may be able to pull round."

And after he had breakfasted, Mr. Browning-Jones sought his boys, and explained to them the arrangement he had made with Mr. Railton.

The boys had breakfasted in the dining-room of the School House with the St. Jim's fellows, and they were looking little the worse for their alarming experiences of the night before.

Only Stansen was still very pale, and seemed haunted by the memory of the terrible scenes of the night. But even he looked much better than when the juniors had seen him by the light of the conflagration the night before.

"You will stay here for a week, my boys, unless your parents write and express a wish for you to return home," said Mr. Browning-Jones. "You will take your places in the Fourth and Third Forms, according to your age. Stansen will go into the Shell, as he is too old for the Fourth. I trust you will do your very best to keep on good terms with the boys who will be your companions, and will be very careful to do nothing to make Mr. Railton regret his kindness and hospitality."

"Certainly, sir," said Halkett cheerfully.  
And then Mr. Browning-Jones left. He was wanted over at the burnt school. The B.-J. boys went in to morning lessons with the juniors of St. Jim's.

Ralph Stansen was the only one of them who was put into the Shell. He was older than most of the Shell fellows, and he could have been put in the Fifth, but Mr. Browning-Jones had explained that he was not up to the work. The half-foreign lad had a keen, quick, almost cunning face, but he certainly did not look as if his intellect was of a high order.

The Terrible Three made up their minds to be kindness itself to the stranger within their gates, though they certainly wished that it had been any fellow but Stansen. But although they did not like the boy, they felt that it was their duty to look after him, and do all they could to help him.

And with that idea in their minds, they made a great effort, and determined to have him in their study. It was Tom Merry who proposed it, after morning school, when the Terrible Three were in the cosy study in the Shell passage.

"Stansen will have to have a study," Tom Merry began.  
"Hum!" said Monty Lowther.

And Manners, who was deeply interested in printing out photographs, did not appear to hear, and made no reply at all.

"Stansen will have to have a study," Tom Merry repeated, "and it would be only decent to ask him in here."

"Oh!" said Manners.

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"We ought to, you know," said Tom Merry. "Better make up our minds to it. After all, it won't be for long, and I dare say the chap's decent, if we rub him down the right way. What do you say?"

"Oh, all right!" said Monty Lowther.

And Manners nodded assent.

So Tom Merry asked Stansen if he would care to share their study, and Stansen accepted in a careless, offhand way that made Tom half sorry he had asked him.

Stansen evidently did not know, or care, what an effort the offer had cost the Terrible Three.

## CHAPTER 8. A Curious Character.

STANSEN had not seemed particularly keen about sharing Tom Merry's study, but as soon as he was an inmate he proceeded to make himself quite at home there.

He had brought very few possessions from the burnt school, but he seemed to have plenty of money, and he did some shopping in Rylcombe the same day, and a great many things were delivered at St. Jim's for him during the afternoon.

After last lesson, when the Shell came out of their Form-room, Tom Merry spoke to the half-foreign junior. He was the only one of the B.-J. boys in the Shell, as we have said, and Tom thought he might be feeling a little solitary.

"Coming down to the cricket?" Tom Merry asked.

Stansen looked at him with a slight sneer.

"Cricket?" he repeated.

"Yes; we're going to have some practice at the nets before tea."

"I don't care for cricket."

"It's lovely weather," said Tom Merry. "You'll like it. We might put you into a match, if you stay long enough at St. Jim's."

"I shouldn't care to be put into a match."

"Oh, all right!" said Tom Merry, very shortly.

He walked away. Stansen's manner could not be called pleasant. Jack Blake, of the Fourth, who was talking to Halkett in the passage, heard what had passed, and he bent an inquiring look upon Stansen.

"Don't you play cricket?" he asked.

"No."

"You don't like it?"

"No."

"What do you play, then—what game, I mean?"

"None."

Stansen walked away, perhaps to avoid further questioning. Blake looked at Halkett in a puzzled way.

"Blessed if I understand that chap!" he said. "Doesn't he like cricket! What sort of a merchant is he, anyway?"

Halkett laughed.

"He was always a queer customer," he said. "B.-J. had lots of trouble with him, and I know he'd have sent him away, only the chap's governor, old Stansen, wants him to stay with B.-J. very much. B.-J. doesn't quite know what a rotter he is, though."

"What's he going to do now, I wonder?" said Digby.

"Smoke!"

"What!"

"He always sneaks away after lessons to get a smoke," said Halkett. "He has his pockets crammed with cigarettes. Haven't you noticed the brown stain on his fingers?"

Jack Blake looked very grave.

"That's not allowed here," he said.

"It wasn't allowed at our school, and he was licked for it often enough; only yesterday he was caned before the whole school for it," said Halkett. "But it doesn't make any difference to him; he does it."

"I mean, he'll get into trouble if the prefects catch him smoking," said Blake. "They will wallop him."

"Serve him right, too!"

"Coming down to the cricket?" Tom Merry asked.

"Yes; rather!"

The juniors went down to the cricket-ground, and forgot all about Ralph Stansen. It was an hour later that the Terrible Three came in, with their bats under their arms, and the glow of ruddy health in their cheeks.

Tom Merry opened his study door in the Shell passage, and started back with an exclamation of astonishment.

The scent of tobacco assailed him as the door opened, and as he looked in he saw that the study was blue with tobacco-smoke.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

"Great Scott!"

"Who's here?" exclaimed Manners. "It can't be Gore up to his old tricks—in our study, too!"

"It's Stansen," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Stansen! The cad!"

The Terrible Three went into the study and closed the door behind them. The smoke was so thick that it was rolling out in clouds into the passage. If the boy was smoking cigarettes, he must have smoked an immense number to fill the study in that way.

"Open the window, for goodness' sake!" gasped Lowther. "It's like a blessed tap-room!"

Tom Merry threw the window up.

There was a rush of fresh air into the smoky room, and the chums of the Shell breathed again.

They all looked at Stansen. The boy was seated in the armchair, with his feet on another chair, and a cigarette between his lips. On the hearthrug and in the grate were numerous cigarette-ends. He was still smoking, and he looked at them with the dull, glazed eyes of the inveterate smoker.

The Terrible Three understood now clearly the cause of his dull eyes, his yellow skin, and his shivering, trembling hands. He was a confirmed smoker at the age of sixteen, and the habit, carried to a dangerous excess, threw him into a constant state of nerves.

As they looked at him now and saw his puckered face, his unhealthy skin and dull eyes, they could not help realising that the boy was on the way to imbecility. His whole constitution was being sapped and undermined by the drug, for a drug it is, and if the habit were continued unchecked it was quite possible and likely that his very reason might become affected.

The disgust in the faces of the Terrible Three might have brought a blush to any fellow's cheeks. But Stansen did not seem to notice it.

He nodded sleepily.

Tom Merry bent over him, took hold of the cigarette, and jerked it from his lips. He was greatly inclined to box his ears at the same time, but he restrained that inclination.

He threw the cigarette out of the open window.

Stansen started up with an angry cry, or, rather, a scream. His colourless face was twisted with anger.

His hands were trembling, and it was evident from his look that his nerves were all in a twitter.

"How dare you!" he exclaimed.

"You can't smoke here."

"Isn't this my study now?"

"Yes; if you choose to be decent in it," said Tom Merry. "But it's our study, too, and you're not going to smoke in it!"

"You—you fool! You fool!"

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"Better language, please!" he said curtly. "I'm not used to being called a fool, and I won't take that sort of thing from a putty-faced cad like you!"

"I will smoke if I like!"

"You ass!" said Monty Lowther. "What do you think will happen if a prefect put his head into the room? He'd think we'd all been having a smoking-party, and we would be hauled up before the beak in no time."

"I don't care!"

"You mayn't care, but we do," said Manners. "You won't smoke in this study, and that's flat!"

"Hang you!"

"You need not get excited!" said Tom Merry. "We can pass over your cheek, as any one of us could lick you hollow with one hand! You young duffer, look at the state you've got into with your rotten smoking. You're all nerves. Any kid in the Third Form here could knock you into a cocked hat!"

Stansen's hands were clenching and unclenching. He seemed to be in a state bordering on hysteria.

"I will not stay in your study!" he exclaimed. "I will do as I like wherever I am! Mr. Browning-Jones has tried to bully me, as you have done, but he has reason to be sorry for it!"

"You've walloped him, I suppose?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically.

And the chums of the Shell grinned.

Stansen did not reply. He was gathering up his cigarettes on the table, and cramming them into his pockets. He seemed to have an enormous supply of them.

"Stansen, lad," said Tom Merry, kindly enough, "why don't you drop this? You must see how it's injuring your health. You're hysterical, and you'll go right off your rocker if you keep this sort of thing up. Why, the way you smoke would kill a man of forty, and you can't expect to stand it at sixteen. If you don't drop it altogether, you might have sense enough to be more moderate—for your own sake."

Stansen gave him a bitter glance.

"When I want your advice I will ask for it!" he said.

"You can have it unasked. If you haven't sense enough to stop this of your own accord, you will be stopped!" said Tom Merry. "Sooner or later a prefect will get wind of it, and then you will be hauled up."

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"I don't care!"

"You will care when you're caned, I suppose?"

"Bah!"

Stansen strode to the door. The chums of the Shell looked after him. They felt that they would have given a term's pocket-money to take Stansen in hand just then, and give him the hiding he deserved.

But civility to the stranger within the gates had to be considered. They could not lay hands upon one of Mr. Browning-Jones's boys.

Stansen turned at the door, and gave them a savage look.

"I hate you!" he exclaimed, in his excited foreign way. "I hate you! I hate this school as much as I hated Mr. Browning-Jones's school!"

"Nice boy!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Your people must be awfully proud of you at home—I don't think!"

"You're not bound to stay here," said Tom Merry drily. "I suppose your father would take you home if you wrote and asked him?"

Stansen made a passionate gesture.

"I would, only I hate home as much as I hate school! I hate you all, and I will make you repent having turned me out!"

And he went out and slammed the door. The Terrible Three looked at one another, and Monty Lowther gave a low, soft whistle.

"My hat!" he murmured. "What do you think of him?"

Manners touched his forehead.

"Off his giddy rocker!" he said.

Tom Merry nodded.

"The young ass has smoked himself into a state of hysterics!" he said. "He might have a nervous breakdown any day. He ought to be stopped."

"We can't stop him!"

"No; I suppose we can't. If he belonged to this school

"But he doesn't; and we shouldn't be justified in ragging him for the few days he's staying here," said Manners.

"I suppose not."

And the Terrible Three tried to forget about the matter. But Tom Merry could not easily dismiss from his mind the pale, sickly, hysterical face of the half-foreign lad, with its wild, excited eyes.

## CHAPTER 9.

### The Mystery of the Fire.

"INSPECTOR KNOWSEY, sir, wishes to see you, sir!" said the School House page.

Mr. Browning-Jones was chatting with Mr. Railton in the latter's study. They were standing by the window, looking out over the wide, green old quadrangle as they talked.

"B.-J." looked a little surprised.

"The inspector from Wayland, Mr. Railton," he explained. "I do not know what he has come over here for; something has been discovered, I suppose."

"Show him in here, Toby," said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir."

"I will leave you," said the House-master.

"Please don't," said Mr. Browning-Jones. "I should like you to hear what the inspector has to say. I am afraid there is something wrong, and I want you to give me your opinion, if you will. The inspector was looking very mysterious when I saw him this afternoon at the scene of the fire."

"Does he suspect—?"

"I fear so; yet what he can suspect is a mystery. It is impossible that the fire can have been the work of an incendiary."

A fat little inspector, with a very ruddy face, came puffing into the study, and he removed his cap and wiped his bald, perspiring forehead.

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen!" he said. "I thought I had better come over at once and see you, Mr. Browning-Jones, about what we have found."

"Thank you, Mr. Knowsey! Please sit down."

The fat inspector sank into a chair.

"I'm afraid there's something more in this matter than appeared at first, sir," he said. "We have been making an exhaustive examination of the ruins, sir, with the firemen from Wayland, and we have found—"

"Yes; what have you found?"

"The fire was not an accident, sir."

"What makes you think so?"

"There is clear proof that it was started by an incendiary," said the inspector. "There is no doubt that it broke out in the box-room adjoining the dormitory."

"Yes; I told you so myself."

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"There is no fire-grate in that room, so there can have been no fire to spread by accident. There was nothing in the room, I understand, but old boxes, so even a spark dropped from a candle would not be dangerous there. It is absolutely impossible to believe that a fire, which began in such a place, could be the result of accident—absolutely!" said the inspector. "But that is not all."

"What is there?"

"We have found a number of paraffin-cans in the ruins of that room—cans which, your porter has told me, were usually kept in a shed outside the house," said the inspector. "They had been carried into the house, and placed in that room—for what purpose?"

Mr. Browning-Jones looked astounded.

"Paraffin-cans!" he said.

"Yes, sir. You may be aware—"

"I am aware that the oil used in the lamps was kept in the shed," said Mr. Browning-Jones. "But, under no circumstances whatever should the cans have been carried inside the School House."

"Well, there they were, sir," said Inspector Knowsey; "burnt and twisted, you know, but it was easy to recognise them. Search was made in the shed, and they were missing there. They were the same cans, sir—six of them, each holding two gallons of paraffin. For what purpose were they conveyed to the box-room?"

"For only one possible purpose, I suppose."

"To set the fire going, sir," said the inspector solemnly. "Your porter tells me that the cans were in their places when he locked up for the night. They were removed afterwards, and taken into the house. The lock on the shed was forced—it was a padlock, as you, of course, know, and the chain had been broken by an iron crowbar being forced into it—and the crowbar was lying near the door. Someone during the night broke into the shed, took out the cans of paraffin, and carried them into the house—into the box-room where the fire started."

"Good heavens!"

"The blackened remains of the cans are there to prove it. Who ever did this, sir, was as great a fool as he was a rascal, I should say, for he seems to have taken no precautions against discovery."

"Apparently not."

"So I want to know, sir, who was the party?" said Inspector Knowsey. "I have already ascertained that the house was not insured, so—" The inspector paused, and coloured a little.

Mr. Browning-Jones smiled a little bitterly.

If his school had been insured, he knew that the inspector would not have thought of looking further than himself for the incendiary.

But a man could not reasonably be suspected of having burnt down his own property, and endangered his own life, for mere amusement.

The inspector was clearly puzzled, therefore.

"Do you suspect anyone, inspector?"

Mr. Knowsey shook his head.

"No, sir. I don't know whom to suspect. But it was someone in the school who set the blaze going."

Mr. Browning-Jones looked very troubled.

"I should have said so myself at first," he said, "only it seems impossible to think so, inspector. Who could have done it?"

"That's what we've got to find out, sir."

"Besides myself, there were only the housekeeper and the maids and the boys—"

"I've questioned the housekeeper and the maids, sir. It is no use looking in that direction."

"You do not mean that—that—"

The inspector smiled.

"I don't suspect you, sir. I should hardly come and tell you so if I did."

"I suppose not, but—"

"The boys, sir."

"But a boy— It is impossible!"

The inspector shook his head ponderously.

"Not at all impossible, sir. There was a fire some time ago at a very famous public school, and it was proved to have been the work of a boy belonging to the school."

Mr. Browning-Jones started.

"You are right, inspector. I remember it."

"In the absence of any other possible solution, sir, I can only suspect that it was one of the boys, absolutely," said the inspector. "Of course, I am sorry to say so, but there it is. Was there any boy who had a very great spite against you, sir?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Any boy who had punished very severely?"

"I never punished any boy severely."

"Any boy who had a dangerous propensity to practical



jokes, then—for that might be the solution," said Mr. Knowsey.

"I think not."

"Then, last, was there any boy who wasn't quite right in his head?" the inspector suggested.

"I am sure not!"

"Not one of the boys who was strange in any way—say, excitable, hysterical, or anything of that sort?"

Mr. Browning-Jones paused.

"I hardly know what to say," he replied. "Perhaps you would like to see all the boys yourself, inspector, and question them?"

"I was going to suggest it, sir."

The young schoolmaster looked at Mr. Railton.

"Could you lend me a Form-room to muster my boys?" he asked. "Lessons are over here now, are they not?"

"Certainly!" said the School House-master. "I will send a prefect to call the boys into the Shell-room."

"Thank you so much."

"This way, inspector."

There was a deep shadow on Mr. Browning-Jones's face as he followed the House-master from the study—a deep shadow, growing deeper and darker. However the inquiry turned out, there could not be much doubt upon one point—that the fire at the private school had been deliberately started by an incendiary.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Stansen is Wanted!

"ALL Mr. Browning-Jones's boys are wanted in the Shell class-room!" said Kildare.

Halkett and several others of the "B.-J." boys, who were chatting with Blake & Co. after the cricket, turned round in surprise. The captain of St. Jim's had come out to call them in.

"We're wanted?" asked Halkett.

"Yes; at once."

"Any trouble?" asked Owen.

"I don't know. Your master wants you. Get the others, and all go in," said Kildare.

"Oh, right you are!"

Kildare walked away. The St. Jim's visitors looked surprised and uneasy.

"Some blessed row, I suppose," said Halkett. "I'm sure I've been trying to keep the peace, for one."

"So have I," said Price.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I'm sure you chaps have been playin' the game all along the line, you know. I twist there is goin' to be no wow."

Halkett gathered up the other fellows to go into the Form-room. Stansen was not to be found, and after looking for him for a few minutes Halkett decided to go in without him. He did not want to keep his master waiting.

Ten lads made their way to the Shell-room, and there they found Mr. Browning-Jones and Inspector Knowsey and Mr. Railton.

They came in quietly, wondering what was the matter. The fat inspector rolled his eye over them.

"All of them here?" he asked.

"No," said Mr. Browning-Jones. "One is not here. Where is Stansen, Halkett?"

"I couldn't find him, sir."

"All of them must come," said the inspector. "It's absolutely necessary."

"I will have him searched for," said Mr. Railton. "Perhaps he has gone into some quiet corner with a book."

He quitted the room.

After a moment's thought, the House-master ascended the stairs, and knocked at the door of Tom Merry's study and opened it.

A smell of tea and hot buttered toast greeted him as he stepped in. The Terrible Three were getting their evening meal, and the study was very warm, in spite of the wide-open window and the breeze from the quad.

The smell of tea and toast almost killed the late scent that had clung about the study, but there was enough of the odour of tobacco left to make Mr. Railton sniff.

The three juniors jumped up at once as the House-master entered.

"I want Stansen," said Mr. Railton. "I understood that he was to share your study, Merry?"

"Ye—es, sir."

"But he is not here."

"No, sir."

"Do you know where he is?"

"I'm afraid I don't, sir. The—the fact is," said Tom Merry haltingly—"the—the fact is, sir, that—that Stansen won't be sharing our study after all, sir."

"Why not?"

"We don't seem to get on, sir."

Mr. Railton frowned.

"I trust you have not been quarrelling, Merry, with a boy who is a guest under this roof!" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry flushed.

"N-n-not exactly that, sir," he said. "We shouldn't have pulled together—that's all, sir; and I don't think Stansen cared about staying, either."

Mr. Railton sniffed slightly.

"Someone has been smoking in this study," he said.

The Terrible Three stood silent and confused.

"I am waiting for an answer," said the House-master.

"Well, sir—"

"Who has been smoking here—"

"You—you see, sir—"

"Was it you, Tom Merry?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Was it you, Manners?"

"No, sir."

"Lowther, was it you?"

"It was not, sir."

"Then I can only conclude that it was Stansen," said Mr. Railton. "You may tell me in confidence, Merry. I shall not report the matter to his master; and Stansen is not in my charge."

"Well, sir, he was the chap, if you put it like that."

"Is that why he does not remain in the study?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. But his master requires him now," said Mr. Railton, changing the subject. "I want him found and brought to the Shell-room."

"Shall we look for him, sir?"

"Please do, and bring him to the Shell-room. It is most important; a gentleman is waiting to see him."

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Railton went downstairs. The Terrible Three cast a glance at their hot buttered toast, and the fragrant tea. But they were prepared to make the sacrifice; Mr. Railton was a popular master.

"Come on," said Tom Merry. "Let's find the chap."

"Oh, all right!"

"I fancy I know where to look for him," said Tom Merry, as they quitted the study. "My impression is that he's gone off somewhere to smoke."

"I think so, too."

"We shall find him in one of the box-rooms, most likely." The Terrible Three ran up the stairs.

As they reached the little landing outside the box-rooms, a well-known scent assailed their nostrils.

Tom Merry gave a kind of snort.

"Tobacco!" he said.

"The cad's here," said Manners.

He opened a door.

There, seated upon an empty trunk, his eyes half closed, his face as pale as chalk, was Stansen, smoking the eternal cigarette.

He glanced up angrily at the sight of the chums of the Shell.

"What do you want?" he cried shrilly. "Leave me alone."

"We want you."

"Go away! Leave me alone."

"You are wanted," Tom Merry explained. "Mr. Railton has sent us to look for you. You are wanted in the Shell-room; somebody's waiting to see you."

"I will not come."

"What!"

"I tell you I will not come!" cried Stansen. "Go—and leave me in peace!"

"You're off your rocker, I should think," said Monty Lowther, in amazement. "Don't you know that you have to go when a master wants you?"

"I will not."

"Look here—"

"Leave me alone."

"You've got to come!"

"I won't, I tell you."

"Look here, Stansen," said Tom Merry quietly. "Don't play the giddy ox. Be a sensible chap, can't you?"

"I will not come!"

"Mr. Browning-Jones wants you, and a man is waiting to see you. Are you out of your senses?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I won't come."

"You must come. Do you think we're going back to tell Mr. Railton you won't come?" Tom Merry demanded wrathfully.

"You can tell what you like; but I will not come."

The chums of the Shell exchanged glances. There was the same thought in all three minds. It was impossible to return to Mr. Railton and say that Stansen would not come; such

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a proceeding would be unheard-of. If Stansen would not go, he would have to be taken; there was nothing else to be done.

"Now, look here," said Tom Merry, as gently as he could. "You've got to come, Stansen; cheek of that sort isn't allowed at St. Jim's."

"Better come quietly," Manners suggested.

"We don't want the trouble of carrying you, but we shall have to do it if you don't come, Stansen," Monty Lowther remarked.

The half-foreign lad jumped up from the box. Five or six cigarettes rolled from his knees as he did so.

He faced the Terrible Three, his lips open, his teeth gleaming, his eyes seeming to burn from his pallid face.

"Will you let me alone?" he panted.

"You've got to come."

"I won't!"

"Then we shall take you."

Stansen gave a wild glance round as the chums of the Shell advanced towards him. There was a grate in the box-room, and in the fender a heavy iron poker. Stansen's eyes fell upon it; and with the spring of a wild animal, he reached the grate, and grasped the poker, and whirled it aloft.

"Now stand back!" he screamed. "If you come a step nearer, I'll brain you!"

## CHAPTER 11.

### A Young Ruffian.

TOM MERRY started back.

He was not afraid. But he was greatly startled. The action of the half-foreign junior took him entirely by surprise.

Stansen looked dangerous enough as he stood there, with his arm thrown back, his fingers grasping the heavy iron poker in a convulsive way.

His eyes were glaring like a wild animal's; and for the moment he seemed to be quite beside himself.

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Tom Merry, aghast.

"Stand back!"

"Put that poker down."

Stansen laughed savagely.

"I will brain you first," he said.

"Put that poker down!"

"Stand back!"

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"Look here," he said. "Mr. Railton has sent me to fetch you, and I'm going to take you. I'm not afraid of your poker, though I almost think you're mad enough to use it. You are coming with me."

"Keep off!"

"Will you put that poker down?"

"No."

"Then I'll make you!"

Stansen's grasp tightened savagely upon the poker.

Tom Merry watched his eyes. He could see that the boy was in a wild, hysterical state, equal to any mad action. But he did not fear. He watched Stansen's eyes, as he would have watched the eyes of an opponent in a boxing-match, and ran forward. Stansen brought down the poker with a deadly sweep; but Tom Merry dodged the blow, and ere the poker could be raised again he ran in close.

His strong arms were thrown round the half-foreign junior, pinning Stansen's arms down to his sides.

The poker fell with a clatter to the floor.

Stansen struggled like a wild-cat in the grasp of the captain of the Shell.

But Tom Merry's grip was not to be broken.

He tightened it, his handsome, cool face within an inch or two of the wild, savage, excited visage of the foreign lad.

"Give in, you fool!" he muttered. "Can't you see you're done?"

Stansen screamed.

"Let me go—let me go!"

"I won't, you young ass! Chuck it!"

Stansen struggled and kicked and tore with his nails. A red streak showed down Tom Merry's cheek.

"My hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "That's got to be stopped."

Manners and Lowther grasped Stansen's wrists.

The boy struggled still; but Tom Merry slid his grasp down to Stansen's ankles, and he was swept off the floor.

Thus the Shell fellows carried him out of the box-room.

Stansen screamed and struggled as they bore him bodily down the box-room stairs, and past the dormitories.

But the Terrible Three had him tightly now, and he had no chance. They were strongly tempted to frogs-march him; but that they refrained from.

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"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, meeting them in the Fourth Form passage. "Bai Jove! Is that a new game, deah boys?"

Tom Merry panted.

"Mr. Railton wants him," he explained, "and he won't go."

"Bai Jove!"

"Come on, you chaps!"

"What is the matter here?"

It was the deep voice of the House-master.

The Terrible Three halted, their prisoner still wriggling and squirming in their grasp like an excited eel.

"If you please, sir—"

"We—we—"

"You see, sir—"

"Yaas, wathah—"

"You—you see, sir, we—we're bringing Stansen," stammered Tom Merry.

"Carrying him, sir," said Monty Lowther. "He—he wasn't inclined to walk, sir."

"Set him down."

"Certainly, sir."

Stansen was set upon his feet.

He stood before Mr. Railton, trembling and shivering with rage, the colour coming and going in his face, and his eyes like live coals.

"You are wanted in the Form-room, Stansen," said Mr. Railton quietly. "Kindly go there at once."

Stansen looked at him; and his fierce, hysterical glance quailed. Without a word he turned away and made his way to the Form-room. He had evidently recognised the fact that Mr. Railton was not the kind of man to be trifled with.

The House-master, with a wrinkled brow, followed him.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

He screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked after Stansen. The swell of St. Jim's was evidently very much puzzled.

"Bai Jove!" he repeated. "That is a weally wemarkable sort of chap! I wathah think he is off his silly wockah, you know."

"Right off it, I should think," grunted Manners. "Look how he's scratched my wrists—like a beastly cat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I jolly well hope he won't stay long here," said Tom Merry sincerely. "It's like having a blessed tiger in the house. He seems to be living in a state of perpetual hysterics."

"Bad habits, deah boy," said D'Arcy sagely. "Let this be a warnin' to you."

"Eh?"

"Let it be a warnin' to you, deah boys," said the swell of the Fourth, in quite a fatherly manner. "Always play the game—"

"What!"

"And always be decent chaps. In a case of doubt you can always ask my advice. I would always point out to you the wight and pwopah thing to do."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Chump!"

"Weally, Lowther—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

The Terrible Three walked back to their study, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly surveying them through his monocle. They went in, and found their tea cold and the toast in the same state.

Meanwhile, Stansen had walked on towards the Shell Form-room. He looked round once, and saw that Mr. Railton was some little distance behind, and his eyes glinted. The unruly rebelliousness of his nature was fully aroused now, and the weak, passionate boy had always been allowed to do as he wished in his own home. He had been an endless trouble to Mr. Browning-Jones, and he seemed determined to give as much trouble at St. Jim's as he had given anywhere else.

He was near the Form-room door, when he suddenly turned into a side passage and ran.

Mr. Railton called after him.

"Stansen! Come back!"

The boy ran on.

Mr. Railton stepped quickly to the end of the passage. He could easily have caught the racing junior, but it was a little too undignified for a House-master, in cap and gown, to chase a junior along the passage.

But Stansen was not to escape.

As he dashed on, a figure appeared at the end of the passage in front of him. It was Knox, the prefect.

"Stop that boy!" called out Mr. Railton.

Knox halted.

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"Certainly, sir!"

Stansen ran on desperately, and tried to dodge Knox. But the prefect stepped into his path, holding out his hands. Knox was very anxious to oblige Mr. Railton just then, for he had lately been in the House-master's bad books, and was very keen to get out of them again.

He grasped at Stansen, and the fugitive lowered his head and ran savagely at the prefect.

"Oh!" gasped Knox.

He staggered back, winded.

Stansen stumbled over him, and fell heavily to the floor. He scrambled up again, but before he could run Mr. Railton had reached the spot.

The House-master's grasp closed like iron upon the boy's collar.

Stansen struggled for a moment, but he realised, then, that he was powerless in that iron grip, and he ceased to resist.

Knox sat up, panting.

"I hope you are not much hurt, Knox?" said the house-master.

"N-n-no, sir," gasped Knox. "Only—only winded a bit, sir. Oh!"

He staggered to his feet, giving Stansen a savage look. But for the presence of the House-master, Stansen would have had a most uncomfortable five minutes just then. He was rather glad to be marched away with Mr. Railton's hand on his collar.

Still in the grasp of the House-master, Stansen was marched into the Form-room, where Mr. Browning-Jones and the inspector from Wayland were waiting.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Suspected.

MR. BROWNING-JONES looked startled. "I am sorry I could not bring the boy before," said Mr. Railton quietly. "It seems to have taken the boys some time to find him."

"I hope he has given you no trouble," said the young schoolmaster, with an expressive look at the Swedish boy.

"Very little."

"Stansen, take your place with the others!"

Stansen sullenly obeyed.

Inspector Knowsey was looking at him very curiously. He had been chatting with Mr. Browning-Jones, but all the time his little, bright eyes were upon the waiting juniors; but as soon as Stansen came in, the inspector gave him all his attention.

"They are all here now, Mr. Knowsey," said the young schoolmaster.

Mr. Knowsey took out a fat notebook.

"Eleven boys," he remarked.

"Just so."

"They are all your pupils at the private school?"

"Yes—just eleven."

"Very good!" The inspector turned to the row of waiting boys, who were beginning to look somewhat anxious. "Now, my boys, I have a few questions to ask you."

"Yes, sir," said Halkett.

"Was any boy among you awake at the time the fire broke out?"

"I think not, sir. I wasn't."

"Who was the first to wake?"

"I—I think I was, sir."

"You! What is your name?"

"Price, sir."

"You woke up first?"

"I believe so, sir. But when I called out, some of the fellows were awake, I think. The smoke was jolly thick in the dorm."

"I should say Stansen was the first, though," Halkett said. "Weren't you awake first of all, Stansen?"

"I don't know," said Stansen sullenly.

The inspector started a little.

"Why should you think that Master Stansen was the first awake?" he asked.

"Well, he was the only chap who had all his clothes on in the playground, sir," Halkett explained. "We all bolted out with half our things on. One chap only had his pyjamas, and young Walker hadn't time to get out at all."

"But Stansen was fully dressed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, I remember—even to his boots and necktie!" said Owen.

The inspector fixed his keen little eyes on Stansen.

"In that case, Master Stansen, you must have been the first up," he said.

"I dressed very quickly," said Stansen.

"Did you awake before or after the room was full of smoke?"

"After, sir."

"You were not up already?"

"No, sir."

"You had not got up for anything—say for a feed, or anything of that sort, or to play a trick of any kind?"

"I had not."

"You were, in fact, in bed when the fire broke out?"

"Yes, sir."

"And asleep?"

"Fast asleep, sir."

"Yet you had time to dress yourself fully before you ran out of the house!" the inspector remarked. "You stopped even to put your necktie on while the house was in flames!"

Every eye was turned upon Stansen now. The Swedish junior was flushing very red, and his eyes sank before the inspector's piercing glance.

"Answer the inspector, Stansen!" said Mr. Browning-Jones.

Stansen raised his eyes.

"I was so frightened I did not know what I was doing," he said. "If I put the necktie on—I don't remember—it was from force of habit, I suppose, without noticing what I was doing."

The inspector nodded.

"Who was first out of the house?" he asked.

There was no reply.

"Come—come, tell me!" said Mr. Knowsey.

"It was Stansen, sir," said Halkett.

"Ah! It was Stansen!"

"He was out of the house when I got out," said Halkett. "I saw him as I ran out of the smoke. Didn't you, Price?"

"Yes, I did," said Price.

"H'm! So Master Stansen had time, not only to dress himself properly, but to get out of the house first of all as well," the inspector remarked.

Stansen did not speak.

"Isn't that a little curious, Master Stansen?" said the inspector.

"I don't think so, sir," said Stansen. "I ran out as soon as I could, of course. Now I come to think of it, I think I took out some of my clothes under my arm, and finished dressing outside. I don't remember clearly. I fainted afterwards in the playground, and I was so upset altogether that I hardly know what happened."

"That would be very natural, under the circumstances," Mr. Browning-Jones remarked, with a look at the inspector—a look of keen distress.

"Possibly so," was the dry rejoinder. "Can any of you boys tell me any more?" the inspector added.

There was silence.

"Very well," said Mr. Knowsey, "I think I have finished with the boys, gentlemen."

"You may go," said Mr. Browning-Jones.

The boys filed out in silence.

The door of the Form-room was closed behind them, and then the three men stood in silence for a few moments. Inspector Knowsey was gnawing the end of his pencil.

"My dear sir," broke out Mr. Browning-Jones at last, "you do not mean to say—"

"I mean to say nothing at present, sir."

"You suspect that boy?"

The inspector shrugged his plump shoulders.

"Somebody set the school on fire, Mr. Browning-Jones."

"But the boy had no conceivable motive for such a reckless, such a wicked action."

"Neither had any of the other boys; but certainly someone among them did set fire to the school," said Mr. Knowsey calmly.

"But—"

"There is no doubt about it, sir—absolutely!"

Mr. Browning-Jones looked greatly distressed.

"I can never believe it of one of my boys," he said.

"I hope the matter will be proved, sir," said Mr. Knowsey. "A reformatory is the proper place for the guilty boy, with a very strong dose of the birch. By the way, I observed that that boy—Stansen, I think, is his name—"

"Yes. He is only half English."

"I observed that he is a somewhat peculiar boy. Is he in normal health? His locks don't seem to imply so."

"He is not a normal boy," said Mr. Browning-Jones slowly. "I had better tell you the whole facts about him, I suppose."

"It would certainly be better to do so."

"He is the son of very rich parents, and has been completely spoiled at home," said Mr. Browning-Jones. "He has fallen into bad habits, and his father sent him to me in the hope that I might be able to cure him. But for his father's earnest wish, I should have sent him away from my

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school. He has almost wrecked his health by excessive smoking, and he is a very passionate and cruel boy. But I have not despaired of leading him into better ways."

"Did he greatly desire to leave the school?"

"I fear that he was not attached to the school, or to his schoolfellows, or to me," the young man confessed.

"He wished to be sent home?"

"Oh, no! He disliked his home. He was on the worst terms with his father, owing to his obstinacy and wilfulness. It was due to his want of training, but he had made himself quite intolerable."

"H'm! Then we cannot take it that this might have been a desperate step to get sent home from school?"

"I am sure not."

"Had you punished him severely? Might such an action have been attributable to revenge?" the inspector asked.

"I had punished him certainly; and he is a revengeful boy; but burning down a school and risking a dozen lives is hardly the act of a revengeful boy. A hardened criminal might stop short of so terrible a revenge."

"True!"

"In short, I cannot suspect Stansen."

Inspector Knowsey nodded.

"We shall see," he remarked.

"Meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile, I suppose the boy will remain here, and will be found if I should need him," said the inspector.

"Oh, certainly!" replied Mr. Raitton.

"Very good; then I need trouble you no further at present," said Inspector Knowsey.

And he took his leave.

## CHAPTER 13.

### Too Thick.

LEIVISON, of the Fourth, looked into his study, and seeing that Mellish was there, came in and closed the door. Mellish looked at him inquiringly. There was an expression upon Leivison's face that interested him.

"What is it?" asked Mellish.

"I rather think we're in for a good thing," said Leivison lazily. "Things have been rather quiet here since Lumley-Lumley turned over a new leaf, and Gore became such a good person. We've both been hard-up for something to smoke, and I haven't won anything at banker since Lumley chucked it."

Mellish grunted.

"But there's a chap come to St. Jim's who can give Lumley-Lumley and Gore points, when they're at their best and brightest," grinned Leivison.

Mellish looked interested.

"One of the B.-J. boys?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Which one—I don't like any of them," said the cad of the Fourth. "They get on too well with Tom Merry and his crowd to be of much use to me."

"I don't mean any of the fellows who have been put into our Form. I mean the chap who's in the Shell now."

"Oh, that blessed alien!"

"Yes, that blessed alien," agreed Leivison. "He goes ahead of anything I've ever seen at school. Stansen's his name."

"I've seen him—a sickly-looking cad."

"That's the chap; only mind how you speak of him, as he's going to be a guest in this study," said Leivison. "I don't want him to hear anything of that sort as he comes in."

"What do you want him here for?"

"Because he'll be of use," said Leivison. "It seems that Tom Merry has kicked him out of his study because he found him smoking there. He can smoke here and welcome—so long as he shares out the smokes."

Mellish grinned.

"Yes, rather," he said.

"And he's simply rolling in money, too," said Leivison. "His father's a rich Swedish merchant, so I hear. The chap looks to me as if he's half off his rocker, but I suppose that's no business of ours. We're going to take him up—hush! There he is!"

There was a knock at the door, and Stansen came in.

He was carrying a little package in his hand, and he laid it upon the table. He nodded to Mellish.

"Oh, here you are!" said Leivison hospitably. "Give Stansen the armchair, Mellish, old man. We've got to make him comfy."

"Certainly," said Mellish, "with pleasure."

Stansen sat down in the armchair. Leivison closed the door. The two cads of the Fourth Form beamed upon Stansen. As Leivison had said, things had been dull for them since Lumley-Lumley, formerly their study-mate, had gone over to Tom Merry & Co., and turned out a really decent fellow. Even Gore, after his many relapses, seemed to have determined to stick to the right path. There was little likelihood that Mellish or Leivison would reform; but they were certainly feeling rather lonely on the crooked path, so to speak.

"What have you got in there?" asked Mellish, with a glance towards the parcel on the table.

"I'll show you," said Stansen.

He opened the parcel.

A bundle of cheroots, and a box of cigarettes tumbled out, and a square bottle, which contained a green liquid that gleamed and glimmered in the light.

"What on earth's that?" asked Leivison.

"Chartreuse," said Stansen.

"You don't mean to say you drink the beastly chemist's stuff?" said Leivison, sniffing at the bottle.

Stansen smiled contemptuously.

"It is a liqueur," he said. "It is very expensive—that bottle cost a guinea."

"Phew!"

"You must have plenty of money to chuck about, I should think," said Mellish.

"I have as much money as I want," said Stansen arrogantly, "and I do as I like. They will not coerce me here, any more than Mr. Browning-Jones could."

"You don't mean to say that B.-J. allowed these things?" Stansen laughed disagreeably.

"Oh, no; it was in secret! When he found anything out he caned me. But I have made him sorry for that."

"What did you do?"

Stansen bit his lip.

"Nothing—never mind that. Look here, if you choose to be my friends, I will make you enjoy yourselves. These are splendid cheroots. I have quarrelled with Tom Merry because he would not allow me to smoke in his study."

"You can smoke here as much as you like," said Mellish.

"Yes, rather!" added Leivison. "We don't get on with Tom Merry any better than you do. I say, do you ever play banker?"

The Swedish boy shook his head.

"I don't play cards," he said.

"I'll teach you, if you like."

"Bah! Let us smoke."

"Oh, all right!"

Mellish and Leivison lighted cigarettes. Stansen lighted up a thick black cheroot, and the other two watched him in wonder.

"You don't mean to say that you smoke things like that?" Leivison exclaimed.

"Why not?"

"It'll make you sick."

Stansen laughed.

"I can smoke twenty a day, if I choose," he said. "It is many years since smoking made me sick."

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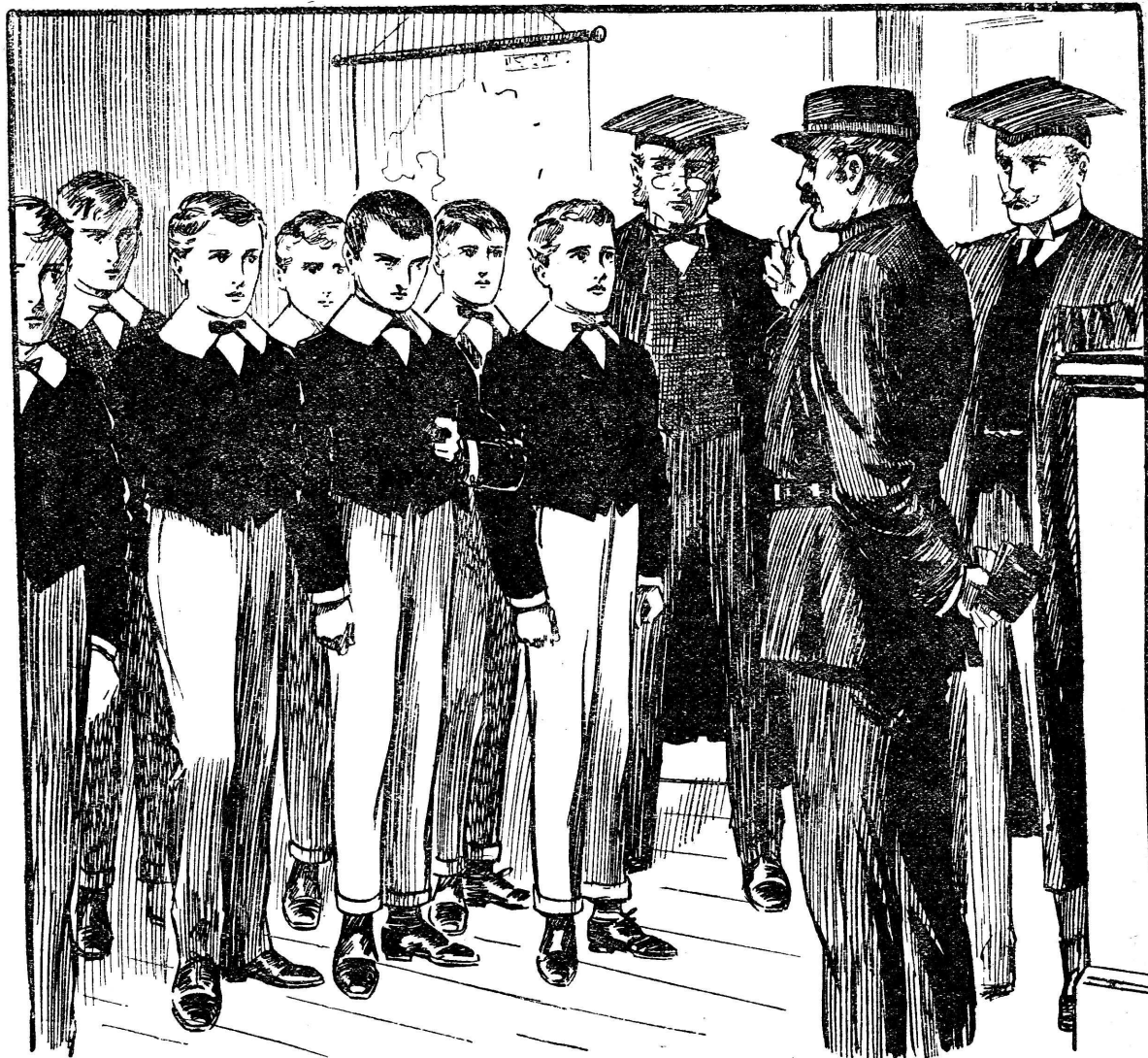
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"Answer the inspector, Stansen!" said Mr. Browning-Jones. Every eye was turned upon Stansen now. The Swedish junior was flushing very red, and his eyes sank before the inspector's piercing glance. (See p. 18.)

Levison started.

"Years!" he said. "You don't mean to say that you've smoked for years, and you can't be more than sixteen."

"I am sixteen."

"And you say—"

"I have always done as I chose," said Stansen, with a curl of the lip. "My mother would never let me be baulked. She is dead now, and my stepmother does not like me. She would not be content till I was sent to school."

"Blessed if I wonder at that," murmured Levison.

"What did you say?"

"I said that was jolly hard cheese, old chap."

"I hate her," said Stansen—"I hate a great many people. I will be revenged upon them all some day."

Levison was silent. Stansen was blowing out great thick clouds of smoke. The cad of the Fourth was beginning to repent having taken Stansen up at all. The fellow was rich, evidently, and a blackguard; two great qualifications in Levison's eyes. But there was such a thing as drawing a line, Levison thought. This thick smoke would never clear out of the study; the room would smell of it for hours. And Stansen's wild way of talking made Levison vaguely uneasy; he hardly knew why.

"You hate Tom Merry as much as I do?" Stansen asked suddenly—so suddenly that it made Levison start.

"I don't like him," said Levison.

"You would like to be revenged upon him, is it not so?"

"Yes—perhaps! What do you mean?"

"Then help me, and I will help you," said Stansen, taking the cheroot out of his mouth in his eagerness, "I know the way."

"What are you getting at?"

"I shall be sleeping in the Shell dormitory to-night, as I have been put in that Form," said Stansen, lowering his voice. "In the middle of the night I will let you two into the dormitory—"

Levison and Mellish stared at him. The Swedish boy's eyes were glinting and glittering, and his mouth looked like a wild animal's. They began to doubt if the boy was quite in his right senses.

"What are getting at?" asked Mellish.

"There will be three of us," said Stansen. "We shall be too many for him. You will bring cricket stumps with you. We will suddenly attack him, and beat him while he is in bed, and in the dark he will not know us. He will have a terrible beating, black and blue, and they will never know who it was."

"My hat!" said Mellish.

"You rotten cad!" said Levison.

Stansen glared at him.

"What! What do you say?"

"You howling cad!" he shouted.

"What! You—you—" Levison was red with anger. He was the least scrupulous fellow in the School House at St. Jim's; but the villainous proposal of the foreign junior made even his blood run cold. Even Mellish was looking savage at the idea that anybody should imagine he would act in the way suggested. It was a little "too thick" even for Mellish.

Levison threw open the door. "Get out!" he exclaimed. "Yes, get out," said Mellish. "You're not fit to be in any room, unless it's a convict's cell at Dartmoor. Get outside!" "You asked me here—"

"I didn't know you were a blessed criminal, though," said Levison. "I don't want to have anything to say to you. I'm sorry I ever spoke to you. Get out of this study, or I'll sling you out on your neck."

Stansen started to his feet, his eyes flaming. He caught the green bottle from the table, in his fury, and made a savage blow at Levison with it. Mellish struck up his hand, and the bottle flew out of Stansen's grasp, and smashed against the wall of the study.

Crash! Levison turned white. If the murderous blow had reached its mark, he would have been stretched stunned on the floor of the study. He was petrified for a moment. Stansen, panting with passionate rage, was looking about for another weapon. But Levison gave him no time.

He leaped at the foreign junior, and grasped him by the collar.

Levison was not an athlete, but he was stronger than the puny, weak-limbed alien. He swung Stansen round, and sent him whirling through the doorway.

"Now, get off!" he shouted. "By George, I'll—" Stansen stumbled to his feet. Levison rushed at him, and kicked him hard, and the foreign junior dashed down the corridor. Levison pursued him as far as the end of the passage, and then returned to the study, gasping.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "What a giddy scorpion! What do you think of him, Mellish?"

"I think you're a silly ass to bring him here." "Well, I didn't know he was a mad idiot like that! Look here, he's simply dangerous—blessed if I don't think he's half insane."

"He looked it."

"He might get up to-night and bash Tom Merry—"

"Well, it's no business of ours, after all."

"Isn't it, you worm?" said Levison. "I'm jolly well going to give Tom Merry a word of warning. Why, the villain might injure him for life!"

"But—"

"He ought to be sent to a lunatic asylum!" said Levison, panting. "That's the proper place for him. Blessed if I feel safe with him in the house!"

And, Levison, having calmed down a little, went to look for Tom Merry. There was no love lost between them, certainly; but Levison felt that he had to put the hero of the Shell upon his guard.

## CHAPTER 14.

### Danger.

**T**OM MERRY and his chums had finished their preparation, and had come down into the junior common-room. There Levison found the Terrible Three, talking cricket with a group of Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers.

Tom Merry wanted to play some of the B.-J. boys in the junior eleven at the next junior match, and they were considering who should stand out for the sake of courtesy to the guests of St. Jim's.

"Can I speak to you a minute, Tom Merry?" Levison asked.

"Go ahead!" said Tom Merry tersely.

"I've got something to tell you—"

"Fire away!"

"Going to give up smoking," asked Monty Lowther sarcastically, "or have you decided not to play banker any more? It would be a day worthy to be marked with a giddy white stone if Levison ever becomes decent!"

"Mind your own business!" said Levison.

"If you're looking for a thick ear, my son—"

"Oh, shut up, Monty!" said Tom Merry. "Let him get on! What is it, Levison?"

"I'd rather speak to you alone," said Levison.

"Undah the circs., deah boys, we had bettah wotire," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"Rats!" said Blake. "What Levison's got to say can wait! We've got to settle about the cricket! I suppose Gussy will stand out to make room for Halkett?"

"Weally, Wlake—"

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"Certainly!" said Manners. "The least useful must be left out!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"To say nothing of the least ornamental!" Monty Lowther remarked.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You chaps can jaw it over while I speak to Levison," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Now, what is it, kid?"

He drew aside with the cad of the Fourth. Levison was looking very angry. But he went on to explain.

"It's about Stansen," he said abruptly.

"Yes. What about him?"

"He's been talking to us," said Levison. "I don't want to say much, but—well, I believe the chap is partly off his rocker, and he's got his knife into you. He was suggesting to us that we should lay into you with cricket-stumps while you were in bed to-night, and give you an awful hiding!"

Tom Merry jumped.

"My hat! What did you say?"

"Something that wasn't polite," said Levison, "and the beast tried to brain me with a bottle. I kicked him out of my study. Look here, my view is that he isn't safe, and I thought I'd better speak to you, so that you can be on your guard to-night. I wouldn't sleep in the same dormitory with him for toffee!"

Tom Merry looked very startled.

"By George!" he said. "I never thought of anything like that! Look here, you're not romancing, are you?"

"If you don't believe me—"

"I believe you," said Tom Merry, with a searching look at Levison's face. "It's a curious case; I can't make the fellow out myself. I shall be on my guard, of course. I don't think he's quite right in the head. I'm very much obliged to you for telling me this, Levison. I suppose there's no objection to my telling Manners and Lowther?"

"No; I suppose not."

"Thanks very much!"

Tom Merry returned to his friends. They all looked at him very curiously.

"Well, have you decided about the cricket?" asked Blake.

"Blow the cricket!"

"What!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'm sorry! I've got something else to think of just now," said Tom Merry. "We'll let the cricket stand over for a bit."

"Oh, all right!"

The Fourth-Formers strolled away. Manners and Lowther remained with Tom Merry; they could see that he had something to say to them.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Monty Lowther. "What was it the giddy black sheep of the Fourth had to impart to your august ear?"

"It's rather a serious matter, Monty."

"Explicate, then!"

Tom Merry explained.

"I knew he was rocky in the top storey," said Monty Lowther, "but I never expected he would develop like this. What a dangerous beast!"

"The question is, whether he's likely to try anything of the sort, without anybody to help him," said Manners. "He seems to have been afraid of tackling it alone."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Exactly," he said. "I suppose, after the reception Levison gave to his wheeze, he's most likely to drop it like a hot brick. But, all the same, he might take the idea into his silly brain—"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"I'm not a coward, I hope," said Tom Merry; "but no chap would want to sleep in the same room with a fellow who might get up in the middle of the night, and bash him with a cricket-stump."

"My hat! I should say not."

"It's not good enough."

"Blessed if I know what to do, though," said Tom Merry.

"I don't feel like telling any of the prefects about it—it would be sneaking—"

"Well, I don't know about that, considering that he's such a dangerous beast," said Monty Lowther. "Might tell the police, I should think."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It would be rotten for B.-J. to make a complaint like that about one of his boys," he said. "He would feel it a lot."

"Well, that's true enough."

"Besides, I believe Levison meant well in warning me; but—but—well, he might have exaggerated, and, besides, Stansen may only have been pulling his leg all the time," Tom Merry said. "I don't say I think so, but it's possible. At the same time, I don't feel safe at going to sleep in the same room with Stansen."

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"But what's to be done?" said Manners. "You can't sit up all night in your study; and Stansen will be here more nights than one, too."

"I suppose I shall have to stay awake to-night, that's all."

"Phew!"

"Well, I sha'n't be much inclined to go to sleep, especially if I see the chap take a cricket-stump or a poker into the dorm. with him," said Tom Merry, with a rueful laugh. "I think he's dotty enough for anything, if you come to that."

"We'll keep an eye on the beast, anyway!" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded. Without being in the least nervous or alarmed, Tom could not disguise from himself the fact that there was very real danger. The more he saw of Stansen, the more he believed that the foreign lad, if not actually insane, had been reduced to a mental state by his bad habits which was little short of actual insanity. When he had himself well in hand, it was different; but he had shown himself to be capable of bursts of passionate fury which made him far from safe.

The Terrible Three saw nothing of the foreign junior until bedtime. Then Stansen was not ready to go up to bed with the rest, and when he was looked for, he was discovered coming up the kitchen stairs.

"What on earth have you been down there for?" asked Gore, of the Shell.

"Mind your own business!" said Stansen.

Gore clenched his fists.

"You cheeky cad——" he began.

Tom Merry tapped him on the shoulder.

"Let him alone, Gore!" he said, in a low voice.

"Look here——"

"Remember he's a guest here, old chap!"

It was seldom that Tom Merry had called Gore "old chap." It seemed to have a great effect upon Gore, for he nodded, and turned away from Stansen at once.

The Shell went up to bed. Monty Lowther was keeping an eye upon the foreign junior, and more than once he saw a strange, cunning smile pass over his thin face.

What was in the boy's wild mind?

Mischief, evidently.

And Monty Lowther determined that he, as well as Tom Merry, would be on the watch that night, and Manners came to the same resolution.

## CHAPTER 15. Under Suspicion.

STANSEN did not speak a word to any of the fellows in the Shell dormitory in the School House.

Although he had only been a day at St. Jim's, he had contrived to make himself thoroughly disliked in the Form, and out of it. Nobody in the Shell wanted to talk to him; and the Terrible Three, who had started by being extremely courteous to the stranger, were naturally not much inclined to speak to him now. They were more inclined to watch him, after what Levison had said to Tom Merry.

"Do you see that the cad's not undressing?" Monty Lowther murmured to Tom Merry.

Tom Merry nodded.

He could not help observing it.

Stansen took off his outer garments, and folded them up in the usual way; but he did not take off his underclothing. He slipped his pyjamas on over it. He could have no other motive but that he intended to get up again.

What did he intend to get up for?

What intention could he have, save to carry out the plan he had sketched to Levison in the latter's study?

Yet the chums of the Shell could see nothing of any weapon. They would have expected Stansen to bring a cricket-stump into the dormitory, but he did not.

But Monty Lowther's keen eyes after a time detected something that had escaped him at first. There was a bag, such as the St. Jim's cricketers used, under the end of Stansen's bed.

That it belonged to Stansen was certain, and Monty Lowther meant to know what that bag contained before he went to bed. He would not have been surprised to see an Indian club or a life-preserver.

"What have you got there, Stansen?" asked Lowther, stepping close to the bed, and tapping the bag with his foot.

"Nothing!" was the sullen reply.

"Isn't that bag yours?"

"Yes."

"What's in it?"

"Mind your own business!"

"Hallo!" said Kangaroo cheerfully. "What's that? Is that a dormitory feed you're going to stand, Stansen, my son?"

"No, it isn't!"

"Oh, we'll stand the feed if the stuff's there!" said Bernard Glyn. "Yank out the bag, and let's see what's in it!"

"Right you are!"

Stansen sprang before the bag as several juniors moved towards it. There was a savage expression on his thin, colourless face.

"Stand back!" he said fiercely.

"Oh, rats!" said Monty Lowther. "What's in that bag?"

"I will not tell you!"

"Then we'll look!"

"Stand back, I say!" screamed Stansen, in his wild way. "It is my property—it is my own! I tell you that I will not have it touched."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"What's the giddy mystery, anyway?"

"That's my business. Let my bag alone."

The juniors looked at him in amazement. None but the Terrible Three had any idea why he should show so much excitement over what seemed to be a trifle.

"The chap's mad," said Clifton Dane. "What on earth does it matter if we look into his blessed bag!"

"Oh, he's off his rocker!"

"You shall not see it!" shouted Stansen. "I will not have it!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Collar the bag!"

"Chuck him out of the way!"

Stansen stood and hit out as the juniors rushed forward. At that moment the door opened, and Darrel, of the Sixth, came in to see lights out.

"Hallo, hallo! What's the trouble?" he called out.

The row ceased at once.

"They are trying to take my bag," shrieked Stansen. "I will not allow it. They shall not meddle with my property."

The prefect frowned.

"What's the trouble?" he repeated.

"He won't let us see what's in his bag," said Monty Lowther. "He's got something there, and he's making a giddy mystery about it."

"What have you got there, Stansen?" asked Darrel.

"Only some things of my own."

"Let his bag alone, if he doesn't want you to touch it," said the prefect. "You have no right to touch his property."

"What's he making the mystery about, then?"

"I don't see that it matters. Let his things alone. Mind, you hear what I say—no one is to touch his bag, if he doesn't want it touched," said Darrel. "It's all right, Stansen; they won't touch it."

Stansen panted.

"They will when you are gone," he exclaimed.

"I have ordered them not to," said Darrel curtly. "No one here will disobey my orders, I think."

"Of course we won't," said Monty Lowther. "If Stansen wasn't a rotten outsider, he would know that, too."

"Remember Stansen is a guest here," said Darrel.

"Oh, all right!"

"His things are not to be touched, and he is not to be interfered with in any way," said Darrel. "Remember what I say. Now tumble in."

The juniors turned in.

Stansen seemed to be still anxious about his bag, for he moved it up to the end of his bed under the head, and his glance dwelt upon it several times with uneasiness as he turned in. Darrel looked at him curiously more than once. He did not in the least understand the strange excitability of the foreign junior, but he attached no great importance to the matter.

The juniors were soon in bed.

"Good-night, lads!" said Darrel, as he turned out the light.

"Good-night, Darrel!"

The door closed behind the prefect.

There was the usual buzz of voices in the dormitory following the departure of the prefect, but in that cheery chat Stansen's voice did not join.

He lay silent and morose.

There was a glimmer of moonlight in at the high windows of the dormitory, and it showed up the great room with a vague, dim illumination.

One by one the voices slackened down, and the boys dropped off to sleep.

The last good-night was said, and slumber reigned in the Shell dormitory in the School House.

But there were at least three who did not sleep.

They were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. The Terrible Three were in no humour for sleep.

After Levison's warning, they could draw only one conclusion from the anxiety Stansen showed to have his bag undisturbed.

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Why that keen anxiety, unless the bag contained some weapon with which he intended to do injury to Tom Merry during the hours of darkness, as he had proposed in the scheme he had communicated to Levison and Mellish?

There was danger in the air, and the chums of the Shell felt it.

They lay awake, and listened to the chiming of the clock as the quarters elapsed, and they listened, too, for any sound from Stansen's bed.

The moon sailed higher in the sky, and the light in the dormitory was clearer, showing up objects in the long, lofty room with dim uncertainty.

And as eleven o'clock struck, Monty Lowther's eyes began to grow very heavy. He did not intend to sleep, but his faculties were no longer very clear. He remembered that Tom Merry was keeping awake; and, after all, what was the use of his keeping awake as well? If there was any disturbance, he would hear it and wake at once. These thoughts passed dimly through his mind, while he tried to keep his heavy eyelids open. They fell, and Monty Lowther slept.

From Manners' bed came a deep and steady breathing. Manners had fully intended to watch all night; but he had dozed off for a moment, and the moment was prolonged.

He did not wake. But Tom Merry's eyes never closed. To Tom Merry's mind was ever present the thought of a cricket-stump crashing down upon him in the darkness, if he slept, and that thought was sufficient to banish sleep effectually from his eyes.

Twelve! Tom Merry started, still broad awake, as midnight rang out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's. Midnight!

The last heavy stroke died away, seeming to leave a deeper silence than before, and Tom Merry began to wonder whether, after all, it was worth while to keep awake.

The thought was passing through his mind, when he heard a faint sound in the deep, tense silence of the dormitory.

It was the sound of moving bedclothes—of someone cautiously, almost silently, creeping from his bed.

## CHAPTER 16.

### The Incendiary.

**T**OM MERRY raised his head a little from the pillow. His eyes were wide open and gleaming; his heart was beating in quick and painful throbs, so quickly, so heavily, that it seemed to dim his sense of hearing for a moment or two.

But he calmed himself with an effort.

What had he heard? He listened with tense, straining ears. Yes, there it was again—the faint swishing sound as bedclothes were pushed cautiously back, and someone stepped from a bed.

Someone was out of bed in the Shell dormitory. Who was it?

There could be but one answer to that question. Tom Merry strained his eyes in the direction of Stansen's bed.

In the dim, uncertain moonlight that glimmered in the dormitory, he could see a faint figure beside Stansen's bed.

The foreign junior was up. Undoubtedly he believed that all the Shell dormitory, with the exception of himself, slept.

What was he doing? Tom Merry saw the dim figure move, and heard slight sounds. It was a minute or more before he realised that Stansen was dressing himself.

Tom Merry lay quiet, listening, watching, puzzled. Why was Stansen dressing? If he intended to make a brutal attack upon the hero of the Shell, surely it would be his game to dive back into bed again, and lie there in the hope of escaping detection as the assailant?

He did not need to dress himself for the sake of moving a dozen paces along the dormitory, and attacking the boy he supposed to be asleep.

Did he intend something else? But what? Tom Merry was mystified; but more than ever the thought forced itself into his mind that the foreign junior was not fully responsible for his actions.

Stansen was dressed now. What was to be his next move? Tom Merry's eyes were so accustomed now to the half-light, that he could watch every movement of the shadowy figure.

Stansen was kneeling down at the head of his bed. He was going to his bag—the bag he had so determinedly concealed from the scrutiny of the Shell fellows. What was he taking from the bag?

Tom Merry almost gasped as he saw Stansen rise, with the bag in his hand. He had lifted it out bodily from under the bed.

What was he about to do? Tom Merry was ready to spring up if Stansen came towards his bed. But he did not. He moved away from his own bed, but it was towards the door of the dormitory.

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NEXT WEEK: "THE MYSTERIOUS DOCUMENT."

Tom Merry, wondering whether he was dreaming, heard the door open, and heard it click faintly shut behind the foreign junior.

Stansen had left the dormitory. For some seconds Tom Merry lay silent, lost in astonishment. Stansen's actions completely amazed and puzzled him.

Then the hero of the Shell, recovering himself, sprang out of bed, and groped for his trousers.

"Manners! Lowther!" he called out cautiously.

Monty Lowther started up at once.

"Anybody call?"

"Yes; get up."

"Has Stansen—"

"He's left the dormitory."

"What?" said Manners' voice.

"Stansen's gone, and taken the bag with him."

"My hat! What the—"

Manners and Lowther were out of bed in a twinkling.

"I—I think I fell asleep," murmured Manners. "I say, what can the fellow be up to? He—he can't be going to smash at some other chap instead, can he?"

"Might be Levison, perhaps. Levison kicked him out of his study."

"My word!"

"I'm going to see, anyway," said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "The chap's not safe, that's a dead cert. Come on!"

"We're on."

The chums of the Shell, in their pyjamas and trousers, crept quietly to the door. They did not want to wake any more of the Form. Tom Merry opened the door cautiously, and the Terrible Three passed out into the passage, and Tom closed the door.

In the passage they paused and listened.

Where was Stansen?

There was no sound to guide them. Tom Merry knew that the foreign junior had put his boots on, but there was no sound of footsteps.

Which way had he gone?

"The Fourth Form dorm., as sure as a gun," whispered Lowther. "He's going for Levison instead of you, Tommy."

"It must be so!"

"Let's go there and see, anyway."

"Come on, then!"

They ran silently along the passage. The door of the Fourth Form dormitory was shut, and the room was quite quiet; but the Terrible Three knew well enough that Stansen might be inside, preparing for his murderous attack.

The chums of the Shell were trembling with excitement now. There was something strangely weird and uncanny in this silent, ghostly hunt through a sleeping house for one whom they believed to be in part, if not wholly, insane.

Tom Merry opened the door and looked in. The moonlight glimmered in at the windows, and showed the row of white beds undisturbed.

There was no sign of anyone moving, but Tom Merry did not mean to leave anything to chance. He crept in, and made his way to Blake's bed, and shook the bed slightly. It was enough to wake Jack Blake.

Blake started up.

"What the dickens—"

"It's all right, Blake."

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes. There's something wrong, Blake, old man. Don't make a row, for goodness' sake! Stansen has dressed and left our dorm., and I believe he's cranky. I was afraid he was coming here, so I came."

"My hat!"

"Don't make a row, but keep awake, on the watch, in case he comes. I've an idea that he means to bash Levison with a cricket-stump, or something of the sort."

"Bai Jove!" came a startled voice from the bed occupied by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Keep awake, you chaps, and watch for him, while we look round," whispered Tom Merry hurriedly.

"Right you are!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry rejoined his comrades in the passage.

"He's not there," he whispered. "Blake and D'Arcy are awake, so they're safe enough now. But we must find Stansen. He may be up to some awful mischief—we don't know. Where can he be?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"He may have gone down to the studies—"

"Let's look."

They descended to the Shell passage. The studies were all dark, and there was no sound to be heard in the passage. Very grim and sombre it looked, all its well-known and familiar outlines lost in the darkness.

The chums paused again.

Where was Stansen? What was he doing? What was the

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meaning of this strange, puzzling mystery? The juniors felt their hearts beating like hammers, with a vague, unformed dread of they hardly knew what.

"He must have left the dorm. for something," Lowther muttered. "But what on earth is he going to do?"

"And what was in the bag?"

"It's a horrible mystery!" muttered Tom Merry. "I believe he's mad—mad as a hatter! What can he be doing? Where can he be gone?"

"The—the kitchen," muttered Lowther, struck by a sudden thought. "You remember, he had gone down in the kitchen when it was time to go to bed. What was he exploring down there for?"

"He can't be gone to rob the larder, I suppose?"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"I wish I could think that it was something as innocent as that," he muttered. "But I'm feeling uneasy—horribly uneasy."

"So am I."

"He may have gone down to discover the lay of the land, so as to be able to get at the larder," Manners muttered. "Of course, he wouldn't have a chance before the maids went to bed."

"No; but—"

"It isn't the larder," said Tom Merry. "But he may be in the kitchen; let's go and see, anyway. If he isn't there, I don't know where he can be."

They hurried silently downstairs.

At the top of the kitchen stairs was a door, which was usually closed at night, though not fastened. Tom Merry groped in the dense darkness for the door, and found that it was open.

Below, in the blackest darkness, lay the kitchen stairs.

The stairs curved further down, and there might have been a light in the kitchen and the adjacent rooms without the chums seeing it. So far as Tom Merry could see, all was blackness below.

But as he peered down the black staircase, though he could see nothing, hear nothing, there came a scent to his nostrils—a smell that made him reel back, with a gasping exclamation.

"Lowther! Manners, old man, do you smell that?"

"Yes. It's—it's—"

"Paraffin!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Good heavens!"

## CHAPTER 17.

### A Narrow Escape.

THE chums of the Shell were petrified for a minute. Bitter and penetrating, unmistakable, the smell of paraffin came up the staircase from the lower floor.

And the chums knew that a great quantity must have been spilt there, for the smell to be so strong.

What did it mean?

It was impossible to suppose that the maids had upset a great quantity of paraffin in the kitchen or on the kitchen stairs, and left it there when they went to bed. Mrs. Mimms, the House-dame, would never have allowed anything of that sort.

But if that was not the case, whence came the smell—whence came the paraffin? What did it mean? Upon what horrible mystery had the chums of the Shell stumbled?

"Good heavens!" muttered Manners. "What—what—"

"It's paraffin!"

"Somebody's put it there—on purpose—"

"Stansen!"

"But why," muttered Monty Lowther, "in the name of all that's terrible—why should he come down here in the middle of the night and spill paraffin?"

Tom Merry grasped his arm.

"Why," he muttered—"why? Don't you remember the fire at Mr. Browning-Jones's school? Nobody knows how it was started."

"Tom!"

"Unless it was by a madman," said Manners, in a strangled voice

"Oh, it's horrible!"

"I'm going down," said Tom Merry.

"We're with you."

"Quiet!"

Tom Merry groped his way cautiously down the stairs.

The smell of paraffin was overpowering as they descended. They understood why; the stairs were drenched in it. Paraffin had been poured over the wooden stairs, and over the banisters, and splashed upon the walls.

A match dropped there, and the staircase would have been a mass of seething flame. And was it not intended that a match should be dropped? For what other purpose was the staircase drenched in paraffin?

Tom Merry reached the bottom of the stairs.

The kitchen door was directly in front of him now, and he saw, as he expected, a light gleaming under it.

Stansen was there!

What was he doing? As Tom Merry listened in the tense silence, he heard a low, faint sound—the sound of a chuckle! And if ever there was a madman's chuckle, it was that which the hero of the Shell now listened to with shuddering nerves.

Tom Merry stepped on towards the door. It was several inches open, and he could see into the kitchen.

He looked in, setting his teeth.

A lamp stood on the table. It cast a dim glimmer upon the great kitchen of the School House.

Stansen was there. His bag lay upon the long table, and it was open. Beside it stood a large can, showing what the bag had contained. That, doubtless, was among the things the foreign junior had bought during the extensive shopping he had done that day. The large, well-packed bag he had concealed in the Shell dormitory contained cans of paraffin, and the wretched boy was showing now the use he intended them to be put to.

One can he had emptied in drenching the stairs. He had now piled a great heap of the kitchen furniture together—chairs and benches and wooden articles—and was drenching the heap with the inflammable oil.

The kitchen windows had been set wide open. A draught was blowing across the great room, and it blew past Tom Merry as he stood at the door.

All was clear enough now to the watching juniors.

Stansen was the incendiary.

One look at the boy's wild, white face was enough to show that he was not in his right senses. He was not what would have been termed mad, but the wreck of his health by incessant smoking and other excesses had reduced him to a state of hysteria, in which all his evil impulses had free and unchecked play. He was grinning and chuckling like a madman now as he drenched the furniture with paraffin.

Tom Merry turned almost sick at what he saw.

This, doubtless, accounted for the mysterious fire at Mr. Browning-Jones's school. It was the work of the wretched boy who was now seeking to destroy the house that had given him shelter.

Once a match was applied to this heap of furniture, there would be a terrible blaze. The draught from the open windows would fan the flames, and the staircase, drenched in paraffin, would catch at once. It would be impossible for anyone to descend to deal with the fire.

The whole under part of the School House would be ablaze.

Tom Merry shuddered.

The grand old building which had withstood the storms of centuries, which had survived the cannon of Cromwell's troops, would perish, to gratify the mad whim of a malignant, half-insane degenerate.

Stansen laid down the empty can, and fumbled in his pocket. Tom Merry knew that he was fumbling for a box of matches.

The moment had come.

There was not a second to lose. Tom Merry threw open the door and rushed in.

Stansen whirled round towards him.

He glared at Tom Merry in wild fury.

"You—you?" he gasped.

The matchbox was in his hand. He knew that he was no match for the hero of the Shell once Tom Merry's grasp should be upon him, and he made a wild effort to strike a match, to hurl it at the drenched furniture, before he could be seized.

Scratch!

The match flamed as Tom Merry leaped upon him.

"You madman! Stop!"

Tom Merry's strong grasp closed upon the incendiary, and as they closed the match dropped to the floor. It dropped into a little pool of paraffin, and there was a curl upward of bluish flame.

Crash!

Down went Stansen in the sturdy junior's grasp, and he fell fairly upon the flame, and blotted it out with his weight.

St. Jim's was saved.

But Stansen was fighting madly. With the fit of insanity strongly upon him now, he seemed to have the strength of a full-grown man.

At any other time, Tom Merry would have dealt easily with his puny opponent, but now Stansen seemed a match for him—more than a match.

Once he almost tore himself loose.

"Help!" gasped Tom Merry.

Manners and Lowther were already springing to his aid.

They grasped Stansen, and grasped him hard, but the frantic junior did not cease to struggle.

He fought, and bit, and scratched, and tore like a wild beast, shrieking with rage as he fought, and the Terrible Three had all they could do to hold him.

They shouted for help as they struggled with the maniac. "Help—help!"

There were sounds of voices above—voices calling—and hurried footsteps. Blake and D'Arcy came dashing down the stairs in their pyjamas, and they hurled themselves at once into the fray.

With five strong juniors grasping him, Stansen was secured at last and held so that he could not struggle.

He was still quivering and trembling with rage, and there was foam upon his panting lips. An incessant stream of fierce cries poured from his lips, till the juniors shuddered to hear it.

"Bai Jove," muttered D'Arcy. "He's mad, you know—mad as a hatter!"

"Mad, by Jove!"

"Good heavens, what has happened?"

Mr. Railton ran down the stairs, and Mr. Browning-Jones was close behind him. Kildare and several more of the Sixth followed them up.

"Blake, Merry, what has happened?"

"It's Stansen, sir—"

"Stansen?"

"He's mad!" said Tom Merry. "Mad—or jolly near it! He was trying to set fire to the house, sir!"

"Good heavens! Is it possible?"

Mr. Browning-Jones advanced towards Stansen. It was curious to see how the mad junior's fury changed to fear and submission as the young schoolmaster came near. There was no doubt as to Stansen's guilt; the drenching paraffin, all proved what he had been doing when he was captured.

Mr. Browning-Jones dropped a hand upon his shoulder.

"Stansen, look at me!"

Stansen covered before him.

"You were acting the incendiary here, Stansen! Then it was you who set my school on fire last night!"

Stansen panted.

"I hated the place!" he muttered. "I hated you! I meant to make you sorry for caning me—and I did! I burnt you out! I don't care!"

"And you were going to do the same again here?"

"Yes!"

"Why?"

"I hate them all!" broke out Stansen passionately, savagely. "They don't like me. I said I would make them suffer! I don't care!"

"The boy must be mad," said Mr. Railton.

"I fear that he is mad," said Mr. Browning-Jones. "I knew that he was greatly affected by his bad habits; but I never dreamed that it had gone to this extent—that he was quite mentally unbalanced. Thank Heaven's mercy that these boys succeeded in stopping him in time! I can hardly forgive myself for having brought this terrible danger upon the school."

"It was not your fault," said Mr. Railton. "You could not know. As for that wretched boy—"

"I shall take charge of him for the rest of the night in my room," said Mr. Browning-Jones, and there was a quiver in his voice which showed how deeply distressed he was. "Come with me, Stansen. You may let him go now, my boys."

The juniors released Stansen.

Mr. Browning-Jones took him away, with an iron grip on his shoulder; and the wretched youth passed the remainder of that night locked up with the young schoolmaster in his room.

Mr. Railton turned to Tom Merry & Co. when he was gone.

"I need not say how I thank you for this!" he said, in a low voice. "You have prevented what would have been a fearful catastrophe. Thank Heaven you succeeded! I hardly dare think what would have happened if that wretched boy had carried out his intention. You shall explain it fully to me to-morrow. Go back to bed now."

"Yes, sir."

"Good-night, my boys! And Heaven bless you!" said Mr. Railton.

And Tom Merry & Co. went slowly upstairs.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as they reached the Fourth Form dormitory. "Bai Jove, I knew that chap was a wottah, but I nevah expected this! Let this be a warnin' to you fellows—"

"What?" howled Blake. "Are you beginning that again?"

"I was not addressin' you, Blake, deah boy. Let this be a warnin' to you, Tom Mewwy, not to take to smokin' and dwinikin'—"

"Eh?"

"Let it be a warnin'—ow!"

Tom Merry took the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulders and sat him down suddenly on the floor. Then the Terrible Three walked on to their dormitory.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Let that be a warning to you!" grinned Blake. "A warning not to play the giddy goat, and—"

"Oh, pway don't be an ass!"

And D'Arcy went in to bed. The Terrible Three reached the Shell dormitory, and found half the Form awake and eager for information as to what had happened. Nor were the chums allowed to go to bed till they had explained.

"My hat!" said Kangaroo, with a long breath. "What a giddy escape! I shall feel safer when that chap is out of St. Jim's."

Out of St. Jim's Stansen was the next morning! Mr. Browning-Jones took him away at daylight, and the "Saints" never saw him again. The other B.-J. boys remained at the school a few days longer, but Stansen did not return. The half-insane youth was taken to a private home, where he could be cared for and kept under strict supervision, and there was no danger of his repeating his attempts at incendiarism. Inspector Knowsey had the satisfaction of knowing that his suspicions had been well founded; and Mr. Browning-Jones, as soon as the truth was established, had, of course, a claim for compensation. That claim Mr. Stansen, the wretched boy's father, met generously enough; and ere the week was out Mr. Browning-Jones had taken temporary quarters for his little school, while the burnt building was in the process of reconstruction. But, with the exception of the affair of Stansen, which had so nearly proved a terrible tragedy, the St. Jim's fellows retained very pleasant recollections of the "B.-J." boys and their stay at St. Jim's when they were Burnt Out!

THE END.

## Next Week.

### "THE MYSTERIOUS DOCUMENT."

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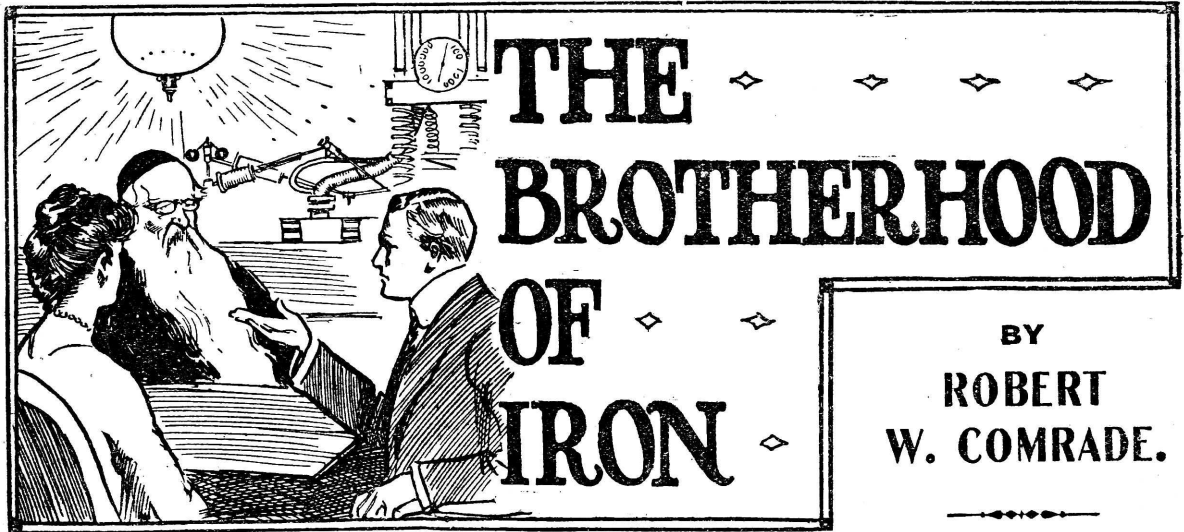
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## A Thrilling Tale of Modern Adventure on Land and Sea.



# 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.

Kingston disguises himself as the prince, and is kidnapped and taken aboard the Unicorn, the Brotherhood's yacht, which immediately sets sail for the Iron Island. During the voyage the sham prince manages to drug the drinking water, so causing all the crew to become unconscious. He then goes on deck to deal with the officers and the Inner Councillors.

(Now go on with the story.)

### Kingston Takes the Upper Hand.

The Unicorn was travelling at full speed, and the swish of the water could be heard as it slid past the great steel plates of the vessel. On the bridge Kingston, from the corner of his eye, saw the first and second officers talking together as the former manipulated the wheel.

For five minutes he sat apparently engrossed in his novel, and did not look up as he heard fresh voices. He knew, however, that the three Inner Councillors had finished their breakfast, and were now coming on deck. Captain Formby was the first to speak.

"Now, Browne," he cried, looking up to the first officer, "what's this I hear about the men feeling bad? If they think—Hullo, what do you want?"

He broke off as Crawford appeared, looking decidedly scared. He stood before the councillors, breathing hard. They were all attired in white flannels and Panama hats, and all smoked cigars.

"Well, what's the matter?" demanded Formby, looking Crawford up and down.

"They're all dead, sir!" gasped the man, quite loud enough for Kingston to hear. "All the men have been poisoned or something, an' they're all lyin'—"

"What do you mean?" interrupted Count von Brezzen quickly. "Why can't you tell us what this fool's tale is?"

Frank Kingston rose leisurely.

"Pardon me!" he exclaimed, leaning against the rail. "May I be allowed to make a few remarks?"

"This matter is hardly one in which your Highness's assistance is necessary," said the captain sharply. "You would oblige me by not interfering."

"Then I regret to say, my dear Formby," replied Kingston coolly, "that I am not in a position to oblige you. You will kindly remain perfectly still, and do precisely as I tell you."

And the Inner Councillors gasped as they saw the "Crown Prince" twirling a couple of revolvers about in his fingers. He stood by the rail every bit at his ease, and spoke as though he were merely making an ordinary request. Then, with unnerving suddenness, he drew himself up straight, and pointed the weapons straight at the group on the deck.

"Now, listen to me!" he said, in loud, arresting tones. "I've got you completely covered, and shall shoot at the least sign of resistance. I am desperate, and should one of the officers on the bridge make any attempt to descend I shall immediately shoot him down. Everybody else is below, so I have nothing to fear."

The councillors looked at him in amazement and fear. They were utterly flabbergasted at this sudden change of front on the prince's part, and knew quite well that he spoke the truth—that as things stood at present they were helpless to move against him.

"What," began the count—"what does this—"

"I shall answer no questions," replied Kingston sharply, "I may as well tell you, however, that I am not the person you take me for—I am not the Crown Prince of Balataria. You have doubtless realised this by the fact that I am now speaking in my natural voice."

They gazed at him utterly speechless.

"You appear surprised," went on the counterfeit prince imperturbably. "Well, I anticipated you would be somewhat astonished. I have no time to waste, and shall set about putting my plans into operation immediately. Crawford, pull yourself together, and take everything from the pockets of those three gentlemen—or, I should say, scoundrels!"

Crawford's eyes bulged in affected fear.

"I daren't! I—I—"

"I give you five seconds to decide," declared Kingston implacably. "Ah, I am glad you have come to your senses! Be as quick as you can over it, for I assure you I am not in a mood to be very lenient."

Gnashing their teeth with rage, Formby, Lyle, and Von Brezzen were forced to allow themselves to be searched one after another. Those two glittering revolvers could not be lightly disregarded. Somehow the tone of Kingston's voice told them that he meant what he said—that he would indeed use them if they showed the least sign of resistance.

Kingston himself stood there against the rail, a stern, immovable figure, with his arms outstretched holding the two weapons. The officers on the bridge looked down in fear and amazement. They were consulting together now, and as they saw that Kingston's attention was fixed solely on their superiors, one of them decided to make a move. Very cautiously the second officer edged towards the ladder, feeling, as he did so, for a whistle which he carried in his pocket.

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Read "THE SCHOOL ON STRIKE" The Grand Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co., appearing in this week's "MAGNET" LIBRARY Now on Sale, 1d.



"My warning was evidently useless," said the Avenger suddenly. He spoke with extreme quietness, yet his voice was quite clear and distinct. A faint click sounded, to be followed almost immediately by a cry from the first officer. His companion had slipped to the bridge-deck as though struck by a rifle-shot.

"Good heavens!" cried Browne, the first officer. "What a terrible weapon!"

He made no attempt to reach his fallen comrade, realising in time that if he did so he would share a similar fate. Those below had heard his remark, and had seen the officer fall, and it caused them to tremble somewhat with fear. The whole thing had been so sudden, so unexpected, that it took the nerve out of them.

"That's the lot," muttered Crawford sullenly, as he laid a final article on the heap which ornamented the deck. "I'm very sorry, sir," he went on, turning to the captain, "but I couldn't do nothin' else, could I, seein' as—"

"That is enough!" snapped Kingston abruptly, for he was, of course, treating Crawford as an ordinary common-member of the Brotherhood. "Lower one of the lifeboats between the four of you, and you, Browne, telegraph for the yacht to come to a standstill. If you attempt to let the engineer know more you know what to expect."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Formby hoarsely, losing all his nerve. "What is the boat to be lowered for?"

"You will know in a very few minutes," replied Kingston coolly. "That's right, Browne! Now you have given the necessary order I will dispose of you."

So saying, Kingston lifted one of his weapons for a second, and another click sounded. It was immediately followed by a thud as the first officer's body struck the boards. To the Inner Councillors it seemed almost uncanny, and they all decided to follow instructions to the letter, being under the impression that the other two were lying dead.

For a few moments they bustled about lowering the lifeboat and the accommodation ladder. The Unicorn had now come to a standstill, and was floating gently on the surface of the clear blue water. Kingston was well aware that somebody might come up from below at any moment, but should such a thing occur he was quite prepared to deal with him.

"So far so good!" he exclaimed, as the boat lay at the bottom of the ladder. "Now, you three will kindly take your places in the boat and grasp the oars. I will sit in the stern, facing you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, but—"

"No 'buts'! Do as I say without question. You, Crawford, have carried out my orders very well, but I must nevertheless treat you as I have done the others."

He raised the revolver, and a moment later Crawford, too, lay on the deck inert and motionless. The three Inner Councillors hurried briskly as they saw what had occurred, and took their seats as directed in the lifeboat.

All three of them were shaking with fear, Count von Brezen being the palest and the most agitated of the trio. Not that the others were at all composed. As a matter of fact, they were decidedly unnerved and terrorised. This startling development had taken them completely by surprise.

"Row away from the ship with all speed," directed Kingston, as soon as he had taken his place in the rear of the boat. "When we have travelled five hundred yards you can talk all you like, but until then—silence!"

The boat moved rapidly away from the Unicorn's side. The yacht lay there, gently heaving to the surface swell, her funnel emitting a slight haze of smoke and her exhaust valve hissing impatiently. The engineer below knew nothing of what was happening, and, Kingston reckoned, would not come up to make inquiries for at least ten minutes.

So, in this dramatic fashion, the three Inner Councillors were driven from their own vessel. And it had all been done by one man—one man and an assistant who merely carried out orders. It was an amazing piece of audacity, but it had been successful. In ten minutes' time the little boat would be a speck in the distance, and then—

And then the Inner Councillors would receive a fresh surprise.

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### The Unicorn Changes Her Course.

"At last!"

Frank Kingston uttered these words as he perceived, about twenty yards distant, a slight disturbance on the surface of the water. The lifeboat had already passed nearly out of sight of the Unicorn, which was invisible save for the masts and funnel.

"You may cease rowing!" exclaimed Kingston, with his eye on that disturbance of the water. "The yacht is quite out of sight, and we are unobserved."

The impotent scoundrels were entirely nonplussed.

"What are you going to do with us?" demanded the count.

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hoarsely. "Why have you brought us out here in this boat? You are worse off here than you were— Great heavens!"

His companions, too, uttered exclamations of amazement as a shining, slate-grey body rose from the water, and drifted close to them. It was the Dart. Fraser had carried out his instructions to the letter.

"A submarine!" gasped Lyle, letting his oar slip through his fingers in his surprise. "I—"

"There is no need for you to be puzzled!" exclaimed Kingston suavely. "The vessel you now see before you has been immediately behind the Unicorn ever since she left Corunna. The man in charge of her knew exactly what would happen, and when he saw the boat leave the yacht's side, he simply followed me."

The prisoners glanced at one another almost fearfully. Seemingly their abduction had been arranged days ahead, and they writhed with impotence. To be foiled and played with by this one man was not only exasperating, but terrifying in the extreme. His powers seemed unlimited, and by now they were quite convinced that he was none other than the secret enemy Lord Mount-Fannell had been so agitated about. His whole manner had changed, and it was quite plain to see he was not Prince Zavier.

"You are—you are going to take us aboard that submarine?" asked Lyle, in a whisper.

"Precisely! I assure you she is quite safe, although your quarters will not be very comfortable. Ah, Fraser," Kingston added, as the conning-tower opened, and Fraser's head appeared, "you have done very well indeed. Step out on deck, and make this boat fast. You will then see these three gentlemen safely aboard."

After replying to Kingston's sentence, Fraser gave the three "gentlemen" a glance which was exceedingly hostile. Fraser did not have many chances to show his real mind to the Inner Councillors, but when he did have that advantage he made full use of it.

"Before stepping aboard," directed Kingston, as soon as the lifeboat was made fast to the Dart, "you will take your coats and caps off. Never mind what for, but do as I tell you. Fraser, don't forget to be ready."

Fraser understood.

"Very good, sir," he replied; and grinned delightedly. He disappeared below, leaving the small entrance clear to admit the three prisoners. They, for their part, could do nothing in face of the revolver, which remained before their eyes the whole time. One by one they removed their coats and hats, and one by one stepped into the submarine, leaving Kingston alone in the open boat.

"Good!" he told himself, as the last one disappeared. "Now for that little piece of deception. I will warrant the Unicorn finds the traces, and draws the conclusion which seems to be the most obvious."

Three minutes later Kingston himself stepped down the tiny ladder into the interior of the Dart. Meanwhile, what was happening on board the Unicorn, the masts of which were still faintly visible on the horizon?

Kingston's surmise had been correct—more than correct as a matter of fact. A full twenty-five minutes elapsed before anyone came on deck from below. It was no business of the engineers why the ship should be stopped, and most of them happened at the time to be repairing a slight mishap which had nothing to do with the running of the vessel. At the conclusion of twenty-five minutes, however, the chief engineer remembered that they were still stationary, and, having finished the job, decided to run up on deck.

As he reached the top of the companion he was somewhat puzzled at the unusual quietness which prevailed, and the absence of anyone in his immediate vision. A frown puckered his brow for a moment, as he stepped across the deck.

"It's verra strange," he muttered to himself, then started forward hurriedly, as he perceived the inert figure of Crawford on the deck. The man was lying on his back, apparently lifeless. The chief engineer bent over him for a moment, then glanced up at the bridge.

It was deserted.

"The cap'n himsel' seems tae be awa'!" he exclaimed, as he ran up the bridge-ladder. "Then there's the count, an'— Hoots! What'll this be?"

He had reached the top, and had suddenly seen the forms of the two officers. Both of them were, to all intents and purposes, in the same state as Crawford. The engineer was considerably startled. In a moment he was bending over Browne, the first officer.

"Dead!" he muttered, between his teeth. "This is terrible! But there's nae sign of the cap'n— Hello!"

The officer beneath him had suddenly moved, and as the Scotsman looked down he saw that his colleague had recovered nearly all his colour in a couple of seconds. It was a great relief, but the chief engineer was absolutely startled

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the next minute when the other rose to his feet as though he had merely been having a nap. The effect of the professor's drug left a strong person with surprising rapidity.

"What's the matter wi' ye?" demanded the engineer quickly. "Are ye all shammin', or am I mad? Where's the skipper an' the other councillors?"

Browne looked round him dazed for a moment, then the remembrance of what had lately passed came back to him with a rush. He gazed frantically out to sea, then cursed violently.

"I am as much in the dark as you are, Mac!" he cried. "Listen. I will tell you everything that has occurred. It was the Crown Prince who started it, and when the yacht came to a standstill. When did you receive the notice to shut off power?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Half an hour ago!" echoed the other, descending the ladder. "Hang it! They've had time to get out of sight!"

"Who? What are ye talking about?"

Browne rapidly put his companion in possession of all the facts, and by that time the second officer and Crawford had recovered their senses. The men, too, were beginning to appear on deck, and very soon the startling news had got round.

The captain and his fellow councillors kidnapped by the prisoner! The thing was impossible. Yet the officers knew it to be the truth, and were nearly off their heads in consequence. Browne, realising that the command of the ship now fell to his lot, managed to keep his wits about him.

"They can't have gone far!" he cried, to his subordinate. "The only thing we can do is to scour round in a wide circle. In that way we are bound to pick them up, for they are only in one of the small lifeboats, with no water, or no provisions!"

In a moment the Unicorn was steaming through the transparent water full speed ahead, a couple of men at the mastsheads armed with powerful glasses. They scanned the horizon on every hand, and the officers below waited anxiously for them to give the cry that the missing men were sighted.

For over thirty minutes the steam yacht forged ahead in a wide circle, and just as the first officer was beginning to give up hope, a cry came from up aloft. Something had been sighted a mile or so to starboard, and the Unicorn was therefore turned in that direction.

The officers were in a considerable state of agitation, for this strange happening had been sprung upon them with stunning abruptness. They could hardly realise that the captain and his two companions had disappeared, in addition to the prisoner—the Crown Prince of Balataria. But no, he was not the Crown Prince. He was an impostor, who had laid out his whole plan of campaign before boarding the vessel.

A cry of surprise and dread arose when the Unicorn steamed close enough to perceive that the object was nothing more nor less than their own lifeboat. But it was deserted, and floated placidly on the calm water bottom upwards!

"What can it mean?" cried the first officer anxiously. "That is our boat, I will swear. But where are its occupants? I cannot believe—I cannot—I—"

He broke off, unable to complete the sentence, for the truth struck him very forcibly—or, rather, what he thought to be the truth. In frantic terms he gave an order for a boat to be lowered, and telegraphed below that the engines should be stopped. Then, accompanied by his second, he stepped into the boat, and they were rowed rapidly towards that significant object so close.

There was a dead silence when they perceived a couple of caps floating near the boat. Further on, drifted some little distance away, a dark, floating object could be seen. Browne looked at it with a slight shudder. What was it? Could it be—

"Make for that—that black thing over there!" he ordered sharply; and gave a muttered exclamation of relief when he perceived that it was only a coat. But immediately afterwards he wondered why he should have felt relieved, for the truth seemed absolutely conclusive.

"There's nobody here," whispered the second officer, in a subdued voice. Under the glare of the bright sun their mission seemed a very strange one, for on that beautiful day it seemed hardly possible that four people had gone to their death so recently. Yet what else could be concluded?

"There's only one thing to think!" exclaimed the first officer, when they were back on the Unicorn. "That scoundrel who was disguised as the Crown Prince gave himself away, life and soul, for the sake of the real prince. He realised how hopeless his position was, and did not intend to be taken to the Iron Island, to be made a prisoner."

"And so—"

"And so he has acted in this way. Before committing suicide he has sent to their deaths three of our most valuable



The sound of voices reached Kingston's ears, and the next second the faces of Don Sebastian and Colonel Marsden looked down upon him. "I thought you would turn up before long," exclaimed Kingston coolly. (See page 27.)

councillors. The thing is awful. I hardly know what to do about it."

"There is only one thing to be done," said the other, who was a man with very little human feeling in his composition. "Since the whole four of 'em are dead, our only course is to go straight back home. Neither you nor myself are in any way to blame for what has occurred, and the Chief, being a just man, will quite recognise that."

"But our object," protested the first officer. "We were to go to the Iron Island."

"Of course! But that is all altered now. To go there would be so much waste of time and fuel, for there is absolutely no object in doing so. I tell you, Browne, this whole affair has been nicely messed up. Formby was a decent sort, and it seems rather a pity that he should go like this. Still," he added callously, "we can't help him now, so the best thing is to help ourselves."

"And get back to England?"

"Exactly!"

And so as soon as the lifeboat had been once more hauled aboard the Unicorn, she turned her bows round, and started off for British shores. Her object was unaccomplished, her commander apparently dead, and her prisoner in a similar state. The first part of Kingston's object had been successfully achieved. The Unicorn, with her large crew and officers, would never discover the existence of the two exiles who lived their lonely lives on the Iron Island.

### Full Speed Ahead for the Iron Island.

At the same moment as the Unicorn started off on her long journey homewards, the little submarine was speeding rapidly along the surface of the water with her conning-tower just showing.

After overturning the boat, Frank Kingston had descended the little ladder into the interior of the Dart. The first person he saw was Tim Curtis, the youngster he had saved from the clutches of the Brotherhood.

"Lummy, sir," exclaimed the lad, "I'm mighty pleased to see yer again! When you come aboard at Corunna, I was away, an' never saw yer. My word, I wasn't 'arf wild when Fraser tole me!"

Kingston smiled.

"Well, young 'un," he said, "you see me now, and will do so for many a day to come. There is still a long sea voyage before us."

"Are we goin' to make straight for the Coronet now, sir?" asked Tim eagerly. "An' are you goin' to be with us all the time?"

"Yes, my lad, I am. That's right, Fraser. When those beauties wake up they will find themselves decidedly uncomfortable. Well, after their careers of crime, they deserve to suffer a little discomfort."

As a general rule, Kingston was one of the kindest and most considerate of men; but when it came to dealing with these cold-blooded members of the Inner Council, he steeled his heart. He hardly looked upon them as men, but as being entirely separate from their fellows.

As Formby, Lyle, and the count had descended into the interior of the submarine, so had Fraser pricked each of them with a long, finely-pointed, prepared stiletto. This was a wise precaution, for, being desperate, they could have easily have overpowered both Fraser and Tim before Kingston put in an appearance.

The trio now lay on the floor, and Fraser was in the act of putting them in irons—or, in other words, securing their legs and hands. They would recover their wits within an hour, but would then be quite helpless. Kingston had a lot to thank Professor Graham Polgrave for. There was no denying that his inventions were marvels of science.

"There is no necessity for us to travel under water," said Kingston, going over to the engine. "The Coronet is only about three hours' run from where we now are, so we shall arrive there in time for late luncheon."

"And what about these, sir?" inquired Fraser, giving the Inner Councillors a dark look. "Are you goin' to keep them in the dark until we get to the Iron Island?"

"That is my intention. You can see after them quite well—the same as you did when Colonel Marsden was aboard. I admit it will not be pleasant for them, cooped up here in this heat; but beggars can't be choosers. They will submit readily enough when they know they are not going to be killed."

Kingston was right. The prisoners opened their eyes some time later as they were speeding through the water. The cupboard-like structure which had been Colonel Marsden's prison on the previous voyage had now been completely done away with. This left much more room, for the submarine was only a small one.

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Without the least sign of hurry, and very coolly, Kingston told the trio what he intended doing with them, and that in future they would have to spend their lives in the company of Don Sebastian and Colonel Marsden on the Iron Island.

They were amazed when they learned of the latter's presence on that lonely Pacific rock, but, having been fully convinced that death would be their lot, the news came somewhat as a relief.

"You will remain in this submarine during the whole voyage," concluded Kingston. "Of course, the vessel will not remain afloat the whole time, but will be placed on the deck of my yacht. It will be quite useless for you to raise any outcry, for nobody on the yacht will take the slightest notice. I do not mean to starve you or hurt you in any way, but for the next week or so you will remain in this vessel manacled as you now are, and strictly guarded by my assistants. You know what to expect should you be foolish enough to offer resistance. When we reach the island you will be free to do exactly as you wish."

"We shall be rescued!" snarled Count von Brezen triumphantly. "The Unicorn is bound—"

"For London," concluded Kingston coolly. "I have arranged a little piece of deception which will entirely hoodwink your excellent first officer. He will return to the Chief and report that myself, together with you three, have all been drowned. The inference they will draw is that I have murdered you and committed suicide myself. So please have no false idea as to your being rescued. I speak from experience, as I was on the island myself for eight years without the sight of a sail."

The three prisoners looked at him with sudden surprise.

"What do you mean?" demanded Lyle.

"Yes," put in the captain, "let us know the meaning of your words. And, anyhow, who are you?"

Before Kingston answered he turned aside for a couple of minutes and faced a tiny mirror which hung on the wall. When he turned again, the resemblance to Prince Xavier had disappeared, and he was once more in his own personality.

"You wish to know who I am?" he inquired blandly.

"Well, my name at the present time is Frank Kingston, although—"

"Frank Kingston!" cried Lyle in amazement. "Why—why— Good heavens, this is utterly inconceivable! Are you the man who has been causing all this trouble to the Brotherhood? You, the man I always looked upon as a brainless fool? I have met you on many occasions at balls and dances, but I never dreamed that you were anything more than you appeared to be on the surface!"

"Thank you," smiled Kingston. "You are paying me a compliment, Lyle. But now that you are my prisoners there is no necessity for me to conceal the truth. For months I have been working against your vile organisation in the personality of Frank Kingston, and nobody has ever had a breath of suspicion against me, and I could go up to the Chief himself, to-day, and he would never even have the slightest inkling of my true identity."

He had surprised his listeners, indeed, and for a moment they hardly knew what to say. It stunned them to think that the secret enemy of the Brotherhood was a man who was well known in London society.

"But you mentioned the Iron Island!" exclaimed Von Brezen, his curiosity getting the better of his rage. "What did you mean by saying that you had had practical experience, and that you had been on the Island for eight years?"

"I spoke the perfect truth," replied Kingston, smiling sideways at Fraser and Tim, who were listening with keen enjoyment. "It may interest you to know that my name, before I became Frank Kingston, was simply Philip Graydon, the man you and your colleagues exiled for life on that lonely rock."

"You Philip Graydon!" cried Formby. "Why, the idea is perfectly ridiculous! Don Sebastian himself found Graydon's remains— No, but—"

Kingston smiled as the captain hesitated and broke off his sentence.

"You are beginning to remember," he said quietly, "that Don Sebastian is himself a prisoner on the Iron Island. There is a lot to explain, but I do not feel inclined to trouble myself to do so. When you reach the Iron Island, I dare say the other two will tell you a great deal of which you are now in ignorance. You imagined Don Sebastian had turned traitor, and in that you were misjudging him. Were he free he would still be a staunch member of your society. But he is not free—he is in a position precisely similar to your own."

Kingston enjoyed seeing the others' amazed expressions, but he refused to talk further on the subject. He changed from the lounge suit he wore into one of spotless white drill,

and became, indeed, the languid and sleepy-eyed fop who was so well-known for his inane laugh and still more inane conversation.

The three prisoners had sense enough to realise that they could do nothing to help themselves. Naturally, they imagined that everybody aboard the *Coronet* would be aware of their presence, and that, therefore, no amount of shouting would be available. But everybody on the yacht would not know of their presence. The crew and petty-officers would remain in total ignorance of their presence, for Kingston had by no means let them into his plans, or, in fact, anything beyond the fact that he was not quite the fool he looked. The captain, however, knew all, for Kingston had found Morrison to be a thoroughly trustworthy man.

The latitude in which the *Coronet* had been instructed to stop was rapidly neared, and Kingston, as he stood, with his head and shoulders in the open air, scanning the horizon, smiled with satisfaction as he perceived, far away, the outline of the yacht's funnel and superstructure.

He was not quite sure whether the vessel was the *Coronet* at that distance, but very soon, as they drew nearer, he was able to recognise the well-known lines of his own vessel. He bent down for a moment.

"Keep the engines going just as they are now, and when I give the order, dive."

He descended the little ladder, and clamped the conning-tower manhole securely in position. Then, having seen that the periscope was all in order, he gave the word. Immediately the *Dart* slipped under water, and proceeded on her journey just below the surface.

"We are nearing the yacht, *Fraser*," remarked Kingston, as he took charge of the wheel. "There is no need to stop up until I give the word. See, we are quite close."

He pointed to the reflection before him, and *Fraser* and *Tim* looked eagerly. Three minutes later the officers and crew of the *Coronet* were startled to see the dark, shining body of the submarine dart upwards and come to a standstill quite close. The manhole swung open, and Kingston, smiling and cool, looked up at the row of eager faces against the rail.

"The gov'nor!" cried one of the sailors excitedly. "Luv a duck, mates, it's a lickie!"

Something like a cheer went up from the assembled crew, and *Captain Morrison*, rapidly descending from the bridge, hastened to the rail and gazed overboard.

"Good-morning, captain!" exclaimed Kingston. "You are looking quite as well as usual. You might lower the accommodation ladder so that I can get aboard."

*Morrison* had all his work cut out to conceal his feelings of amazement. He well knew the task Kingston had just been engaged upon, and had had more than a suspicion that he would never be seen again alive. Yet here he was, cool and smiling, as though he had merely been on an hour's run.

The captain quickly gave the necessary orders, and Kingston stepped on to the ladder. At the top a whole group were waiting to greet him. *Professor Polgrave's* face was wrinkled into its usual mass of creases as he welcomed the new-comer.

*Dolores*, although she did not show it, was chiding herself for having had a fear that her friend would not keep his word and turn up as arranged.

Kingston treated the whole matter as a very trivial one, and seemed surprised when they greeted him as having just arrived from a long voyage. The prince was more warm in his greeting now than he had been previously, for he fully understood what this man had done for his sake.

"The first thing I require," smiled Kingston, as he was pressed into a deck-chair under a large awning, "is a good luncheon. I have touched nothing since early this morning, and I can give you my word that I am really hungry."

"Luncheon is just about to be served, I imagine," put in the professor. "Ah, yes, there goes the gong, if I am not mistaken. But, upon my soul, I am afraid I shall eat nothing! Your coming has so excited me that my appetite has entirely vanished!"

"That's a pity," replied Kingston. "But once you begin to eat, professor, you will find your appetite returning. But if you will excuse me a minute, I should like to speak to the captain for a moment before accompanying you to the saloon."

He hurried across the deck, and lightly mounted the bridge ladder. The captain was there, alone, and he looked inquiringly at Kingston as the latter approached.

"I can't stop to explain anything now, *Morrison*," said the owner of the *Coronet* quickly, "but everything has gone right from the beginning. The three prisoners are safe and sound in the submarine, and nothing remains, row, but for you to set our course for the Pacific."

"Do we start at once, sir?" asked the captain eagerly.

"Immediately. There is no reason why we should remain here at a standstill. Let the yacht go for all she's worth, and do not stop, unless it is necessary, until we draw within ten miles of the *Iron Island*. There is no need to call at any port for water or coal, I presume?"

"None whatever, sir."

"Good! Then do as I say, and after luncheon I will explain in full what has been occurring on the other yacht."

Five minutes later the *S.Y. Coronet*, with the *Dart* hanging from its own special davits, was gliding through the water full-speed ahead. The second phase of the adventure had commenced.

### The Arrival at the Island.

When *Frank Kingston* entered the saloon he found the others already at their places. The head of the table had been left vacant, and he seated himself with a smile. The *Crown Prince* was looking quite contented of mind and at ease. Before commencing the voyage he had resigned himself to a dull time of it, but by now had found that he was enjoying the trip immensely.

"You'll tell us all about it, *Mr. Kingston*, won't you?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly; but before talking we had better lunch. I find I have developed a great appetite since leaving England, and at the present moment I am very hungry. And to talk and eat at the same time is rather difficult."

So the meal proceeded merrily, the talk being merely light and dealing with everyday trifles. *Dolores* was looking particularly radiant that morning, and the professor simply overflowed with geniality. Kingston was not vain enough to suppose they were extra light-hearted because he had returned to their midst. Yet this was the case.

The very instant the meal was finished the whole party reascended to the deck, and as they crossed over to the awning Kingston beckoned to the skipper, who was still on the bridge. The latter understood, and immediately descended.

"You've expressed a desire to hear what has been happening on the *Unicorn, Morrison*," said Kingston languidly, "so I'll tell the story now. I really fail to see anything vastly interesting in it, but— Well, you can judge for yourselves."

Very quietly, and in plain, straightforward language, he proceeded to tell them everything that had occurred since he left London. He did not fail to emphasise the fact that without *Crawford* he would have been more or less helpless. Indeed, from the way he spoke, one would have imagined that *Crawford* had done the lion's share of the work, but his listeners guessed the truth easily enough in spite of his modesty.

"But really, professor," exclaimed Kingston, when everything had been told, "I owe a very great deal to that marvellous drug of yours, and more especially to the revolver. This latter has been simply invaluable."

He held up as he spoke the glittering silver-plated revolver which had temporarily laid out the two officers on the bridge of the *Unicorn*.

"The weapon is very simple," replied the professor, beaming—"very simple indeed. I cannot claim to be the inventor of it, in any way, for its principle is practically the same as that of any ordinary air-gun."

"But no air-gun is made to shoot those little darts," put in *Dolores*. "It must be very much more useful than an ordinary revolver, for the latter may kill and would certainly injure, while this merely renders a person unconscious."

"That is the whole idea of the thing," replied *Polgrave*. "It is in no way deadly, but of far more use than a cartridge-pistol; unless, of course, one wishes to take life, and I am sure *Mr. Kingston* is not inclined that way—quite sure."

"You are right, professor, for while I want every Inner Councillor to meet with his just deserts, I have no intention of shooting them down. This invention enables me to be in a far safer position than I should be if I carried a real revolver. But now that I have told you everything, won't you let me know how you, yourselves, have been getting on?"

*Dolores* laughed.

"We?" she reiterated. "We have simply been enjoying ourselves, *Mr. Kingston*, with nothing at all exciting except the thought of you aboard the enemy's ship disguised as the prince. There's nothing whatever to tell you."

"And you, your Highness?" said Kingston, turning to *Zavir*, who was leaning back comfortably in a deck-chair, puffing at a cigarette. "Have you been in any way inconvenienced by this enforced trip?"

"To speak quite frankly, *Mr. Kingston*," replied the prince, "I imagined before boarding the *Coronet* that I was destined to spend an exceedingly unenjoyable sea-voyage. But by this time I have come to the conclusion that I could not,

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have spent a more delightful time anywhere. You must allow me, at some future time, to show you my gratitude for all the help you have rendered me in this unfortunate business."

"I assure you, prince, that I have been working for my own ends as well as yours. There are three more Inner Councillors accounted for—or, rather, they will be after we have paid this visit to the Iron Island."

Dolores glanced at Frank Kingston.

"What do you intend doing after that?" she queried.

"That," replied Kingston, "is a question we must leave the prince to decide."

"I!" exclaimed his Highness. "How do you mean?"

"Well, before returning to England I mean to land you in your own country," replied Kingston quietly. "Remember, there is still General Stolzenburg to deal with. Personally, I shall do nothing with regard to him, for he is not a member of the Brotherhood. Once you come into power, however, it will be quite a simple matter to have him arrested."

"Quite," agreed the prince grimly. "When that time does come he shall be shown no mercy. Stolzenburg is a traitor of the basest description, and deserves nothing but death. It is galling to think that while I, the Crown Prince, am helpless, he has practically supreme power. This being the case, it will be little short of dangerous for me to enter Balataria."

"Quite so," drawled Kingston. "You told me, while in London, that you had some staunch friends and supporters a few miles from the capital. Now I propose you should proceed there immediately we leave the Iron Island."

"But I should be known," protested Zavier; "and although a great many of the people are devoted to me, I should undoubtedly find myself in difficulties. Stolzenburg is particularly anxious to get me out of the way, and as this plot has failed he will be desperate."

Kingston bent forward in his chair.

"But he will never know you are in Balataria!" he exclaimed. "I shall take you there disguised, and you can remain so until the time comes when you are yourself the king. It is very sad and unfortunate that you should be forced to be away from your father's side at such a time as this. But it is inevitable if you are to ever reign over your country."

"I quite understand that," replied the prince seriously. "But how will you do this?" he continued, in an eager voice.

"How will you get me to these friends near the capital?"

"The matter will be quite a simple one. You can accompany us disguised as an English tourist, and we can be a party together 'doing' Monte Questo and the surrounding country. In that way you will be on the spot, and the very instant your father is laid to rest you can claim your rights to the throne. The denouement will be so sudden that Stolzenburg will have no time to act before he finds himself placed under arrest."

The prince rose to his feet and paced up and down for a moment.

"It is a splendid idea, Mr. Kingston!" he cried. "The matter has been worrying me whenever I thought of it, but by doing as you suggest my difficulties are at an end. But how can you spare the time to do this?"

"My time is not exactly valuable," replied Kingston, with a smile; "and it does not matter one whit whether I return to London in one month or two months from now. Besides that, I shall thoroughly enjoy the trip to Balataria."

"And how about us?" put in the professor somewhat anxiously. "What are Miss O'Brien and myself going to do?"

"Come with us," replied Kingston. "As I said, we shall be a party, and as soon as his Highness has succeeded to the throne we shall make for the coast, board the Coronet, and return to England. By that time I shall be quite ready to deal with the next Inner Councillor on my list. For the present, however, we have simply got to enjoy ourselves."

And Kingston's words proved to be the truth. During the long journey to the Pacific the party aboard the Coronet found plenty of entertainment. The days seemed to go by quickly enough, and Kingston, although he never showed any signs of it, was rather impatient to get to their journey's end. He disliked idleness of any sort, and was never happier than when in the thick of an exciting adventure.

But all things must come to an end at some time or other, and finally, soon after breakfast on a hot, sultry morning, the Coronet slowly came to a standstill. She was within ten miles of the island Kingston was so intimately acquainted with.

"I suppose you won't do anything to-day, sir," ventured Morrison, as Kingston ascended to the bridge.

"On the contrary, Morrison, I shall get the whole business finished with. I've no desire to remain here a moment longer than is necessary, so please see about lowering the submarine so that I can depart within half an hour."

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NEXT WEEK: "THE MYSTERIOUS DOCUMENT."

"Very good, sir," returned Morrison, who was used to his master's sudden decisions. "After all, there couldn't be a better day for it. The glass is high, and there's hardly a breath of wind. Who's going with you, sir?"

"Nobody—nobody, that is, except Fraser and the boy. There is no reason why the others should be exposed to unnecessary risks."

But the prince and Professor Polgrave were very eager to see the place where Kingston had spent so many years of exile.

"I am very sorry," exclaimed Kingston, "but what you ask is quite impossible. The Dart is only a small vessel, and her load already is rather too much. Were you to come aboard into the bargain she would be unable to rise to the surface once she had dived. After I have landed the three scoundrels, however, I can quite easily take you aboard and make a tour round the island."

"Splendid!" cried the professor. "That will suit us to perfection, Kingston. But it would be a pity to be so near the island, and depart without setting eyes upon it. After all I have heard concerning it, I am vastly curious to see the place—vastly curious."

So it was arranged.

There was considerable excitement among the crew when the Dart was lowered to the transparent water. They merely understood that Kingston was going on a short pleasure trip, and had no suspicion that they were near land. Kingston was attired in the same spotless white drills and panama-hat. He looked somewhat bored as he murmured a languid *au revoir*, and proceeded to clamber down the ladder to the submarine's deck.

A few minutes later the little vessel slid away from the Coronet's side, and after travelling for about one hundred yards, suddenly disappeared below the surface. Of those who were on the yacht watching, only a few knew the true mission on which the smaller vessel had embarked.

It was no pleasure trip, but one of very serious import, and the crew would have been amazed had they known that it was then setting out to complete an act of justice; to banish for life three scoundrels who were unfit to associate with their fellow-beings.

### In the Hands of the Enemy.

"There she is, Fraser; unchanged, as far as I can see."

It was Kingston who spoke the words. He was standing in the conning-tower, gazing intently before him through a pair of powerful binoculars. Far away could be seen the outline of a rugged shore—the high ironstone cliffs of the Iron Island.

"Your journey is very nearly at an end," continued the Avenger, stepping below, and addressing himself to the sullen Inner Councillors.

By this time they had become resigned to their fate. During the long voyage they had discussed their position a thousand-and-one times, and by now realised that escape was utterly hopeless.

But it was welcome to know that they would soon be in a position to walk about and behave as they wished—besides, there was Colonel Marsden and Don Sebastian to greet them when they arrived. So Kingston's words were not exactly unwelcome.

"What do you mean?" asked Count von Brecken. "Are we nearing this accursed island?"

"We are already within sight of its shores," replied Kingston. "Nevertheless, I do not admit that the place is accursed, as you state. You will find the isle not at all a bad place to reside on. Of course, your food will mostly consist of fruit, fish, and vegetables, varied now and again by some preserved meats and other foods which I am carrying ashore for your benefit."

Not one of the trio made answer.

"I may as well let you know," continued Kingston, "that the punishment you are about to receive is scarcely adequate enough for my liking. When your numerous crimes are reckoned up you may consider that you are being let off very lightly indeed."

"Not 'arf, sir!" put in Tim, with a grimace at the prisoners. "They ain't bein' punished 'arf enough, not to my mind. Why, lummy, you was on the island for eight years all by yourself, while there'll be five on 'em there now—a little colony, pretty near."

The Dart continued her course rapidly, and at last, by very careful steering, she slipped between two of the jagged fangs of the reef and entered the peaceful blue waters of the lagoon.

# ANSWERS

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

Kingston scanned the shore expectantly, but saw no signs of life whatever. He was rather puzzled at this, for he had been certain that the two exiles would see the submarine, and would be awaiting its arrival on the beach.

Straight ahead was the little bay, with its strip of shingle extending almost to the foot of the mighty banyan-tree which Kingston knew so well. Farther back could be seen the dense foliage of the little miniature forest which he had so often entered in the cool of the evening, and where he had built a comfortable little arbour. On either hand the jagged faces of the rock stretched from the sea upwards, but nowhere was a sign of life visible.

By all appearances the island was as deserted as it had been before Kingston's sojourn thereon, and this caused him to wonder. Could Don Sebastian and Colonel Marsden have escaped? Perhaps some boat had been blown out of its course, had seen their signal, and— But Kingston dismissed the idea with a shake of his head. No sailing-ship could be blown so far as the Iron Island.

"It's very strange," he told himself. "The last time I came there were visible signs everywhere of human presence. But now everything has altered; everything seems to be deserted. It is inconceivable that they are both dead, and yet— Oh, I shall know presently, I suppose!"

The waters of the lagoon were very deep until the fore-shore was reached. This sloped steeply, so that it was possible for a person to jump from the nose of the submarine and land within his depth. The Dart came to a standstill, and Kingston stood on the tiny deck for a moment, waiting to see if anyone appeared. Nothing, however, could be heard or seen but the numerous birds and insects.

The air quivered with the heat, and Kingston shook his head a trifle as he descended the ladder.

"Now then, Fraser," he said, "let them loose one by one, and send them on deck. I shall be there armed with this revolver, so you need not worry. There is no sign whatever of my other prisoners, and I cannot quite understand it."

Once more he reached the deck, and now, armed with a megaphone, he uttered a loud shout. Until he was certain that the other two were on the island he would not be satisfied. Captain Formby ascended the ladder eagerly, and gazed round him with expectant eyes.

Kingston decided what to do. "Jump ashore!" he commanded tersely. "No, don't protest. The water is not deep, and you can easily wade up the beach. When you have done so, remain still, and don't move until I give you the word."

Formby looked at the revolver in surprise. "Why," he exclaimed, "I thought when we reached this place we were to be allowed—"

"I don't choose to explain to you my reasons," interrupted Kingston, with one eye on the captain and the other on the banyan-tree. "Jump into the water as quickly as you like."

Formby lost no time, and found that he could very easily do as Kingston had said. After the stiffness of the submarine, the plunge into the deliciously cool water was not in the least unwelcome, in spite of the fact that he went in fully dressed.

The other two were served the same, but could not understand why they had to remain near the water under cover of that revolver. Their rage at being kidnapped had now left them, and they were only curious now to see what kind of place they were destined to spend their future lives upon.

Fraser and Tim were on deck, looking on interestedly. "Fraser," exclaimed his master suddenly, "I am going ashore."

"Ashore, sir?" "Yes. As there is no sign of Don Sebastian or Marsden, I mean to find out what has become of them. You remain here until I return."

"But it will be dangerous, sir," protested Fraser. "Suppose they're alive—an' there ain't any reason to think they're dead—there'll be five of 'em against you. Even you, sir, would have your work cut out to get the better o' five."

"I don't think I could do it, Fraser, and certainly do not mean to risk such a thing. You are to remain here and keep the three covered by your own revolver until I come back. On no account allow them to move out of your sight."

"Right, sir! That puts a different light on it. You can easily hold your own against two of 'em."

"Well, I shall certainly do my best," smiled Kingston.

He drew himself back, and then, with one clear spring, landed on the dry sand. It was a magnificent leap, and Fraser and Tim found it difficult for a moment to keep their feet, for the Dart rocked considerably as Kingston left the bows.

Without once looking behind him he hurried up the shingle, the professor's revolver in his right hand. His keen eyesight missed nothing whatever, and he looked searchingly into the banyan-tree as he drew near. The hollow centre had obviously not been used for human habitation for many months, so he proceeded up the rugged path with the intention of reaching the luxuriant vegetation which grew a little further on. He knew that on the far side there was a small stretch of grassland before it changed to the hard and bare ironstone, but, owing to the trees, he could not see this.

Up the path he remembered so well he walked with his usual springy step, and smiled a little as he came within sight of the arbour. It was overgrown now with many weeds and creepers, and he seriously began to think that his two prisoners were either dead or had escaped.

And then a startling thing happened. He was walking along, gazing intently ahead along the pathway, when, with no warning whatever, he felt himself falling. It was puzzling, because the ground seemed to be perfectly sound. To save himself was utterly impossible, for it all happened in less than half a second.

The whole sandy ground upon which he had been walking gave way and precipitated him headlong down a long and dark well-like shaft. To make matters worse, his revolver, as he involuntarily flung his hands out, flew from his grasp and landed on the surface. With a jar he reached the bottom of the pit, and just managed to keep his feet.

"By Jove," he murmured, "I've been trapped!" The thought seemed in no way to disconcert him, and the fall, although it would probably have seriously shaken another man, apparently affected him very little. The ground beneath his feet was composed of soft, loose sand, and this broke the violence of the fall somewhat.

He looked up, and could see that the well was about sixteen feet deep. Above the top the bright green of the vegetation could be seen, and Kingston listened intently. Suddenly he smiled.

"I thought so," he said to himself. The sound of voices reached his ears, and the next second a couple of triumphant faces looked down upon him. They belonged to Don Sebastian, the Spaniard, and Colonel Marsden. Kingston nodded.

"I thought you would turn up before long," he exclaimed coolly.

"You fool!" said Marsden, in a harsh voice. "You have run your head right into the noose. Nothing can save you, for you are even deprived of your revolver. That will come in useful to us later on, Don."

"It will," replied the other. "And now, Mr. Frank Kingston, we are going to leave you to yourself for a while. We have seen everything that has occurred, and now mean to ascertain who the three men are whom you have landed."

"They are a trio of your old companions," said Kingston calmly. "You will doubtless be pleased to see them, for they should prove pleasant company when I have left you to yourselves again."

Don Sebastian laughed derisively. "That will never be!" he cried. "You will not leave this island again alive!"

"You can, of course, stick to that opinion," returned Frank Kingston languidly, "but I am afraid I must differ from you. You are mistaken, my excellent Sebastian—very much mistaken!"

#### Fraser Goes for Help.

Don Sebastian laughed derisively at Kingston's words. The careless tone in which they were spoken, however, caused him to feel just a little uneasy. He was well awake to the fact that Kingston was an extraordinary individual, and the recollection of his former encounter many months before was still vivid in his memory.

"He'll be safe enough down there!" chuckled Colonel Marsden, standing on the edge of the pit, and gazing down.

"Not safe enough for me," said the Spaniard. "You don't know him, Marsden. Help me to drag those logs across the top; they'll bottle him in securely."

He indicated several heavy logs of wood which lay close by, and together the two exiles dragged them over the mouth of the well-like hole. Even if the prisoner had had a chance of escaping before, this move effectually prevented such a thing now—even Kingston could do nothing to help himself.

"Is that good enough for you, then?" exclaimed Marsden. "By Jove, Don, although there's no hope of our escaping, we'll have our revenge on Kingston! He's set eyes for the last time on the civilised world."

"And his death will not be an easy one!" snarled the other viciously. "One of us will have to go down to the beach and— But, stay! Why couldn't we take possession of the submarine, and get into the course of ships? The thing wouldn't be so difficult to handle."

Marsden shook his head decidedly.

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"We're exiled here," he said, "but we are alive. Your suggestion would only end in death. It would be suicidal to attempt it. Think for a moment. We don't know anything whatever about the machinery, and if the slightest mishap occurred, we should be stranded, perhaps, miles from the shore, unable to go forward or backward. Besides, the submarine would never take us to the track of ships even if we knew the way. Kingston's yacht is probably within ten miles, but as we don't know the direction, we should never find it. No, Sebastian, we're safest where we are."

Don Sebastian realised this after a moment's thought. "You are right," he exclaimed. "But although we are still marooned on this island, we have got the opportunity of exacting our revenge on the man who is responsible for our presence here. Now, you remain here, while I run down to the beach and tell the others what has happened."

"Three more—eh?" said Marsden. "Things will live up a bit now. With five of us together, we ought to be fairly comfortable. We can build that house we spoke of now they have come. I wonder who they are?"

"You will soon know."

The Spaniard picked up the revolver and examined it for a moment.

"I can't make this out," he said, after a second or two. "There seem to be no cartridges whatever. I'll take it with me, for if it was of use to Kingston, it will serve me as well."

He grasped it in his hand, and commenced walking down the path. He and Marsden cut peculiar figures. Their clothes were in rags, and both of them were bare-footed, their boots, presumably, having worn themselves out. But their faces were the strangest of all. Having no knives or razors, their hair and beards had been allowed to grow until they were now long, straggly, and thick.

Marsden's hair being very dark, he now looked a very terrifying person, with it lying on his shoulders, and his beard reaching to his middle-waistcoat button. Don Sebastian's once trimly-pointed moustaches were now lost in the thickness of his side-whiskers. He hurried along the path, and his eyes glittered as he saw the three men on the shore, with Fraser and Tim on the deck of the submarine.

"Formby, Von Brecken, and Lyle," he muttered, as he drew close enough to recognise them. "How Kingston kidnapped them is a wonder, for they are three of our very best men—or, rather, they were. Ah, they have seen me!"

He walked over the hard pebbles which littered the sand as though they did not exist, for by this time his feet had become hardened. He saw the look of puzzled surprise on Fraser's face, and chuckled inwardly.

"Why, it's Don Sebastian!" cried Formby, after a moment's scrutiny. "By Jove, I hardly recognised you—"

"Don't waste time over greetings now," interrupted the Spaniard quickly. "I've something far more important to say. We have captured Kingston, and Marsden is now keeping guard over him! The next thing is to get rid of the submarine."

The three Inner Councillors looked at one another in surprise.

"Captured Kingston?" echoed the count. "Do you mean he is a prisoner—"

"I said so," replied Don Sebastian. "We can amuse ourselves with him as we like once this submarine has gone."

"But Fraser—the man who is on the deck there—will go back to the ship and tell the captain what has happened."

"Let him! Even if we kill Kingston, and let the captain of his ship know of it, nothing will be done, for publicity wouldn't do in a matter of this sort. We're safe enough, whatever else happens."

"What's all that talk?" cried Fraser suddenly. He was somewhat anxious regarding his master, for Don Sebastian's manner clearly showed that something out of the ordinary had happened.

The Spaniard turned at the sound of the voice.

"Ah, Fraser," he cried, in a jeering voice, "I'm afraid you will have to return to your ship alone!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Mr. Frank Kingston is entirely in our power, and that we mean to keep him! You can be off as soon as you like, for you'll never set eyes on your master again—at least, not in this world!"

Fraser's face became stern and set. He could tell from the other's tone that he was speaking the truth with regard to the first part of his sentence, and he cocked his revolver significantly. Tim's face had become a little pale.

"You speak very confidently!" exclaimed Fraser. "Mr. Kingston ain't the man to knuckle under to scum like you! You're lying!"

"Your words count for nothing. There are five of us to one, so I think we have the advantage. I tell you your master will never see his ship again!"

"Oh, yes, he will, you Spanish skunk! Besides, the whole five don't count for more than one, an' Mr. Kingston'll soon show you who's the best man! An' another thing; I've got you under cover of this revolver, and can easily pot three of you before you get out of range. I think the cards are equal."

Don Sebastian laughed easily. He could afford to.

"Not so equal as you imagine," he replied calmly. "Marsden is watching over your clever master, and can also see everything that is happening here. If one of us falls, he will instantly put an end to Kingston's life. So if you shoot you will be killing the very man you want to save!"

Fraser paled. He saw how helpless he was in a moment, and his anger got the better of him. Just when everything had been going right, it was terrible to think that Kingston might possibly have overstepped himself now.

"You scoundrel!" cried the faithful Fraser, nearly frantic at this last threat. "You've got the upper hand now, but the gov'nor'll prove that he ain't to be treated like an ordinary man!"

"Get into your vessel and clear away!" directed the Spaniard, enjoying himself immensely. This was a distinct turning of the tables. "I have a revolver here which I took from Kingston; it might possibly hasten your movements!"

He held up the glittering weapon which held the professor's marvellous darts, and Fraser, as he saw it, hurriedly entered the conning-tower and ordered Tim to follow his example. The four men on the shore laughed derisively; they naturally thought that Fraser was frightened, and had considered discretion the better part of valour. Tim, too, was somewhat surprised at his companion's hurried movement.

"Don't you see, youngster," Fraser explained worriedly, "that if that pistol went off everything would be lost? That heathen Spaniard has absolutely no scruples, and would fire for the mere fun of it."

"But it wouldn't hurt yer," protested Tim. "One o' them darts only makes yer quiet for about 'arf an hour!"

"That's just it! If it had been an ordinary revolver I wouldn't have cared. Then if he'd have fired, he might only have wounded me, but with that dart-pistol, I should have dropped immediately."

"Then they'd 'ave come aboard and wrecked the engines, p'r'aps," put in the lad shrewdly. "I see what yer mean now. You want to git back to the Coronet an' tell Miss Dolores an' the others?"

"Of course."

"We shall 'ave to be quick if we're goin' to save the gov'nor. Lummy, I shall blubber like anything if Mr. Kingston's goin' to be killed!"

"He ain't!" interjected Fraser, through set teeth—"leastways, not if I can help it. Shut that trapdoor, an' make everything secure. We're goin' right away!"

(Another thrilling instalment of this serial next Thursday.)

**HOW DO YOU DO?**



**"The Mysterious Document."**

By good fortune a strange chart giving clues to huge treasure in a South Sea island falls into Tom Merry's hands; and next Thursday's new, long, complete story is naturally full of most thrilling incidents. You must not miss reading

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More Free Hampers will be given away next week.

*The Editor.*