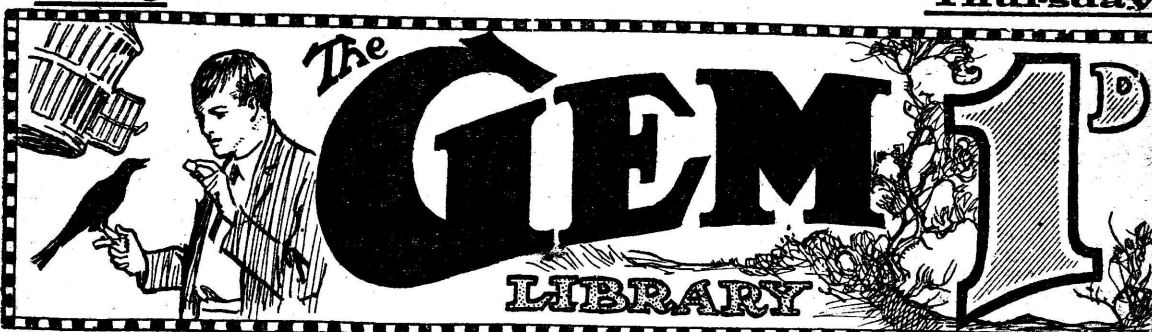


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Complete Stories for All and Every Story a Gem!



THE SECRET OF THE SEA.

Or "The Manuscript in the Bottle."

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

By . . .

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Merely a Misunderstanding.

FIGGINS of the New House came striding across the old quad. at St. Jim's with his long strides. From the doorway of the School House three juniors watched him coming, and they exchanged a grin.

The three were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell Form. The Terrible Three were in high spirits just then. St. Jim's was about to break up for the summer vacation, and the long holiday in prospect brought smiles to the sourest faces. Even fellows like Levison and Mellish looked good-tempered and cheerful; and as a matter of course Tom Merry & Co. were in great spirits. When the Terrible Three were in great spirits it generally meant ructions of some sort, too.

"Behold he cometh!" murmured Monty Lowther. "He cometh alone into the hands of the giddy foe!"

"He doth!" said Manners. "He dooth! As soon as he reaches the steps we—"

Tom Merry held up a warning hand.

"Wait till he gets inside the House," he said.

"He mayn't be coming in."

"Oh, he's coming in!" said Tom Merry. "Pratt said that Figgins had something to say to me—he's coming over looking for trouble, you know. My suggestion is that he shall find some."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep back behind the door and collar him as he comes in," said Tom Merry. "We'll rush him upstairs and bump him into the study and anoint his chivvy with some of Manners's rotten photographic chemicals. That will give him a complexion for the holidays—a sort of smile that won't come off."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush! He'll hear!"

"Well, 'shush' yourself, then!"

"Now, look here, Lowther—"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Rats!"

"Fathead—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Manners, peeping round the door.

"You'll warn him off. He's nearly got to the steps."

"Well, if Tom Merry will jaw—"

"If Lowther will jaw—"

"Shut up, I tell you!"

The juniors were quiet at last.

It was the last day of the old term, and the juniors had a strong and natural desire to rag old Figgins once more before the school broke up. Not that Figgins had done anything to be ragged for. It was not that. But the rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's seldom slept. And the School House fellows wanted to give the leader of the New House juniors something to remember during the long vacation.

Figgins unsuspectingly came up the steps of the School House.

He walked cheerfully into the House; and as he did so three forms rushed forth, and Figgins went rolling on the floor, with the Terrible Three rolling over him.

"Oh!" roared Figgins. "Yaroooh!"

"Collar him!"

"Yow! Ow! Yopp! What the— Gerroop!"

Figgins was whisked off the floor, and the Terrible Three carried him to the stairs with a rush. One of Figgys's arms and one of his legs trailed on the floor, but the rest of him was secured in the grasp of the Terrible Three; and wherever Figgins went, of course, the loose arm and leg had to follow.

"Yaroooh!" roared Figgins. "Leggo! Chuck it! What's the row? I came over here to see Tom Merry—"

"Well, here I am!" grinned Tom Merry. "Bring him along! Don't make a row, I believe Railton's in his study."

"What-ho!"

"Yow! Look here—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Shove him along!"

"Yaroooh!"

Figgins was bundled up the stairs, struggling violently. Needless to say, it was not done without considerable noise. A study door opened in the passage below, and Mr. Railton,

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the master of the School House, looked out. But the juniors had passed the bend of the staircase and were out of sight.

The House-master smiled as he heard a sound of distant bumping and gasping. After all, it was breaking-up day, and Mr. Railton knew when to be deaf. He went back into his study.

"All together!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yow—leggo!"

"Rats!"

With a combined effort the Terrible Three got their prisoner up the last stairs and brought him with a whirl into the upper passage.

There Figgins fought his last fight. With his collar torn out, and his hair wildly ruffled, and his jacket split up the back, and his trousers a mass of dust, the hero of the New House struggled, but in vain.

He was whirled along the passage towards the Shell quarters.

Bump!

Outside Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage Figgins dragged his captors down in a wriggling heap, and four juniors rolled over and over on the linoleum.

"Collar him!" panted Tom Merry. "Don't let the boulder get away!"

"Yow!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed a voice, as the door of Study No. 6 opened. "Bai Jove! What is this feahful wow! You throw me quite into a fluttah, you know!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. He adjusted his eyeglass in his right eye and gazed at the wild scene in astonishment.

"Bai Jove! What a set of howwid wuffians!"

"Lend a hand!" gasped Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"What's the row there?" sang out Jack Blake's voice from within the study. "Can't you come and lend me a hand with his strap, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Rescue, School House!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! That atahs the case, of course!"

D'Arcy rushed to the aid of the Terrible Three. Blake came out of the study and lent a hand, too. Then Figgins's desperate resistance was over. In the hands of five juniors he was quite powerless, and he could do nothing but gasp helplessly.

"Bring him along to the study," panted Tom Merry.

"What's the row?" demanded Blake.

"He came over looking for trouble—and he's found it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I—" gasped Figgins. "I—I came—"

"Yank him along!"

Figgins was rushed into the Shell passage, and into Tom Merry's study. There he was bumped in a dusty heap on the floor. Tom Merry slammed the door shut, and the five School House fellows stood in a ring round the dusty and dishevelled Figgins, chortling.

"Caught!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you silly chumps!" roared Figgins. "You dangerous asses! What have you piled on me like this for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We heard that you were coming over, and we were ready," explained Tom Merry. "Here's the trouble you were looking for. We're going to anoint you with pyro—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, you know, that's a wippin' ideah! Of course, you will be careful of Figgay's linen. There is no excuse for damagin' a fellow's linen."

"You fatheads!" roared Figgins. "I didn't come over to look for trouble!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"What did you come over for, then?" demanded Tom Merry. "Pratt distinctly told me that you were coming to speak to me."

"So I was, idiot!"

"Well, then—"

"Well, ass, can't you see, chump, that I might come over and speak to you without looking for trouble, idiot?" belted Figgins. "I came over to ask you to spend the first week of the vacation with me in Devonshire."

"Oh!"

"I was going to ask Lowther and Manners, and D'Arcy and Blake as well—"

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm sorry! Ha, ha, ha! We're all sorry! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the School House fellows all said that they were very

sorry; but as they were roaring with laughter all the time it could not be supposed that their sorrow was very deep.

Figgins grunted and rose and wrestled with his collar. But it was impossible to make that collar look like a collar again.

"Well," he growled, "are you coming?"

"Invitation still open?" grinned Monty Lowther.

Figgins grinned, too.

"Yes," he said. "Will you all come?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Jolly pleased, old boy!" said Tom Merry. "We'll give you many little treats like this while we're staying with you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kerr and Fatty Wynn are coming for a week, and then I'm going away myself," said Figgins. "It will be jolly, having the lot of us there. It's my uncle's place—a house right on the coombs, near Clovelly. Jolly good swimming, bathing, and boating, and so on. You're all coming?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Yaas! And, undah the cires, I think we ought weally to apologise to Figgins for this wuff reception of him—"

"Oh, good!" said Figgins. "Then I'll go and get tidy, if you utter idiots have finished."

"Quite finished, thank you," said Monty Lowther.

"I weally considah—"

But Figgins departed without waiting to hear what Arthur Augustus D'Arcy really considered.

CHAPTER 2.

Off for the Holidays.

"BAI JOVE! It's blowin'!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark.

Eight juniors were tramping along a rough and rocky road. Away on their left they could hear the boom of the sea—the wide Atlantic, stretching out endless to the west. But they could not see it, save for an occasional gleam of foam. Night had fallen on the wild, beautiful coast of West Devon.

The storm had been rising all the afternoon, and as night came on it blew harder and harder. Deep down in the coombs the juniors could hear the waves thundering over the pebble ridges.

Trees, black and grim, surrounded them with dark shadows. Big rocks loomed on their right, gleaming with rain.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had, in the first place, suggested calling a taxi. The suggestion had been received with a yell of laughter by the other fellows, and even the big, stolid Devon man sent to meet them allowed his iron visage to relax into a grin. D'Arcy understood by this time that, even if taxis had been available, they would not have been much use on a road like this.

The juniors had to walk, and their bags were to be sent on by hand afterwards. It was the only way.

"Bai Jove! It's blowin'!"

The remark was not really needed. The booming of the sea, the crackling of the trees, the rush of the wind in their faces sufficiently indicated to the juniors that it was blowing.

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther. "Have you really noticed that at last?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"There's going to be a storm to-night," said Tom Merry. "Pity the chaps who get driven on the shore down there! I say, Figgins, how much further is it to your uncle's house?"

"Not very much further, I think," said Figgins. "Blessed if I can tell in the dark! We get half-way down the street in Clovelly, and then turn."

"Bai Jove! Are we near Clovelly?" asked D'Arcy.

"Yes."

"I suppose we can get a taxi there?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause for wibald laughtah, Figgay. I am gettin' a twifle tired, and I should weally like to get into a taxicab."

"I think you'd like to get out of it again, if it started down the High Street of Clovelly," chuckled Figgins.

"Even a hansom would be bettah than nothin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or even a gwowlah," said D'Arcy. "Undah the cires, I should not wefuse a seat in a four-wheelah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

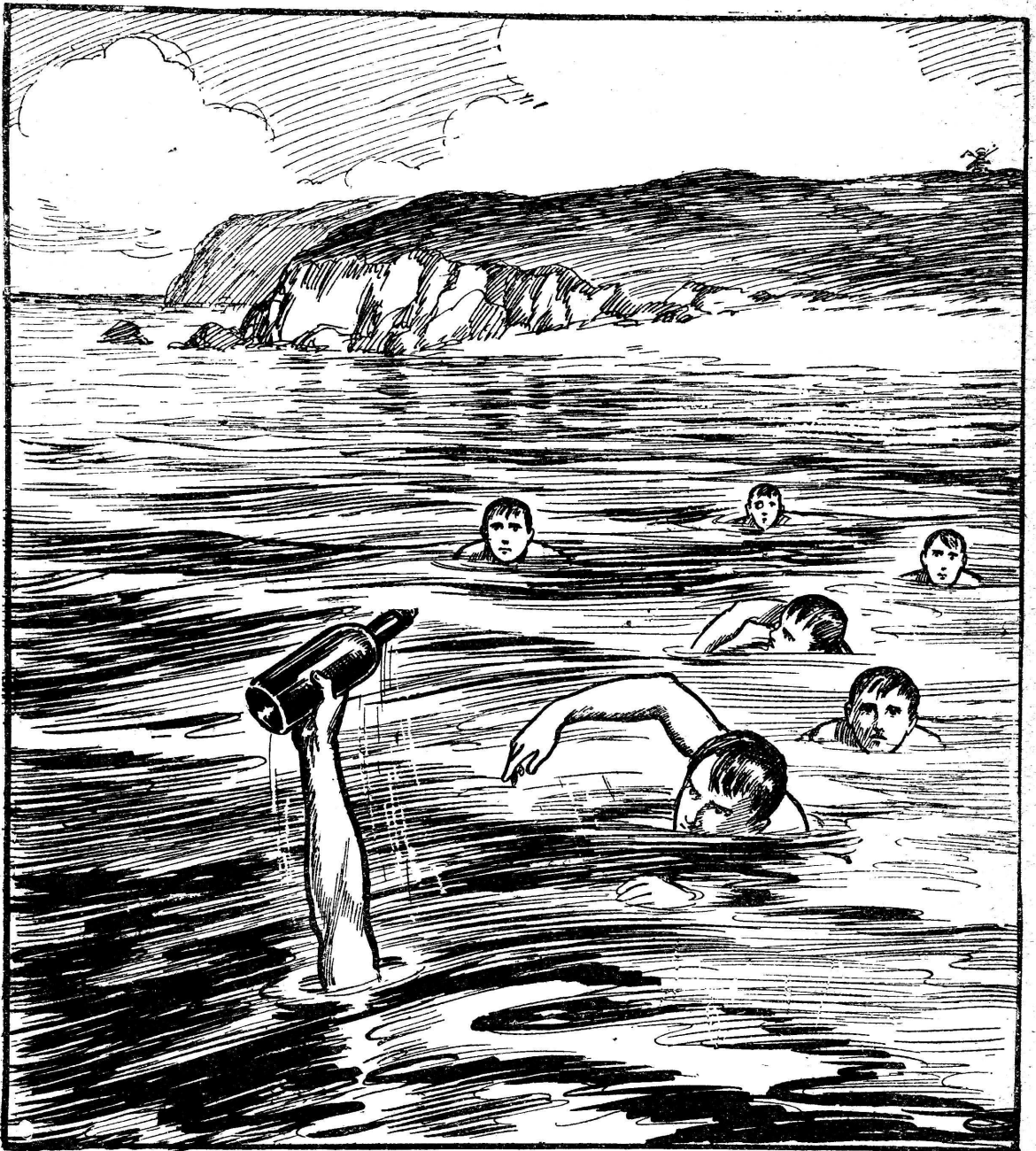
"I uttably fail to undahstand the cause of this wotten mewwiment, Figgins. Bai Jove!"

"Hallo! What's the matter now?" asked Blake.

"My cap's blown off."

"Lucky it wasn't your head!"

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake. Pway wait for me a few minutes while I get my cap."



Tom Merry made a desperate effort, and passed Figgins. He grasped the bottle in his hand and flourished it in the air, disappearing under the water as he did so. (See page 8.)

And Arthur Augustus went groping to the side of the road. There was a yell of warning from Figgins.

"Come back, you ass!"

Down by the side of the road towards the sea were deep coombs, clothed in trees and creepers that grew right down to the shingle by the sea. Deep down at the bottom of the gullies, the breakers were roaring on the rocks. D'Arcy's cap had been carried down into one of the coombs, and it was probably tossing in the white-edged breakers by this time.

Figgins rushed after the swell of St. Jim's, and grasped him by the arm.

"Stop! You fathead!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"You'll break your neck if you try to leave the road!" yelled Figgins.

"But I cannot present myself at your respected uncle's

house without a cap," said D'Arcy. "I should considah it lackin' in pwopah respect."

"If you try to leave the road, ass, you'll present yourself to Davy Jones with a broken neck," said Figgins.

"Undah the cires.—"

"Come on!"

"Pewwaps you will lend me your cap, Kerr. Your caps fit me, though they are not weally so well cut as I should like."

"And what am I to do for a cap?" demanded Kerr warmly.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."

"You utter ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an uttah ass! I think—"

"Oh, come on!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm frightfully hungry, and if the supper is ready at Cliff Lodge, it will be spoiling."

"Trust Fatty to think of that!"

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"THE INVENTOR'S RIVAL."

"Well, nobody seems to have sense enough to think of it excepting me," growled Fatty. "I know I'm jolly hungry. I haven't had anything to eat since the lunch-basket in the train. There was only a cold chicken, and some ham and hard-boiled eggs, and a seed cake, and the biscuits. I—"

"Come on!" shouted Manners.

"I fail to see how I can pwoceed hatless—"

"Oh, take my cap, and come on!" said Blake.

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy, but your cap is vevy pwominent in colour, and gween stwipes do not suit me. The colour in a chap's cap should always tone with the colour of his eyes, and the colour of his necktie; but the necktie should be darkah—"

There was a shout of exasperation from the juniors. They were wet, and they were hungry, and the wind was blowing almost through them. At such a time, a discussion of the colour scheme of caps and neckties was decidedly out of place. So, at all events, thought everyone excepting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The juniors closed round the swell of St. Jim's, and grasped him, and hurried on, regardless of his expostulations.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Come on!"

"I twust—"

"Buck up!"

"Undah the circs.—"

"Rush him along."

And Arthur Augustus was rushed along. The wind roared at them as they came out into Clovelly street. Lights twinkled in the queer old street, from some of the queer old house. Arthur Augustus halted, panting.

"Tom Mewwy, I am quite fatigued, and awf'ly blown about. I insist upon callin' a cab."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I insist—"

"Look at the street, you ass!" shrieked Figgins.

"Bai Jove!"

"A cab couldn't get down there, unless it could play hopscotch. Come on!"

"Bai Jove!"

And Arthur Augustus, after turning his eyeglass round him, had to admit that a cab, even if there had been one obtainable, would hardly have been a safe conveyance. For the High Street of Clovelly was a path that proceeded in a series of huge steps down the face of the cliff to the sea.

"Bai Jove! This is vevy wemarkable," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard this as a wemarkable and intewestin' place."

"Go hon!" said Figgins.

"Undah the circs.—"

"Under the circs., as we're late for supper, we'd better buck up."

And the juniors bucked up. They left the strange old street, and a path along the cliff brought them to a garden which appeared to hang almost in space, with a fence along the very edge of a sheer cliff. Their guide opened a gate, and gave a whistle. Through the rain and the gloom the juniors followed him, and entered a wide stone porch, where they were safe from the howling wind.

"Here we are!" said Figgins.

And Fatty Wynn gave a fat murmur of satisfaction.

"I can smell supper! They're keeping it hot!"

CHAPTER 3.

Fatty Wynn Does His Best.

FIGGINS'S uncle was a little stout old gentleman, who suffered from gout, which caused his nose to be of a deep purple colour. At all events, he attributed that to the gout. Unbelieving, scoffing people attributed both the gout and the purple nose to a love of old port; but that, of course, was a calumny. At all events, he was an extremely jolly little gentleman; and, as Blake remarked, he had excellent taste in some things, for he was very fond of the society of young people. He was always very pleased when he had Figgins and some of Figgy's boy friends staying in his house for a holiday, and he always succeeded in giving them a good time. True, his gout prevented him from getting about with them very much; but perhaps that did not make them enjoy their holidays on the Clovelly cliffs any the less.

Mr. Gandish—that was his name—welcomed the juniors very heartily. After they had changed from their wet things, they descended to supper, and Fatty Wynn's round eyes glistened at the sight of the supper-table. Mr. Gandish evidently knew boys, and boys' capacities in the matter of eating. The supper had been kept hot, as Fatty had guessed; and what a supper it was! Hot, and steaming, and heaps of it, as Fatty said. And the fat Fourth-Former of the New House at St. Jim's settled down to enjoy himself.

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Mr. Gandish presided at the table with beaming smile. He was not much like Figgy's other uncle, Major Figgins, coming from a different side of the family; but he was just as nice in his way. And he was evidently very fond of Figgins. Figgins was head and shoulders taller than his uncle, a fact of which Mr. Gandish was very proud. He often cast admiring looks at Figgy's lengthy limbs.

"And you didn't get blown away, hey?" said Mr. Gandish. "We are going to have a storm to-night—though I don't suppose it will wake you lads up, after your journey, hey?"

"Wathah not, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think I shall sleep like a top, sir, thank you. May I twouble you to pass the kidneys, Fatty Wynn?"

"They're good," said Fatty.

"Go it, Fatty," said Monty Lowther admiringly. "This will be a record for you, I really think, though I've seen you at it before."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shall I take your belt off for you, Fatty?"

Fatty Wynn sniffed.

"If I want my belt off, I can take it off, I suppose," he said.

"I thought perhaps you couldn't reach it now," said Monty Lowther blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is a vevy wemarkable place, Mr. Gandish, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have nevah seen so wemarkable a place as Clovelly before. I wegard the scenewy here as simply wippin'; it beats the Wivierah hollow."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry. "We've been along the Mediterranean coast, and we think Devonshire licks it—rather. Only there isn't any casino here for Gussy to blow his fivers in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and turned it very severely upon the hero of the Shell.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I twust you will not give Mr. Gandish the impwession that I was a weckless boundah when I was at Nice with you."

"Certainly not," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I know we had to drag you away—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That was only a momentawy abewwation of mind. I wegard gamblin' with howwah," said D'Arcy. "I wefuse to entah into any discuss, on the subject, you uttah ass! Bai Jove, how it's blowin'!"

"I shall get some ripping photographs along this coast," Manners remarked. "I've brought my camera."

"Vevy good. You can take me if you like," said D'Arcy. "I am quite willin' to be taken dozens of times, if you like, with all sorts of backwounds."

"Go hon!"

"Good egg!" said Monty Lowther. "A series of comic pictures—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Gussy in boating costume, catching crabs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy in swimming costume, calling for help—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy in fishing costume, never getting a catch—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Gussy on the rocks, calling for a taxi—"

"You uttah ass!"

"You might be able to sell the pictures to a cinematograph show afterwards, Manners, old man," Monty Lowther went on.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy gave Lowther a withering look, and went on with his supper. Fatty Wynn leaned back in his chair at last, with a great sigh of contentment.

"That's what I call good," he remarked.

"Have some more kidneys, Fatty," said Figgins.

"N-n-no, thanks."

"Have some of the jam-roll," said Kerr.

"Well, perhaps a little—not more than half of it, please. I've really had enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try the pudding, Fatty," urged Blake. "You haven't touched the pudding. It's about the only thing you haven't touched, so you may as well."

"Well, just a taste—say half a pound or so."

Fatty Wynn disposed of the jam-roll and the pudding. Then Tom Merry and Blake urged bananas upon him, and the fat Fourth-Former ate five or six. They were curious to see whether he would ever leave off, and, indeed, Fatty Wynn found it difficult to do so, with a table before him loaded with such good things.

But even Fatty Wynn refused all offers at last.

"No, enough's as good as a feast," he said, waving back the apples that Blake would have forced upon him. "I'm done."

Blake cast a doubtful glance at the doorway.

"Think you'll get through again?" he asked.

"Bai Jove! We'll all stand round him and shove!" said D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn rose from the table, somewhat slowly. He was feeling very heavy and sleepy, but quite happy and contented.

"I think I shall enjoy a night's rest," he remarked. "I feel as if I should like to be carried upstairs. I'm so tired."

"Well, you weigh about a hundredweight more than you did an hour ago," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Look here, you silly ass—"

"Let's see if you can get through the door."

Fatty Wynn got through the doorway easily enough, as a matter of fact. He took his candle and went upstairs very slowly, the other fellows behind him, after bidding good-night to Mr. Gandish.

"Buck up, Fatty!" said Kerr. "You're keeping us back!"

"It's all right," said Monty Lowther; "I've got a pin here."

Fatty Wynn bucked up quite suddenly, and the pin was not needed. The juniors turned into a large room, with a verandah running along under the windows, and a row of eight beds in it.

"We all dig here," said Figgins. "Like the old dorm. at St. Jim's, ain't it? It's better to be all together, eh?"

"Yaas, wathah! I shall be able to keep an eye on you chaps, and look aftah you genewally."

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"Weally, Mannahs, I twust you will wemembah the time we went to London, and you all got lost."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors turned in. The candles were extinguished, and the room was in darkness. The hour was growing late, and most of the juniors fell asleep almost at once. A deep and musical snore proceeded from Fatty Wynn's bed. But the Terrible Three did not sleep.

"I'm going out to have a look at the storm," Tom Merry murmured to Manners and Lowther.

"What-ho!" said Lowther.

"Wait till the kids are asleep," said Tom, with all the feeling of responsibility of a fellow in a higher Form.

Lowther chuckled.

"Yes, rather!"

There was a snort from the direction of Jack Blake's bed.

"I can hear you, you silly ass!"

"Go to sleep, kid!"

"I'm not going out in the rain. I prefer bed," said Blake.

"I advise you to go to sleep like sensible chaps!"

To which the Terrible Three replied with one voice:

"Rats!"

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus Looks After the Terrible Three.

TOM MERRY opened a window upon the verandah.

There was a gust of wind in the room immediately, and bedclothes flapped, and other clothes whisked about.

"My hat!" said Lowther. "It's blowing!"

The Terrible Three had dressed themselves, and put on their coats. They wanted to see the storm at its height, and it was raging with terrible violence now.

Round the cliffs and the old stone house, the wind was roaring furiously, and the juniors could hear the deep boom of the breakers down by the shore.

"It's ripping!" said Tom Merry.

They stepped out upon the verandah, and closed the window behind them. The other fellows were asleep. Tom Merry & Co. groped their way to the steps down into the garden, and brushed among wet shrubbery.

"This way!" said Tom Merry.

"Better look out!" mumbled Manners. "We don't want to get blown off the giddy cliff."

"Hold to one another," said Lowther.

"Good egg!"

They found the path that ran out upon a great bald cliff, that fronted the Atlantic, high and sheer. The wind roared about them as they tramped through the rain. They came out on the cliff top, picking their way by the frequent flashes of lightning. On the cliff, amid roaring wind and drenching rain, they stood looking out to sea.

Boom, boom, boom!

"Listen to the sea!"

The waves were crashing upon the pebbles far below, and breaking among the trees deep down in the coombs.

Boom, boom!

Tom Merry gave a sudden start.

"Hark!"

"I can hear," said Lowther. "The sea's making an awful row!"

"It wasn't the sea."

"What wasn't?"

"That noise, then. It was a gun, I think."

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"Who could be firing a gun here—at this time of night?"

"Some ship in distress."

"Phew!"

Tom Merry pointed out to sea, as a flash of lightning rived the deep dead black of the heavens.

"Look! Oh, look!"

For a moment, as the juniors looked, they caught a glimpse of a vessel with close-reefed sails, driving past in the gale.

Then, as the quick light faded, it was swallowed up in blackness again.

The juniors stood, pale and aghast.

"That vessel can't live on a shore like this," said Tom Merry, in a strained voice. "She must go on the rocks."

"Poor chaps!"

"There will be a wreck."

"There will be more than one wreck to-night," said Tom Merry, with a shadow on his face. "I wonder whether we could do anything. I am sure it was a gun from that ship we heard just now."

"What could we do?"

"Give the alarm in Clovelly!"

"Look!"

From the direction of the village lights were flashing. It was evident that the gun had been heard there, though the vessel was driving past, and it was very unlikely that any assistance could be rendered from that quarter.

Flash after flash of lightning came athwart the gloomy sky, but the juniors, strain their eyes as they would, could not catch a glimpse of the ship again.

It had vanished into the night.

Deeper and deeper rose the roar of the storm; louder and louder the crash of the breakers on the rocky coast.

The Terrible Three turned back to the house at last.

What they had seen had saddened them. They could not help thinking of the brave fellows on that storm-driven vessel, racing before the wild wind, with sharp and cruel rocks so close at hand, and grim death waiting for them among the breakers.

"Poor chaps!" said Tom Merry. "I hope they'll weather the storm. But they were very close in."

They reached the gate of Mr. Gandish's garden. A shadow loomed up before them in the blackness.

"Is that you, Tom Mewwy?"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hallo! What on earth are you doing out of bed?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I woke up!"

"Well, we didn't think you were walking in your sleep," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah!"

"And why didn't you go to sleep again?" demanded Manners.

"I felt it my dutay to look aftah you chaps," said D'Arcy loftily. "While we are away from the coll. I feel to a certain extent responsible for you."

"Well of all the cheek! And you're the youngest duffer in the party!"

"Youngest in yeahs, pewwaps, but oldest in expewience, you see, to say nothin' of tact and judgment, deah boy."

"Fathead!"

"I wufuse to be called a fathead. I—"

"If Gussy's done, we may as well go in," Monty Lowther suggested. "I'm getting wet. Of course, Gussy's conversation is awfully interesting, but I'd rather listen to it indoors, if I have to listen to it at all."

"Weally, you silly ass!"

Monty Lowther pushed on up the path, and perhaps purposely pushed into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There was a sound of a fall and a splash.

"Ow!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, in astonishment. "Where are you, Gussy?"

"I'm sittin' in a wain puddle, you ass!"

"Dear me! What are you doing that for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You pushed me ovah, you fwabjous ass! Pway lend me a hand up!"

"Not a bit of it! You came out to look after us, didn't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you can look after us as we go up to the house," said Monty Lowther blandly. "You won't be able to see us in the dark, but you will have the satisfaction of looking after us."

"Weally, Lowthah!"

"Come on, you fellows."

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"Weally—weally, I object! I pwotest— Ow!"
Objections and protests were quite useless. The two juniors started at a run, and the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's had to run with them.

They dashed down the quaint old street, leaping from step to step without a pause, and D'Arcy had to leap with them.

Loud rose the protesting voice of the swell of St. Jim's.
"Leggo, you asses! Bai Jove, you'll all be wollin' to the bottom in a minute! Leggo! I insist upon bein' weleased at once! I wegard you as dangewous lunatics! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Behind the trio came the rest of the juniors, running and jumping. Big, bronzed fishermen stood out of the way, with good-natured grins, for the juniors to pass. The St. Jim's party raced on at top speed, round corners and down rugged steps, till they reached the bottom, and there the catastrophe that D'Arcy predicted happened.

Blake lost his footing and rolled over, dragging D'Arcy down with him, and Tom Merry rolled over D'Arcy.

"My hat!" gasped Kerr. "Look out!"
But it was too late.

The fellows behind were going at too great a speed to be able to stop themselves. They stumbled over the fallen juniors and added themselves to the heap. Kerr contrived to swerve in time and avoid a collision, but all the others went down, and there was a wildly struggling and shrieking mass of juniors on the ground and a sea of waving arms and legs. From the struggling heap indistinct voices were heard.

"Yow! Gerroff me chest!"
"Gerraway!"

"Bai Jove! My eyeglass is bwoken!"
"Yow! Yow! Gerroff!"

They sorted themselves out at last, in the midst of a grinning crowd of boatmen and fisherfolk. Arthur Augustus rose crimson with indignation. He had the eyeglass cord in his hand, but the eyeglass was gone. It was scattered in fragments on the sand.

"You uttah asses!" roared D'Arcy. "Look at that!"
"Ow! My nose!"

"Yow! My shins!"
"Groo!"

"You feahful chumps—"
Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, never mind the bumping," he exclaimed. "We've got rid of Gussy's eyeglass, and that's something."
D'Arcy gave him a withering look.

"Nothin' of the sort, you ass! I am not likely to twust myself among you wuff duffahs without bein' prepared for emergencies."

"Eh!"
"I've got seveval more in my case."

And Arthur Augustus extracted a new monocle from his pocket and fastened it on the cord, and adjusted it in his eye with considerable satisfaction.

The juniors tramped along the shore at the foot of the big cliffs. On the sand, tossed up by the sea, were fragments of wreckage, and several fishermen were dragging in a broken mast that was tossing on the waves. There had been a wreck in the night evidently, and Tom Merry wondered whether it was the same vessel that he had seen from the cliff-top. What had become of the crew?

The deep and murmuring sea, breaking on the golden sand at their feet, could have told them.

CHAPTER 6.

The Message in the Bottle.

FOR several days the Atlantic rolled and boomed after the heavy storm, and the waves echoed with deep-throated murmurs in the depths of the verdant coombs. Tom Merry & Co. contrived to have a very good time, climbing the cliffs, sailing in the bay, and exploring the coast and the caves. The weather grew calmer and more sunny every day, and on the third day of the visit to Cliff Lodge Mr. Gandish considered it quite safe for Tom Merry & Co. to venture into the sea. That the juniors were very eager to do. The wide and murmuring blue seemed to murmur an invitation to bathers. After breakfast one morning Tom Merry & Co. tramped down to a snug little cove not far from the Cliff Lodge, with their bathing clothes under their arms in little bundles—very little bundles.

"What a wippin' mornin'!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the glorious sea and the great cliffs rising along the shore. "Bai Jove! It must have been wippin' in the old times, you know, when the chaps used to sail out from here to fight the Spaniards, you know."

"I don't know," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "They had sailing ships in those days, you know, and they often got becalmed, and I've heard that on some occasions they ran fearfully short of grub."

"Oh, wats!"

"Besides, I don't see much in fighting the Spaniards. I fought a Spaniard once; he was a bigger chap than I was, and he gave me a black eye. He was a chap in the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School."

"You are an unwomantic beast, Wynn. I was thinkin' of the glowious days of Queen Bess, when Dwake and the othah chaps sailed to the Spanish Main. It must have been wippin'." I feel as if I could have sailed the Spanish Main—

"You couldn't sail a giddy skiff on a river," growled Monty Lowther. "The only sail you're suited for is a draper's sale, to buy up silk socks."

"Weally, Lowthah—"
"Well, here we are!" said Figgins. "You can leave your togs in one of these crevices—not that anybody is likely to come by—we might be a hundred miles from everywhere."

"Yaas, it's a vevy solitawy spot," said D'Arcy, looking round. "It weminds me of somethin' I wead in a poem once."

"Never mind the poem," said Blake. "Get your boots off."

D'Arcy sat on a chunk of rocks and commenced unbuttoning his boots. D'Arcy did not wear lace boots.

"Vevy well, Blake. (But it was a wippin' poem, somethin' about solitude and sages, or somethin'.")

"Or sage and onions?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, you ass—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I wemembah it now! I will wecite it for you chaps while you are gettin' your things off."

"Oh, don't bother!" said Tom Merry politely.

"No bothah at all, deah boy. Here goes!"
"Look here!"

"Oh, Solitude, where are the charms
That sages have seen in thy face?
Betthah dwell in the midst of alarms
Than weign in this howwible place."

"That's it!" said Arthur Augustus, with great satisfaction. "I can wemembah these things like anythin', you know. I know it was somethin' about sages and solitude."

"Very complimentary to the place, I must say," said Figgins.

"Bai Jove, you know, I didn't mean it in that sense!" said Arthur Augustus, realising all of a sudden that his quotation was rather unfortunate, under the circumstances. "I was not speakin' in that sense."

"In fact, he wasn't speaking in any sense; he never has any sense," said Monty Lowther. "It's all right, Gussy; nobody ever expected you to speak sensibly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

"I believe I know a verse something like that, by Shakespeare or George Robey, or some chap of that sort," said Lowther thoughtfully. "It runs like this—"

"Weally, you fathead—"

"Oh, Gussy, oh where are the charms,
That you somehow seem to delight in?
Betther dwell in the midst of alarms
Than listen to Gussy recitin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You feahful ass, Lowthah! I don't believe that wot was witten by any idiot but yourself. I wegard you as a fwabjous ass."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I wegard it as impewative to give Lowthah a feahful thwashin'. You othah fellows can go in while I thwash Lowthah."

Lowther laughed. He had his clothes off now, and he dived into the water from a rock. From the water he waved his hand to Arthur Augustus.

"Fall in and follow me," he sang sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Ass!"

The juniors splashed into the water one after another. All of them could swim, and two or three of them were very good swimmers indeed. Arthur Augustus, in spite of the disparaging remarks of the other fellows, was as good as any, and he was very graceful in the water. Monty Lowther splashed him over with open hands on the water, and the swell of St. Jim's made for the humorist of the Shell.

"Pax!" sang out Tom Merry.

"Wats! I am goin' to thwash Lowthah!"

"Let's have a race," said Blake. "Let's swim for some mark, and see who gets there first. Of course, Gussy will be last."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort, Blake. On second thoughts, I will let Lowthah off, and show you fellows how to swim."

"Where shall we swim to?" said Tom Merry, treading water, and gazing out to see. "Ha! Look out there; there's something bobbing on the water."

"It's a bottle," said Blake, shading his eyes with his hand

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and gazing out to sea. "It's a floating bottle—a ginger-beer bottle, I expect, dropped overboard by some tripper."

"He's put the cork in it again, then, or it wouldn't float," observed Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, there it is," said Tom Merry. "Let's swim for it, and the winner collars the bottle and brings it ashore to show he's won."

"Good egg!"

"Vewy well."

"Now, all start together, or we'll give Gussy a start if he likes."

"I wefuse to have a start."

"Get into line, then."

The juniors formed up level. From over the cliffs came the sound of a bell ringing.

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"When that bell stops we start; that's the signal."

"Good!"

The juniors waited and listened. The bell died into silence, and they started at the same moment. With swift, steady strokes they cleft the water.

Tom Merry drew a little ahead, and then Blake glided after him and passed him. Arthur Augustus, swimming very gracefully, drew ahead at half distance. The rest of the swimmers were well behind, but half-way to the floating bottle Figgins began to gain.

He passed Arthur Augustus, swimming with long, steady strokes.

"Go it, Figgy!" gasped Kerr, who was falling behind. "Buck up for the New House!"

"Go it!" shouted Fatty Wynn, who had tailed out to the end.

Tom Merry put out his strength, and passed Blake. He drew level with Figgins, and as they neared the bottle they were neck and neck.

Both were putting all they had into the contest now; it was School House against New House once more.

Figgins gained a head, and lost it again, and Tom Merry passed him, and kept the lead.

There was a shout from the School House fellows behind.

"Buck up, Tom Merry!"

Figgins made a desperate effort, but Tom Merry had the advantage now, and there was no time for the New House junior to pull up. Tom Merry shot forward, and his grasp closed upon the bottle. It dodged his hand for a moment, but he caught it by the neck, and flourished it in the air, disappearing under the water himself as he did so.

Then his head came up, and he grinned.

"I've got it!"

"Oh, blow!" gasped Figgins.

Tom Merry laughed breathlessly.

"It was a close thing, Figgy; but I've got the bottle. By Jove!" Tom Merry was looking at the bottle in his grasp.

"By Jove, there's something in it!"

"Ginger-beer?" gasped Blake, as he came up.

"No."

"What then?"

"It's a rum-bottle," said Tom Merry, "and there's a paper in it!"

"My hat!"

CHAPTER 7.

A Secret of the Sea.

THE St. Jim's juniors gathered round Tom Merry in the water.

The hero of the Shell held up the bottle to view.

There was no doubt that it was a rum-bottle; it had certainly contained rum, though there was none of that fiery liquid in it now.

But through the thick glass of the bottle could be seen a folded paper.

The juniors gazed at it in deep interest and amazement. It was a message from the sea—a written letter, sealed up in a floating bottle.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is weally remarkable."

"Yes, rather!"

"It's a message of some kind—a message from the sea," said Tom Merry. "We'll get this ashore and see what it is."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Might be a clue to a hidden treasure," said Blake. "You remember that giddy document a sailorman gave you once, Tommy. This may be another document of the same sort."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I hardly think so. But it will be jolly interesting, at any rate. Let's get back to the beach."

"Yaas, wathah! Buck up, deah boys!"

"Do you want any help, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther politely.

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The swell of St. Jim's glared at him.

"No, you uttah ass, I do not want any help!" he replied.

The juniors swam back to the beach, Tom Merry still holding the bottle in his hand.

All the juniors were eager to see what message it contained. They scrambled out of the lapping water upon the sands, in the blaze of the summer sun.

In their scanty attire they gathered round Tom Merry, who examined the bottle.

"The cork's been driven in flush with the top," said Tom Merry. "Anybody got a corkscrew?"

"Never thought of bringing one," said Monty Lowther, with a grin. "Couldn't possibly foresee a thing like this, you know."

"Anybody got a pocket-knife with a corkscrew in it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"Have you got one, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good egg!"

"It's one my bwothah Conway gave me," D'Arcy explained. "It has a corkscrew, and three blades, and a tin-openah, and a file, and a sewedwivah, and—"

"All we want is the corkscrew. Where is it?"

"In the knife, deah boy."

"Ass! I mean, where's the knife?"

"I'm sowwy, I left it in the studay at St. Jim's."

"What!" roared Tom Merry.

"I left it in the study at St. Jim's, deah boy. It's unfortunate, undah the circs., I know. I weally wish I had brought it with me."

The juniors glared at D'Arcy.

"You frabjous ass!" said Tom Merry. "You burbling jabberwock! What's the good of telling me about the blessed knife if it's in the blessed study at the blessed school?"

"I was answevin' your questions, deah boy. You see—"

"Break its neck," said Lowther.

"I wefuse to be alluded to as 'it,' and I uttahly decline to have my neck bwoken, Lowthah. I considah—"

"I was speaking of the bottle, ass."

"Oh, I see! Undah—"

Crash!

Tom Merry knocked the neck of the bottle neatly off against a rock. A thin stream of water ran out from the bottle, showing that, in spite of the tight cork, some seawater had leaked in.

"The papah's wet," said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps you won't be able to wead it, Tom Mewwy. Hand the bottle to me."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

The hero of the Shell drew the paper from the bottle. It was damp with sea-water, but in places dry. It was folded, thickness on thickness, and Tom Merry was very, very careful not to tear it as he spread it out on the sand.

It was a rough, thick paper, such as might have been used for wrapping candles or such articles. There was writing upon it in thick pencil, the writer evidently having pressed hard upon his pencil to make the writing as deep as possible. In places the water had obliterated it.

The juniors bent their heads together over the paper as it lay on the sand, rapidly drying in the hot sunshine.

This is what they read:

"Wrecked cliffs and cannot get where I am, but this place coast. Help. "JAMES CALCROFT, Mate of schoon . . . ed Wing."

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!"

"Poor chap!" said Tom Merry. "It's somebody wrecked somewhere, and he's sent this message to sea, hoping somebody will pick it up and be able to rescue him."

"But he doesn't know where he is," Lowther remarked. "That's rather vague information for a rescue-party."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We may be able to make out some more words when the paper's drier," said Blake hopefully. "The worst of it is that the pencil is rubbed off by the water. If it had been in ink—"

"The ink would have wun, deah boy," said D'Arcy sagely.

"Well, it's in pencil," said the practical Kerr. "We shall have to make the best of it. I dare say we can guess some of the missing words."

"The last ones, anyway," said Manners. "That unfinished word must be 'schooner,' for instance."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And 'ed Wing,'" said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"There's very little doubt that that would be Red Wing



The Remove had no chance whatever, and they rolled over under the smiting pillows as the Fourth Formers yelled and laughed as they smote them. (An amusing dormitory incident in the splendid, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars College, entitled, "Saved from Disgrace," contained in this week's issue of the "Magnet" Library. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

in full. I've heard of Red Wing as the name of a ship—especially a sailing-ship, which I suppose this would be."

Kerr nodded.

"Then we can get on the track," he said.

"How?"

"By sending to London inquiries after a schooner called the Red Wing. They will know at Lloyd's if there is such a schooner, and if it is missing."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"They'll let us know," said Kerr; "and we can further inquire if the craft had a mate named James Calcroft. That would distinguish it from another schooner of the same name—there might be half a dozen."

"True!"

"As soon as we know where the Red Wing had sailed to we shall know what sea this poor chap is wrecked in, as we can get the latest reports of the vessel from Lloyd's," Kerr remarked.

The chums gazed at him quite admiringly. It was simple enough, but Kerr had been the one to think of it.

Figgins clapped his Scottish chum on the back.

"Bravo, Kerr!" he exclaimed. "You've got a head for thinking things out, and no mistake. Why, with the telegraph going, we ought to be able to find all that out by to-morrow!"

"Bai Jove, yaas! And then we'll be able to wescue the

chap!" said Arthur Augustus, with glistening eyes. "I'll ask Lord Conway to lend us his new yacht, you know, and we can make another voyage to the South Seas, if needed."

"Blessed if I think that bottle could have floated from the South Seas without getting broken!" said Manners.

"I don't see why not. There was nothing to break it in the water, and this is very likely the first time it has come near the shore," Tom Merry said thoughtfully. "It may have been in the water for weeks or months—or for years, for all we know. The blessed thing might have been chucked into the sea before we were born, for that matter."

"Bai Jove!"

"Let's take it up to the house and ask my uncle's opinion about it," suggested Figgins.

"Good egg!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Bathing was abandoned for that morning. The juniors were too interested and excited over their discovery to think of any further swimming.

They dressed themselves hastily, and tramped away over the cliffs to Cliff Lodge. Mr. Gandish was sitting in the garden when they came in, and he noticed their excited faces at once.

"Nothing wrong—eh?" he asked, looking up over his spectacles. "None of you nearly drowned—eh?"

"No, sir," said Tom Merry. "But we've found something."

"Found something—eh?" said Figgins's uncle. "What have you found?"

"A manuscript in a bottle, sir."

"By Jove! Tell me all about it."

Tom Merry explained. Mr. Gandish adjusted his glasses in great excitement.

"Give me the paper," he said.

And the old gentleman spread the paper out before him upon his newspaper on his knees, and scanned it through his spectacles with great interest.

CHAPTER 8

Kerr Works It Out.

TOM MERRY & CO. stood looking on while Mr. Gandish read the message from the sea.

The old gentleman was very nearly as much excited as the juniors. He read the message over three times before he looked up.

"Begad!" said Mr. Gandish. "That's very interesting! Begad!"

"We'd like to have a try to rescue the chap if it were possible, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, yes, certainly—yes!" said Mr. Gandish. "That is only right! Certainly! It is unfortunate that the paper gives no clue to his whereabouts. It's a secret—a secret of the sea."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Kerr suggests applying to Lloyd's for information about a schooner called the Red Wing, uncle," Figgins remarked.

Mr. Gandish nodded approvingly.

"An excellent idea, too," he said. "Quite right! We shall get all possible information from that quarter—in fact, I will send them a copy of this paper. It is a remarkable thing—a most remarkable thing!"

He took out his pocket-book and jotted down the message from the sea, marking the separate places of the missing words:

"Wrecked on . . . by cliffs"—three words missing there," said Mr. Gandish. "It might be 'wrecked on an island surrounded by cliffs—'"

"Most likely an island, sir," said Lowther. "But I wonder where the island is? In the South Seas very likely."

"In that case, the bottle would have taken a considerable time to float here on the currents," said the old gentleman. "Of course it is possible."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I fear we can do nothing in the matter until we have received some information from shipping quarters in London," said Mr. Gandish. "I suppose you lads wish to keep this document?"

"If we may, sir."

"Certainly! I will send an exact copy of it to London. I will attend to it at once, too. No time must be lost."

And Mr. Gandish went into the house.

The St. Jim's juniors sat down in the garden to con over the document. As the paper dried, glimmerings of words appeared where they had been obliterated, but not plainly enough for them to be deciphered.

Kerr wore a very thoughtful look as he coned over the paper. It was evident that something was working in the Scottish junior's mind.

Figgins pinched his arm.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"What's what?" asked Kerr.

"You've got some idea in your mind," said Figgins. "Out with it!"

"Well, I think that the third word on this isn't 'island,'" said Kerr. "I think it's very likely 'shore' or 'coast.'"

"Why?" asked Tom Merry.

"For one thing, it looks more like a word of five letters than a word of six, from the space it takes up, and considering the size of the rest of the writing."

Figgins nodded approvingly.

"Something in that," he assented.

"Then the word 'coast' occurs later on," said Kerr. "It's only reasonable to suppose that the chap is wrecked on a coast."

"Yaas, that's quite wight."

"Then I think— But perhaps you don't care to hear what I think," said Kerr modestly. "I don't want to do all the jawing."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Go ahead," he said. "This is where you come in, Kerr. You've got the brain for this sort of thing. We give you first jaw."

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"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, all right!" said Kerr. "The writer of this giddy message mentions 'cliffs.' If he's on an island, why should he say anything about cliffs?"

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Blessed if I know!" he said.

"Why should he, if he's on a shore, for that matter?" asked Fatty Wynn.

Kerr smiled—the smile of superior knowledge.

"Because, if he's on a shore, he would most likely try to get inland and reach some place where there were people," he said. "But cliffs might stop him—see?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well thought of!" said Tom Merry. "Of course; he might mention the cliffs as a landmark to a rescue-party; but he would be more likely to mention mountains, or something of that sort."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But, taking it that he's on a coast," said Monty Lowther, "can you give a guess at what coast it is, Kerr, old man? There are a good many coasts in the world."

"I think I can give a guess."

The juniors gathered round in great interest. To them the message told nothing definite, but they knew that Kerr always weighed his words carefully before speaking.

"Blessed if I see how you work it out," said Blake. "But go on!"

Kerr smiled quietly.

"We found the bottle in the water," he said. "Of course it may have come from a great distance, but it is more probable that it didn't. Every extra mile made it more likely that it would get broken, or that it wouldn't float here. The most probable supposition is that it was dropped into the sea near at hand."

Tom Merry jumped.

"Do you mean that the shipwrecked man may be on the English coast?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Why not?" said Kerr. "There are plenty of wrecks on the English coast, I suppose, and only three days ago there was a fearful storm."

"My hat!"

"The message is in English, and was written by an Englishman—the vessel was therefore English. Why shouldn't she have been wrecked in home waters?"

"No reason at all," said Tom Merry slowly, "except—except—"

"Except—" naturally runs to islands and South Seas—think—perhaps being wrecked," grinned Kerr.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I suppose that's it," he admitted.

"Yaas, wathah! There's certainly somethin' in that. I regard you as a weally clevah chap, Kerr. I should nevah have thought of that."

Kerr smiled again. He thought of a good many things that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would never have thought of, as a matter of fact.

"Of course, in following out a thing of this sort, you follow the line of greatest probability," Kerr went on. "The greatest probability in this case is that the bottle was dropped into the sea within reasonable distance of where it was found. But there is another point, which I take to be a clincher."

"Bai Jove!"

"The bottle has allowed sea-water to leak into it, and the paper was partly soaked, and it was damp all over. Now if the bottle had been a longer time in the water, the paper would have been thoroughly soaked, and we couldn't have read a word—to say nothing of the fact that if the bottle had filled it would have sunk. Now, as the bottle actually was leaking, it was only a question of a certain amount of time before it sank, and so I think we may safely say that it hasn't been in the water a very long time."

"Quite right!"

"Take all the circumstances together," said Kerr, "the bottle has probably been in the water only a few days—the man is more likely wrecked upon a coast than upon an island—and there was a terrible storm on this coast only three days ago!"

"By George, then the chances are—"

"This coast, too, is very rocky, and in some places you must have noticed that the cliffs couldn't possibly be climbed from the sea, while there are little coves among them where a man might land," said Kerr. "Suppose a chap cast ashore in such a place, shut in by cliffs he couldn't climb, what could he do? Only stand and watch the sea—perhaps in a part where vessels never pass. Such a man might be only a couple of miles from a town, but as far off from help as if he were wrecked in the Fiji Islands."

"Bai Jove!"

"And it's likely enough," said Tom Merry, "and that would account for his mentioning that he has no boat, and the word 'swim' may be part of a sentence explaining that he can't swim, meaning that that's the reason he doesn't try to get along the coast."

"Exactly."

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins. "Kerr's worked it out rippingly. The chap, instead of being wrecked in the South Sea Islands, may be within five miles of us all the time, perhaps in sound of the church bells."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we'll jolly well look for him!" Tom Merry exclaimed. "It will be a ripping way of spending the rest of our holiday, searching along the cliffs for a shipwrecked seaman."

"Ripping!"

"And we'll begin at once," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course, I've only worked it out in theory," said Kerr. "The chap may be wrecked at the North Pole, or the Equator, for all we know. But I think the theory's probable enough to start on."

"What-ho!" said Figgins. "Let's start. Which way?"

"There was a wreck the night we came here," said Tom Merry, "and I think that the vessel that was wrecked was the one we saw driving before the storm, from the top of the cliff. It was driving southward. It may have been that very craft."

"As likely as not," said Kerr.

"Then come on—southward-ho!" said Tom Merry.

And the St. Jim's juniors started.

CHAPTER 9

Man Overboard.

KERR as Tom Merry & Co. were upon the quest for the shipwrecked sailorman, some of them could not help feeling that their search was somewhat in the nature of a wild-goose chase. The clues were faint and shadowy. As Kerr said, it was the most probable interpretation of the message from the sea, and that was all. Where the castaway really was was a secret of the Atlantic, which the waves might never give up. But, at all events, it was as good a way of passing their time as they could have thought of, and they entered upon the search with zest.

Fatty Wynn stopped in Clovelly to buy sandwiches and buns, and carried quite a bulky parcel under his arm. As Fatty Wynn said, you never could tell—the search might lead them far afield, and in that case, it was no good risking going hungry. There were risks enough in exploring a wild and rocky coast, without that risk being added to them.

"We'll get a boat, and coast along," Tom Merry remarked. "We can get a decent boat here in Clovelly at so much an hour. Shall we take a boatman, or not?"

"Not!" said all the juniors together.

"He would know the coast, you know," Tom Merry remarked.

"Oh, I know the coast very well," said Figgins. "I've been up and down here lots of times. I'll skipper the boat. We want to be on our own."

"Yaas, wathah! I shouldn't mind takin' charge of the party, as far as that goes—"

"But we should mind," grinned Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins!"

"If Gussy is going to row, I stipulate first of all that he shall have an allowance of catching crabs," said Monty Lowther. "After he has caught a hundred he stops rowing."

"I wegard you as an uttah ass, Lowther. As a mattah of fact, I don't feel much inclined to wow. It's too much beastly fag in this hot weathah."

"Oh, we can't let you off," said Lowther. "You must do your share of the work, and, besides, we don't want to miss the fun."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Here we are," said Tom Merry. "Here's a boat that will suit us rippingly. It belongs to old Peter Wood, and we've had it before, so that's all right. Tumble it out, and tumble yourselves in."

The juniors were soon pulling out on the blue water. An excursion steamer was lying off Clovelly, and taking passengers aboard by boat. There was no anchorage close in. The juniors waved their caps to the excursionists on the steamer, and caps and ginger-beer bottles were waved back. Then the boat pulled along the cliffs.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat in the stern, in an attitude of considerable dignity. As a matter of fact, the afternoon was very hot, and nobody specially wanted to row. Blake and Lowther and Figgins and Tom Merry bent to the four oars, while Manners steered.

"Pull a bit more steadily," said Arthur Augustus. "You splashed me, then, Lowthah."

Lowther looked astonished.

"Did I splash you?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah."

"How did I do it?"

"You were bumping your oar in the watah like a silly ass."

"Like that?" asked Lowther, innocently bumping his oar in the water again.

Splash!

There was a wild howl from Arthur Augustus.

Drops of water were splashed all over his beautiful boating flannels, and he jumped up in great excitement.

"You uttah—uttah ass!"

"Dear me! Did I splash you again?" demanded Lowther.

"Yaas, you uttah chump."

"How did I do it?"

"By bumpin' your silly oar in the watah in that silly cack-handed way."

"Like that?" asked Lowther, again

Splash!

Yawooh!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Lowthah, you clumsy ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Is that a wag, you feahful ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It dawned upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that the splash had not been all clumsiness on Monty Lowther's part.

He fixed his monocle upon Lowther with an almost ferocious stare.

"Lowthah! You fwabjous chump!"

"What I like about Gussy," murmured Monty Lowther dreamily, "is his fine flow of language. Doesn't he run on nicely, like a pellucid streamlet, or a—a gramophone?"

"You feahful duffah!"

"His nice selection of courteous phrases, too, is very taking," murmured Lowther. "I find him so soothing on a hot day—always full of repose, and never getting excited."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his nose. Certainly there was very little repose about him now. He made a sudden stride towards Monty Lowther.

"Lowthah, you uttah wottah! I have let you off once today, but this time I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Mercy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway get up, and let me thwash you, you ass."

Monty Lowther brought his oar inboard, and let the tip of it touch D'Arcy's chest, as the swell of St. Jim's came for him. It was only a slight push, but it overbalanced Arthur Augustus, and he sat down in the boat with a bump.

"Ow!"

The boat rocked violently. There was a roll on the sea, as it flowed on the rocky shore.

The boat danced on the waves.

"Here, look out!" exclaimed Blake. "If the boat gets capsized, this will figure in the papers as another shocking boating fatality. I don't want to get famous that way."

"Weally, Blake—"

"These blessed accidents are always due to some idiot changing his place in the boat," said Manners. "Why can't you sit still, Gussy?"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Oh, he's going to sit still now," said Monty Lowther, "if he gets up I shall push him over again."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Now, lie down, Gussy."

"Wats! I wefuse to lie down, and I should uttably decline to be pushed ovah. I wegard you as an uttably fwabjous ass."

"Go hon!"

"I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin, Lowthah."

"Mercy! Have pity on my grey hairs!" implored Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's, breathing wrath and vengeance, struggled to his feet. Monty Lowther's oar touched him in the ribs, and he sat down again, with a bigger bump than before.

"Oh! Yawooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"I'm willing to make it pax now, if you like," said Monty Lowther generously.

The juniors roared. It was really an offer that Monty Lowther could afford to make, considering that he had been the aggressor all along.

D'Arcy sat up, and groped for his eyeglass.

"I wefuse to make it pax, Lowthah. I uttably wefuse to do anything' of the sort."

"Then sit still."

"I wefuse to sit still. I am goin' to give you a thwashin'."

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I am sowwy, deah boys, to intewwupt the harmony of the partay in this mannah, but I wegard it as simply impewative to administrah chastisement to Lowthah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Arthur Augustus staggered up again. Monty Lowther made another poke at him with his oar, but this time the swell of St. Jim's dodged it.

He rushed right in on Lowther, and clasped him round the neck. Monty Lowther jumped up, and they struggled in the middle of the rocking boat.

The other juniors jumped up, too, in alarm.
"Chuck it!" roared Tom Merry. "Do you hear? You'll have the boat over in a second, you silly asses."

"Wats!"
"Stop it!" yelled Blake.
"I am goin' to thwash—"

Blake and Figgins grasped D'Arcy, and dragged at him. The swell of St. Jim's struggled. There was a sudden splash in the sea.

"Bai Jove!"
"Man overboard!" yelled Kerr.
"Bai Jove! It's Lowthah!"
"Good heavens!"

The juniors crowded to the side of the boat, till it tilted dangerously. They looked for Lowther to rise to the surface, to help him into the boat. But the face of Monty Lowther did not appear upon the rolling waters

CHAPTER 10. Quite a Surprise.

MONTY LOWTHER had gone right under when he fell off the boat, and the juniors, watching the water, could not see him rise. Where was Monty Lowther? Had he gone down like a stone to the bottom of the sea?

Arthur Augustus was white as chalk.
"Bai Jove, deah boys," he gasped, "where's Lowthah?"
"He fell in," said Kerr.
"And he went under," said Blake

"Yaus; but where is he now?"
"Well," said Blake, with an air of great consideration, "when a chap goes under, and doesn't come up again, the general conclusion is that he stays under."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry solemnly.
D'Arcy gazed at them in wondering horror.
"Bai Jove! How can you speak so lightly, deah boys, when the poor chap is ddownin'?" If he's undah the watah al this time, he must be ddowned."

"Horrid!"
"Awful!"
"Rotten!"

Jack Blake took out a handkerchief and began to cry into it loudly. Fatty Wynn covered his face with his hands. D'Arcy stared at them.

If Lowther had really been drowned, certainly the chums of St. Jim's would have been very cut up; but they did not look cut up now. D'Arcy could not understand it. If Monty Lowther wasn't drowned, where was he? There was no sign of him on the sea. The shore was half a mile away, and he could not have swum there without being seen.

"My deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, "I am afwaid this twagedy has made you hystewical. That is the only way I can account for your conduct."

"Oh, dear!" sobbed Blake.
"Dead!" wailed Manners. "Dead as a nutcracker or a stiek of Everton toffee! Only five minutes ago he was as lively and playful as a piece of Gorgonzola cheese! Oh, oh, oh!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"
"Cut off in the bloom of his youth!" moaned Tom Merry.
"Young and handsome and blooming—"

"Young and blooming handsome, you mean," said Blake, with a sob. "A blooming nice chap in every way! Oh, oh, oh!"

"Weally, Blake—"
"Dead and drowned," said Figgins. "Drowned and dead! Oh, oh! What a present for Davy Jones! Oh, oh, oh!"

"It's awful to lose a friend like this!" groaned Kerr.
"And to think that that's not the only loss—that Gussy will be hanged now!"

D'Arcy jumped.
"Weally, Kerr—"
"Hanged by the neck, or by a rope, or both," said Kerr.

"Of course, we cannot conscientiously help the assassin to escape."
"The—the what?"
"Of course not," said Tom Merry. "But I d-d-don't want Gussy to be h-h-hanged. It will spoil his necktie."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, you feahful wottahs—"

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"The question is, did Gussy mean murder?" asked Kerr, in a judicial manner. "If his intention was not murderous, he may get off with penal servitude for life."

"Well, that would be a comfort."
"Yes; we could go and visit him on visiting days, you know, and sneak in new neckties and silk socks to him when the warders weren't looking."

"I should like to have a photograph of him in broad arrows," said Manners. "We could hang it up in the study, in remembrance of both Gussy and Lowther."

"Good egg!"
"You uttah wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus, in horror.

"How you can tweek this matter so lightly is beyond my compwehension. It was an accident, of course. Lowthah fell into the watah of his own accord. But it is howwible! Who's goin' to tell his uncle?"

"Oh, I never thought of that!" gasped Tom Merry. "Who will break the news to Lowther's uncle—the kind, noble uncle who lent him fifteen bob on his watch?"

"You uttah ass! I do not mean that kind of an uncle! I mean his uncle who brought him up."
"It will bring down his pink whiskers in sorrow to the grave," said Kerr. "Oh, Gussy, Gussy! How could you do it?"

"Weally, Kerr—"
"How could you, Gussy?" demanded the juniors, in chorus.
"I didn't—"

"Oh, dear! We all saw you! I never beheld such a fearful blow!" said Kerr solemnly.

"Weally, you ass—"
"Never—or hardly ever! Lowther was simply hewed down—"

"I twust I did not hit him vewy hard," said Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "I do not wemembah hittin' him at all. I meant to give him a feahful thwashin', but you fellows dwagged me off before I had time."

"Oh, oh, oh! Poor old Monty! Boo-hoo!"
The juniors wept.

"What about recovering the body?" asked Tom Merry seriously. "Of course, it won't be much use in itself, but there may be money in the pockets, and I lent Lowther my knife, too, this morning."

"I wegard that as howwibly mercenawy, Tom Mewwy."
"Well, it's bad enough to lose a chum, without losing a pocket-knife, too," said Tom Merry. "I put it to you chaps. I don't want to think of this awful tragedy whenever I miss my pocket-knife."

"Certainly not," agreed Figgins. "Besides, Lowther's relations might like to have him back. Relations do these things."

"Quite true."
"What are you going to do about it, Gussy?" asked Kerr. The swell of St. Jim's started.

"I!" he ejaculated.
"Yes. As you killed him—"
"Ow!"

"Well, to put it more euphoniously, as you were the unintentional cause of his early and lamented demise, it's up to you to dive in and fetch him up," said Kerr.

"Hear, hear!"
"But—but—"
"Have a sandwich before you start," said Fatty Wynn, holding out one to Arthur Augustus. "They're quite really good."

Fatty Wynn ought to have known about that, for he had already consumed more than a dozen. D'Arcy waved the proffered sandwich back.

"How can you possibly eat at such a moment, you howwid boundah?" he exclaimed.

Fatty Wynn stared.
"Because I'm hungry," he said.
"I wegard it as howwible."

"Rats! At a time like this, you ought to eat to keep your pecker up," said Fatty Wynn. "Besides, we can consider this in the light of a funeral, and this is the funeral feed! I'm burying him with ham! See?"

"You howwid wottah!"
"Are you going in, Gussy?"
"Weally, you know—"

"I don't think we ought to return without the body," said Manners, with a shake of the head.

D'Arcy stripped off his jacket, and his other things followed. Even at such a moment, the swell of St. Jim's was not inclined to spoil his clothes.

"Vewy well, deah boys," he exclaimed, "I'll go in!"
"Go it!"
"Bravo!"

"I don't suppose I shall find him, but I'll do my best, deah boys."
"Hurray!"
Splash!

Arthur Augustus dived into the sea, where Lowther had gone in, and disappeared. Then the boat rocked as Monty Lowther, quite alive and cheerful, climbed in on the other side. He had been hanging on there all the time, concealed by the gunwale from D'Arcy's eyes, though all the others, of course, knew that he was there.

The juniors grinned as he climbed in.

"I feel quite wet," Lowther remarked. "I suppose there's not any special objection to my changing into Gussy's clothes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther tore off his wet things, and towelled himself down. On the shining sea the head of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared. The swell of St. Jim's was panting. The juniors bunched round Lowther to conceal him from D'Arcy's eyes, as the swell of the school looked towards the boat.

"I can't find him, deah boys."

"Have another try," said Kerr encouragingly.

"I'm afraid it's useless."

"Never mind, go it! You can't expect to murder people in this reckless way, without a little trouble afterwards," said Kerr.

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Oh, have another try!"

"Vewy well!"

The swell of St. Jim's disappeared under the water again. Lowther puffed and blew from his vigorous towelling, and began to dress himself in D'Arcy's clothes. They were a size too small for Monty Lowther, but they were dry, and that was something. Monty Lowther dressed himself rapidly.

D'Arcy's head came up beside the boat.

"I'm afraid it's no go, you fellows."

"You're not going to leave him there, are you, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry reproachfully. "Think of his uncle's feelings! Think of my pocket-knife!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Think of the cash in his pockets—I know he had about thirty bob."

"You uttah wottah!"

"Then his boots would fetch something."

"I wufuse to continue this disgustin' discuss, Tom Mewwy. I have nevah wegarded you as so uttahly beastly before. Help me into the boat."

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I insist upon comin' in immediately."

Tom Merry glanced round. Monty Lowther had almost finished dressing, and was sitting on a thwart, buttoning up D'Arcy's boots.

"Oh, all right, you can come in!"

He lent D'Arcy a hand into the boat. The swell of St. Jim's clambered in, and caught sight of Monty Lowther calmly sitting there, buttoning his boots. The elegant junior stared—and stared!

"Gweat Scott!"

CHAPTER 11.

Strangers Yet.

"HA, ha, ha!"

The juniors simply shrieked at the expression upon the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He was gazing at Monty Lowther as if the latter were a ghost.

Lowther, without even looking up, went on quietly buttoning his boots.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah! Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you are not drowned?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Monty Lowther looked up.

"Did you speak to me?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah! You—you are not drowned?"

"I hardly think so," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

"I don't feel drowned, at all events. Do I look drowned?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I'm not even wet," said Lowther blandly.

"How—how did this—this happen? You fell into the watah, and we all thought—or pewwaps only I thought—you had gone to the bottom. How did you come up?"

"Oh, I came up, and swam under water round the boat!"

Monty Lowther explained cheerfully. "I hung on there till you dived overboard."

D'Arcy gasped.

"Bai Jove! You uttah wottah!"

"Well, you know, I was in mortal terror," said Lowther. "You looked so awfully ferocious, I simply dared not enter the boat."

"You—you—"

"I had to wait for you to cool down. Even now I'm feeling frightfully nervous."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's breathed hard through his nose. He realised that it was a "rag," and his noble blood was at boiling-point.

"I wegard you as a set of wottahs!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aftah this aftahnoon I shall uttahly decline to wegard you as fwriends—I dwop your acquaintance all wound."

"Oh, Gussy—Gussy!"

The swell of St. Jim's waved his hand.

"I don't know you any longah," he said. "As for you, in particular, Montay Lowthah, I wish to impwess upon you nevah to speak to me again!"

And the swell of St. Jim's looked round the boat for his clothes.

He found Lowther's wet clothes, but his own were on Lowther's limbs, and for the moment the swell of the Fourth did not notice that circumstance.

"Bai Jove! These are not my clothes!" he exclaimed, looking round. "These are somebody else's beastly clothes, and they're all wet!"

The juniors rowed on. No one replied to D'Arcy. The oarsmen kept their eyes steadily before them, and the others scanned the sea and the cliffs and the seagulls. No one appeared to hear D'Arcy speak.

"I wepeat," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's warmly—"these are not my clothes! Who has taken my clothes?"

Silence.

"Tom Mewwy, you ass—"

Tom Merry looked at him.

"Did you speak to me?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then kindly refrain from doing so again," said Tom Merry, with dignity. "I dislike being talked to by strangers."

"Eh—what?"

Tom Merry looked away again.

"Stwangahs!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "What do you mean, you fwabjous ass?"

"I mean that I don't know you."

"What?"

"You've dropped my acquaintance," Tom Merry explained—"consequently, I don't know you. I decline to talk to a chap I don't know."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry waved his hand chidingly.

"Please don't address me," he said. "I was always shy with strangers; and I really don't like it."

"You uttah ass!"

Tom Merry did not appear to hear. He rowed on steadily. D'Arcy gave him a wrathful look, and turned to Manners.

"Mannahs, deah boy—"

Manners did not even look at him.

"Mannahs, have you seen my clothes?"

"Eh?"

"Have you seen my clothes?" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Possibly. I'm not in the habit of specially noticing clothes worn by strangers, however. Kindly do not address me."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"I dislike very much having strangers' conversation forced upon me."

"You feahful, fwabjous ass!"

D'Arcy looked round the boat. He recognised his buttoned boots on Lowther's feet, and then he recognised his clothes. He made a step towards the humorist of the Shell, his face pink with wrath.

"Lowthah, you howwid wottah, you have got my clothes on!"

Lowther stared steadily out to sea, without answering.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy caught him by the shoulder and jerked at him.

"Lowthah, you wottah—"

"Hallo!"

"Give me my clothes!"

"Eh? Who are you?"

"You know who I am, you dweadful ass!"

Lowther shook his head solemnly.

"Not at all!" he replied. "Not in the least! I don't know you! I've seen you before. I believe you're a St. Jim's chap, ain't you? But I don't know you."

"Give me my clothes!"

"Eh?"

"My clothes!" shrieked D'Arcy excitedly.

"Please don't speak to me."

"I insist—"

"It is impossible for me to hold a conversation with a fellow I don't know," said Monty Lowther. "Pray desist."

"I must have my clothes!"

Lowther did not reply.

"Lowthah, you ass—Lowthah!"

Still silence.

The swell of St. Jim's shook the Shell fellow by the shoulder.

Monty Lowther gazed round appealingly at the others.

"Lend a hand to keep this idiot off me!" he exclaimed.

"I don't know him, but he persists in forcing his acquaintance on me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Lowthah—oh!"

Kerr and Manners and Blake took hold of Gussy and sat him down upon a thwart. The swell of St. Jim's gazed at them in helpless fury.

"You—you fwabjous beasts—"

"Sit there!" said Blake severely. "It's bad enough to have a stranger in the boat, spoiling the harmony of the party—especially a chap who goes about like a giddy Fiji islander, without any clothes on—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"But we can't have a stranger rowing with a fellow we know. Sit tight."

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort! I—"

"Then we'll drop you overboard, and trail you along after the boat," said Tom Merry.

"I should wufuse to be twailed aftah the boat."

"Will you keep order?"

"Certainly not! I am goin' to thwash Lowthah, and take my clothes off him!"

"There's a rope here," said Figgins. "We could tie him up if you like."

"Good egg!"

"I wufuse to be tied up! I—"

"Lowther's clothes are pretty nearly dry now," Kerr remarked. "Could you let him have them—I mean, could we trust them with a stranger?"

"I wufuse to dwess in them, I—"

"Better let him have them," said Tom Merry. "There's an excursion steamer yonder, and it will pass pretty near us—and there are ladies on board."

Arthur Augustus turned the colour of a beetroot. He made a wild grab at Monty Lowther's clothes, and was dressed in them in record time.

CHAPTER 12.

Exploring the Cave.

THE juniors pulled in nearer the shore, Arthur Augustus sitting in an attitude of chilling dignity in the boat.

But the other fellows did not appear to observe it. They did not know D'Arcy now—and they were keeping it up till the swell of St. Jim's should come round.

The blaze of the sun had dried Lowther's clothes, and D'Arcy found them dry enough; what worried him chiefly was the fit of them. Besides, Lowther's colour scheme was more florid than suited D'Arcy's taste. Arthur Augustus was very particular on the subject of stripes and spots. But it could not be helped now, and the swell of St. Jim's had to sit there in a waistcoat that did not agree with the tone of his complexion, and a tie that did not either agree or contrast with the tone of the waistcoat. It was what Arthur Augustus would have called roughing it, with a vengeance.

Big black cliffs rose against the sea as the boat pulled in—big, soaring cliffs, penetrated by the deep green gullies, or coombs, which could be climbed by active climbers, to reach the road over the cliffs inland. The sea boomed and broke on the sand and shingle at the base of the echoing coombs. All looked dark and solitary; though here and there on the cliffs a straw hat or a white dress could be seen.

"Well, this looks as jolly lonely as the islands in the Pacific, the time we were looking for the giddy treasure," Blake remarked.

Arthur Augustus opened his lips to say "Yaas, wathah!" but closed them again with the words unuttered, remembering that he and the other fellows were strangers yet.

"Yes, doesn't it?" said Figgins. "Just the place to look for a shipwrecked chap who can't get off. Some of those coombs can't possibly be climbed, you see; and a chap chucked in there by the sea would be a prisoner, unless he could swim out."

"That's where we shall find him," said Kerr.

"I think so," said Tom Merry.

The boat pulled closer in.

It was certainly a likely theory that the juniors were following up; though on such an extent of wild coast the search was likely to be very like that for a needle in a bundle of hay.

Half a mile upon mile of giant cliffs stretched there, and the searching of them would be the work probably of weeks and months.

But the juniors were hopeful.

"Land here and begin," said Jack Blake.

"Right-ho!"

It looked a likely spot. The sea ran in with curling foam between two big masses of cliffs, and further on shelving sand ran from the water's edge to the edge of a thick cluster of wood.

The juniors ran the boat upon the sand and jumped ashore. Round them the cliffs rose in great walls of rock, and three hundred yards above them, at least, could be seen the tops, clothed in green. The rocks were inaccessible to a climber, offering hardly foothold enough for a seagull.

Kerr nodded his head in a convincing way.

"Suppose our boat were biffed on the rocks now," he remarked. "And suppose we couldn't swim. What could we do? Simply send a note out to sea in one of the gingerbeer-bottles."

"Yes, rather!"

"Here's a cave!" said Figgins.

The cove into which the juniors had rowed was a small one—they could examine the surroundings quite easily without moving from the spot. In the midst of the cliffs a deep, dark cavern opened, and it was plain that if the castaway was in the cove at all he had taken refuge in the cavern.

"That's where we begin," said Tom Merry. "Get out the candles, you chaps."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors were trembling with excitement now. Whether the castaway was there or not, there was something thrillingly interesting in exploring a cave. It might have been used by smugglers in past times. There might be casks and old pistols, and perhaps even skeletons in the gloomy recesses. In the caves near to Clovelly they had found old boots and ginger-beer bottles, relics of modern trippers, but this cave was too far off the beaten track for that.

The candles were lighted, and the juniors plunged into the cave. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hesitated whether he should follow.

He finally decided to do so.

Blake and the others stared at him as he entered the cavern.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "What's this stranger doing round here? I say, you fellow, who are you?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'm sorry," said Tom Merry gently but firmly, "but we can't allow chaps we don't know to join our party."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Anybody here know this chap?"

"Nobody!"

"Then I must ask you to walk further off, you stranger."

"You uttah ass! I should wemain in the boat, but I am convinced that you fellows will get into some feahful

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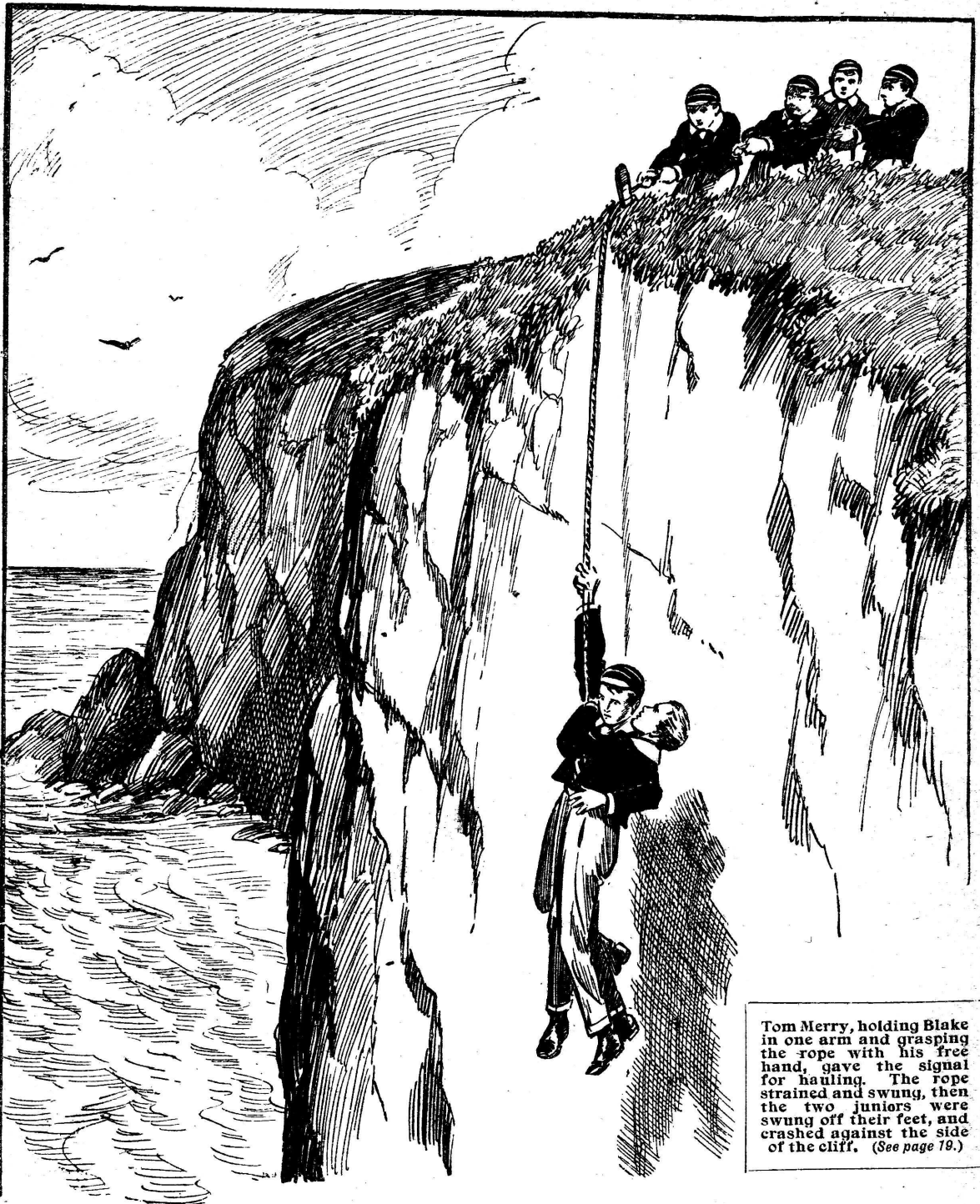
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MASTER N. NELSON, 14, Pitherric Road, Dundee.
MASTER A. MACKENZIE, 15, Baxter Park Terrace, Dundee.



Tom Merry, holding Blake in one arm and grasping the rope with his free hand, gave the signal for hauling. The rope strained and swung, then the two juniors were swung off their feet, and crashed against the side of the cliff. (See page 19.)

trouble unless I am here to look aftah you," said the swell of St. Jin's indignantly. "That is my only weason for comin'."

"I'm afraid I can't discuss the matter," said Tom Merry. "My grandmother always warned me against being too ready to enter into conversation with strangers."

"Same here," said Blake. "Who is this chap who keeps on persisting in talking to fellows he doesn't know?"

"You feahful, fwabjous chumps!"

"I say, come on, you fellows!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "We shall lose all the afternoon if you hang about talking to chance acquaintances like this."

"Quite right. Come on."

The juniors marched on into the cave, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bringing up the rear. The cave narrowed as they advanced, as if the big rocks were going to close up their path altogether, but the opening ran on in a narrow tunnel, and then it widened again. Right into the heart of the cliffs the tunnel ran.

The candles flared and flickered as they walked on. Round them the cave widened and narrowed in turn, and the candlelight gleamed and glistened on the surface of the rough rock.

When they spoke their voices had a hollow, booming sound, echoing strangely in the hollows of the rock.

"My hat!" said Manners. "Look here, the chap can't

have come right in here, even if he was wrecked in the gully yonder."

"Might have," said Figgins. "He might have followed this cave to see if it would lead out anywhere inland. It must run a good way through the cliffs, anyway, considering how far we've followed it."

"Well, that's possible."

"Anyway, we may as well explore it to the end," said Kerr. "It doesn't look as if there had been any smugglers here, though, does it? I haven't seen any casks or skeletons."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laugh rang weirdly and eerily through the cavern.

"Blessed if it doesn't seem to be getting on without a blessed end at all!" said Tom Merry, holding up his candle and peering ahead. "The direction has changed several times, and I don't think we're going inland now."

"Can't possibly tell here."

"I suppose not; but I think we're following the coast, and if the tunnel has an opening, it will be in another coomb along the sea."

"Well, we'll see!" said Blake, pushing on ahead.

"Mind! The rock's slippery here!"

"Oh, I'm all right— My hat!"

Blake's foot slipped as he spoke.

There was a sudden slope in the rocky floor of the cave, and Blake went down the slope, slipping before he could save himself. His candle whisked out, and his voice rang in a startled cry as he whizzed into the blackness.

Tom Merry dashed forward, holding up his candle.

"Blake! Blake!"

"Look out! You'll be in, too!" shrieked Lowther, grasping his chum by the shoulder.

They halted on the sloping rock.

Before them lay a deep, black opening as they held forward the candles—and into the gloomy abyss Jack Blake had disappeared!

CHAPTER 13.

Deep Down.

TOM MERRY & CO. stood frozen with horror. They gazed at the gloomy abyss opening almost at their feet, into which their chum had vanished, with white, scared faces.

"Good heavens!" muttered Lowther. "He's gone!"

"Blake! Blake!"

"It mayn't be deep," Figgins muttered. "I—I thought I heard a splash!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Blake! Blake!"

"Hold me by the hand so that I can get near the edge and look in," said Tom Merry, in a low voice.

"Mind! It's risky!"

"All right!"

Lowther took Tom Merry's left hand, and Manners took Lowther's, and the rest of the juniors held on to Manners. Thus Tom Merry drew near the edge of the abyss, and with his free hand held the candle out over it. The light flickered and wavered in a strong draught.

"Blake! Blake!"

Tom Merry's voice rang out loudly with deep echoes in the hollows of the rock.

"Blake!"

He could not penetrate more than a yard or so into the deep gloom of the chasm. He listened with straining ears for a reply from below. Where was Blake? How deep was the abyss? Was Blake stretched in death upon the cruel rocks deep below? The thought was like a hand of iron clutching at the junior's heart.

"Blake! Blake!"

"Hallo!"

It was a faint, echoing shout from below.

Tom Merry's heart leaped.

"Blake! That you?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven!"

Tom Merry turned almost giddy with relief. There was a murmur from the juniors behind him. They had heard Blake's voice, too, and it had lifted a load of anxiety from their hearts.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I've been feelin' howwible, you know. It was simply dweadful."

"Blake!"

"Hallo!"

"Are you hurt?"

"I think I've twisted my ankle a bit. It hurts!" came Blake's faint voice in reply. "I fell in about three feet of water, though, and I think that saved me. I've got out of it. I'm sitting on a rock. Are you showing a light?"

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"Yes."

"I can't see it. The rock bulges out here over my head. I think. But I can see light in the distance here. I think this is near the end of the tunnel."

"Daylight?"

"It must be."

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps we had bettah dwop down aftah Blake, you know—"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "There may be no way back again. One of us had better go after him, and I think I'd better be the one."

"Bosh!"

"Stuff! Better let me go," said Figgins. "You see—"

"Weally, Figgins, as Blake's special chum, I—"

"Oh, you're strangers now, you know."

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"Shut up a minute while I speak to Blake," said Tom Merry. He bent over the verge of the abyss again.

"Blake, old man!"

"Hallo! I'm still here!"

"How's your foot?"

"Only pains a bit."

"Can you climb?"

"No!"

"Move at all?"

"Yes. I think I had better get along here out into the daylight. If I come out into a coomb you can bring the boat along and take me off."

"Good egg! But how'll you let us know?"

There was a long pause.

"Ask me another," said Blake at last.

"I'm coming down after you," said Tom Merry.

"Don't; it's too risky."

"How deep do you think you dropped?"

"Twenty feet at least."

"Well, if you can drop twenty feet, I can drop twenty feet," said Tom Merry. "You're not going to stick there alone."

"Hold on!" said Kerr. "One of us can dodge back and get a rope from the boat. We brought plenty of ropes. Then it will be safe."

"Doesn't he think of things?" said Figgins admiringly. "This is what comes of being a blessed Scotchman, you know."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "You buzz back, Kerr, and be as quick as you can."

"You bet!"

And Kerr ran off with flickering candle. The juniors occupied the time while he was gone with arguing which of them should join Blake. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Blake's own chum in the Fourth Form, claimed the right to go.

"It's all wot!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "If Hewwies or Dig had been here, they might claim it, but I'm Blake's only weal chum, and I'm bound to go."

"That's all very well," said Manners. "But you don't know Blake now."

"Ass!"

"We can't trust a stranger to look after Blake—"

"Weally, you silly ass—"

"So I'd better go," said Figgins. "I'm in the Fourth Form, and Blake's in the Fourth, and that's a good reason. We can't trust Shell fellows on a job of this sort."

"Yaas, I agwee with you there, Figgay, but I considah—"

"Rats!"

"Wats!"

"Oh, Figgay can't go!" said Lowther briefly. "Figgay is our host, and he's bound to put himself in the background."

Figgins sniffed.

"Quite wight!" said D'Arcy. "I'm sure Figgay will not neglect the unwritten wules of etiquette. Figgins is off. You see, I'm bound to go."

"I'm going," said Tom Merry. "I'm skipper of the party, and I'm bound to show the way. Besides, the Shell always lead."

"Wats!"

"Let's leave it to Blake," suggested Manners.

"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah! I nevah thought of that, you know."

"Blake, old man!"

"Hallo!"

"One of us is coming down to keep you company! Which will you have?"

"Oh, any old thing will do!" said Blake cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Toss up for it," suggested Blake.

"Good ideah! And I nevah thought of that, eithah!"

And the juniors tossed up for it, by candle-light, and Tom Merry won. By that time Kerr was back with the rope.

The end of the rope was fastened round the hero of the Shell, under the armpits, and he slid over the edge of the chasm.

"Careful!" he muttered. "This rock has a sharp edge here—it's like a knife! Mind how you pay out the rope!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The rope slid out.

Tom Merry swung into the darkness of the abyss, his boot clinking against the rock as he turned on the rope. His candle went out in the draught, and he was left in darkness.

He felt his way with his hands against the wall of rock.

"Blake, where are you?"

"Here!" came the echoing answer from the blackness.

"Keep away from under me, in case of accidents."

"It's all right. I'm under the rock. You couldn't fall on me if you tried!" said Blake cheerfully.

"I can hear the rope scratching on the rock. If it goes—Oh!"

The rope parted with a twang.

Tom Merry shot downward.

Almost before he cried out he was plunging up to his waist in icy water.

CHAPTER 14.

On the Track!

BUT the fall had been a short one, and Tom Merry was not hurt. He floundered in the water, still holding tight the candle. Blake's voice came from the gloom.

"My hat! Are you hurt, Tommy?"

"N-no!" Tom Merry gasped. "No! Only a shock! Ow! I'm wet up to the waist, and it's horribly cold!"

"Yes; I've found it so!"

"Groo!"

"Got any matches?" said Blake.

"Yes, that's all right."

Tom Merry carried a waterproof matchbox. He groped for it, and struck a match above the level of the water, and after some attempts succeeded in getting the candle-wick alight.

The juniors above were calling down anxiously.

"I'm all right," Tom Merry shouted back, "only the rope's gone."

"Bai Jove!"

"The rock cut through it."

"That's rotten!" said Figgins, from the top. "It looks as if we sha'n't be able to pull either of you up."

"It's impossible; the rope would part, and it would take longer pulling up than letting down, too. There's no chance."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Follow this tunnel to the end, and see what comes of it."

"Then we'll wait here?"

"Yes; it's all right. It won't take long; I can see daylight."

Tom Merry's candle flickered on rough walls of wet rock. At his feet flowed sea-water, and as it was flowing outward he could tell that the tide was not coming in. But it showed that the tunnel was on a very low level.

"My hat!" Tom Merry muttered. "When the tide turns, I dare say this place will be full up. How ripping for us!"

Blake grunted.

"We should be drowned like giddy rats in a trap," he said. "Let's buzz."

The candlelight showed Blake sitting on a rock projecting from the water. The tunnel, as it ran on, was flooded, but in no place to a depth of more than three feet.

Tom Merry held out his hand to Blake.

"Can you walk if I help you?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so. I couldn't climb, but I can hop along if you let me lean on you, and lend me a hand."

"I hope it's not serious, old chap."

"Oh, it's only a sprain. I've had things as bad on the footer field," said Blake, with undiminished cheerfulness; "and it doesn't hurt much, excepting when I move. Let's get off. We're starting, you fellows!"

"Right-ho! We're waiting here till we hear from you," sang back Figgins.

"Good!"

Tom Merry and Blake, wading sometimes waist deep, sometimes knee deep, followed the course of the tunnel. The candle went out again, but Tom Merry did not trouble to relight it. The gleam of daylight was clear before them, and the opening of the tunnel was in sight.

Jack Blake leaned heavily upon the Shell fellow's arm. In spite of his cheerfulness, the injury to his ankle hurt him considerably.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Tom Merry, at last.

The water ran out into a little cove, embosomed in cliffs. The juniors trod out upon the rocks, and looked about them.

They were in a little embayment of the cliffs. Before

them the sea rolled, wide and blue, in the distance, but they could catch only a narrow glimpse of it, so close were the big, towering cliffs. Round them and behind them the cliffs rose like great walls of rocks, crowned with trees and thickets.

At high tide it was certain the sand at their feet would be covered with water, several feet deep at least. Then the tunnel through which they had come would be blocked with water, and impassable. If the tide caught them there, they could only climb up the cliffs for safety, and the cliffs could not be climbed to any great height, for the rocks were steep and in places overhanging.

"The tide won't turn for an hour at least," Tom Merry said, looking at the sea.

Blake nodded.

"We ought to have the boat round here by that time," he said, "but I doubt if the boat could get near here. The chaps will have to come over the cliffs, and let down a rope to us."

Tom Merry gazed about him.

"But where are we, exactly, I wonder?" he said. "This can't be very far from the coomb where we left the boat; but—"

"But where is it? that's the question. It's to the southward, anyway," said Blake. "I feel pretty sure of that."

"Yes, I think so," said Tom Merry, looking out to sea. "But—"

"Better cut back and tell the fellows to get back to the boat, and come along the coast," said Blake. "It's no good their following us here, this way. We should be shut in here by the tide, with no escape."

"Quite right. You'll be all right if I leave you?"

"Yes. I'll bathe my ankle in the sea-water—it will do it good."

"Right you are!"

Tom Merry plunged back into the tunnel.

Without Blake to help, he traversed it quickly, and in a few minutes he caught the gleam of the candles in the gloom overhead, and knew that he was near the spot where Blake had fallen in.

"Hallo!" he called out.

"Hallo!" came back Figgins's voice.

"We've found the outlet," Tom Merry called up.

"There's no way from it, though—it's quite shut in. You fellows get back to the boat, and go along the shore south. You'll come upon us that way. It can't be far."

"Right you are, Tommy!"

"Au revoir, then!"

Tom Merry returned the way he had come, and joined Blake in the little cove. Blake was sitting on a rock with his feet immersed in the water, bathing the swollen ankle. He held something in his hands—a fragment of wreckage he had picked up on the sand, and he held it up as Tom Merry joined him.

"Look at that!" he said.

It was a fragment of a broken boat. On it were several letters painted, and the juniors looked at them in deep interest.

"Red W—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The Red Wing!"

CHAPTER 15

The Castaway.

THERE was no doubt about it.

That fragment of wreckage had belonged to the schooner Red Wing—the wrecked vessel of which the juniors were in search.

There was little doubt now that the wreck had really been on the Devon coast, as Kerr had worked out from the message in the bottle. The secret of the sea was becoming clear. The wreck had been on these rocks, and perhaps in this very

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A Grand, New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry
& Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

bove lingered the castaway, shut in by inaccessible cliffs, who had sent that message floating in the bottle to summon help.

"By George," said Blake, "I think it's pretty clear now! Kerr worked it out all right. The wreck was along here somewhere."

Tom Merry looked round.

"And this is just the place where the man might be!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. If he were tossed in here by the sea, he certainly couldn't get away again, unless he were a first-rate swimmer, and then he would have about even chances of getting drowned."

Tom Merry's eyes scanned the cove, and the grim, frowning rocks.

If part of the wreckage of the Red Wing had been washed into the little cove, it was quite possible that the castaway had been washed there, too. But in that case, where was he?

When had he sent that message on the waters? Doubtless on the morning after the wreck, when he had found that it was impossible to escape inland. What had happened to him since? Wrecked, probably without food of any sort, he must have famished since. He might have fallen in some desperate effort to climb the cliffs, or he might have tried to escape by water, and have been drowned. His hope that the message in the bottle would be found could have been very slight.

"Poor chap!" said Tom Merry, in a low tone. "I wonder

"He may be here," said Blake.

"But where?"

"Let's look for him."

"Can you walk?"

Blake grinned faintly.

"I can limp," he said.

"Come on, then."

The juniors had nothing to do while they waited for the boat to come. They moved slowly along the cove, and Tom Merry called out at intervals, in case there should be anyone within hearing.

But no reply came to their calling.

If the castaway was there he could not hear—or he would not answer. Tom Merry paused suddenly, and stooped down to the sand. He picked up a cap—a sailor's cap, and held it up for Blake to see.

"Somebody's been here," said Blake, in a hushed voice.

"Looks like it."

"And, look here!"

On the rocks lay a broken tobacco-pipe. Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. They were on the track, he felt certain of it.

"He's here, Blake!" he whispered.

"By Jove, I believe so!"

"But—but—"

"Why doesn't he answer, then?"

"He might be asleep somewhere," said Tom Merry, in a shaking voice.

Blake did not reply. The same thought was in both minds, that they might stumble upon a dead body in their search, and the juniors felt their hearts beat painfully at the thought among the rocks.

The sun was blazing down upon them, and the juniors were soon dry, and they were thirsty, too. Tom Merry had a bottle of ginger-beer and a tin cup in his wallet, and he took them out. Blake touched his arm.

"Hold on, Tommy!"

"What do you mean?"

"If that chap has been shut up here, he can't have been able to get anything to drink. There is no fresh water here at all, unless some of the rain was left in the crevices. Keep that, in case we find him!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Quite right, Jacky; I ought to have thought of that. Come on!"

And the bottle remained unopened.

They tramped along the rocks, searching for a clue, but not finding one. Near the tunnel by which they had entered the cove, a deep crevice opened in the cliff, overarched by heavy rock.

They paused as they came to it.

"Just where a chap might creep for shelter!" Blake whispered.

"Yes."

"Let's look, anyway."

The crevice was deep in shadow. Tom Merry called out: "Is anybody here?"

He started as a faint sound came from the shadows.

It was a groan!

Blake clutched his arm.

"We've found him!"

Tom Merry did not reply; he clambered into the rocky crevice. He stopped just in time to avoid stumbling over a man who lay stretched on the ground.

He was a young man, not more than thirty, with a pale, emaciated face, white through the sunburn on the skin.

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His eyes, deep and hollow, turned wildly upon the juniors as they came up.

He tried to raise himself upon his elbow, and sank back again from sheer exhaustion.

"Help!" he muttered.

Tom Merry knelt by his side.

"We're here to help you," he said. "Are you James Calcroft, the mate of the schooner Red Wing?"

The man stared at him.

"Yes," he murmured.

"Good! We're here searching for you!"

"Then—then—"

"We found the message in the bottle."

"Oh, Heaven be praised!"

The man was evidently utterly exhausted. He groaned again as Tom Merry took the bottle from his wallet, and drew the cork.

"You are thirsty?" the junior asked.

The sailorman groaned.

"I am dying of thirst!"

"Drink, then!"

Calcroft drank the gingerbeer eagerly. The slaking of his burning thirst seemed to put new life into the man.

He dragged himself to a sitting posture.

Light came into his eyes, and a trace of colour into his wan cheeks. He gazed at the boys with eyes a little less wild and haggard.

"Have you anything to eat with you?" he muttered.

"I've some sandwiches."

Tom Merry handed them to the castaway. It was pitiful to see how eagerly the man ate.

"Oh, thanks—thanks!" he murmured, when the sandwiches were gone. "I've eaten nothing for three days—three days!"

The last morsel was eaten. Then Calcroft's strength seemed to be returning. He leaned back against a rock with a sigh of contentment.

"You found the bottle?" he asked.

"Yes; look here!"

Tom Merry showed him the half-decipherable document. The mate of the Red Wing looked at it with a peculiar expression upon his worn face.

"I never thought I should see it again," he said weakly.

"I thought of it as a chance, that was all. I can't swim, and I couldn't climb the cliffs round the cove. I've tried, and I've twisted my leg by falling. There was no escape for me—and I thought I would die of hunger here. The rum-bottle was thrown ashore with other things, and I thought of sending a message to sea in it. And that's saved my life—thanks to Providence!"

He scanned the paper again.

"It's been wetted by the sea-water," he said. "I fastened it up as tightly as I could. Some of the words are blotted out!"

"Yes; we had to guess a lot of it."

Calcroft looked over the message again.

"I can tell you how it should have read," he said. "This is how I wrote it: 'Wrecked on coast, shut in by cliffs, and cannot get inland. Cannot swim, and have no boat. I do not know where I am, but this place must be on the Devon coast. Help! The word Devon is gone,' he said. "How did you know I was on this coast at all, then? It might have been on any coast."

Tom Merry smiled.

"We thought of South Sea islands at first," he said. "But Kerr—one of our chaps, you know—Kerr worked it out, like a regular Sherlock Holmes. That's how we came along here looking for you!"

"Thank Heaven you came! You have saved my life! I've had nothing to eat for three days; nothing to drink except some rain-water I found in a crevice the first day; but it was dried up by the second, and there has been no rain since. Thank Heaven you came! You have a boat, I suppose?"

"We didn't come by boat."

Calcroft stared.

"You could not have come over the cliffs, surely?"

Tom Merry explained how they had arrived in the cove. The man gave a groan.

"Then the boat may not find you—you are lost, as well as I!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The other chaps won't give up till they find us, anyway," he said. "It's all serene!"

Blake held up his hand.

"Hark!" he exclaimed.

Faintly, through the air, echoing among the cliffs, came a distant shout.

"Hallo!"

CHAPTER 16.

The Rescue!

"HALLO!"

The hail echoed and re-echoed among the cliffs of the cove.

Tom Merry jumped up.

"That's our chaps," he said.

"What-ho!" said Blake. "Now we sha'n't be long!"

"Rather not! You don't mind if we leave you for a minute, Mr. Calcroft—we'll come back for you!"

"Ay, ay; it's all right now!"

Tom Merry and Blake ran out of the crevice. The shouting of the St. Jim's juniors echoed in the little cove, but they could not be seen. There was no sign of the boat on the sea, or among the ricks of the little inlet.

Tom Merry looked round in surprise.

"Where are they?"

"Hallo!"

"They're shouting," said Blake. "Let's shout back!"

"Good! Give 'em a yell!"

And Tom Merry and Blake yelled together:

"Hallo! St. Jim's! Hallo!"

Their voices rang with a thousand loud echoes among the cliffs, startling the sea-gulls. From the distance a shout came back.

"Here we are!"

The voices sounded from above, and Tom Merry scanned the cliffs with a keen eye. A cap waved over the summit of a grey cliff, and he recognised Monty Lowther.

"There they are, Blake!" he exclaimed, waving his hand.

"Jolly good!"

The two juniors ran towards the cliff, Blake limping. They had to stand some distance out from the base of it, however, to see the juniors on the top. The cliff was fifty feet high or more, and behind it rose range on range of soaring cliffs, barring the juniors off from the land.

The St. Jim's juniors were bunched on top of the cliffs. Kerr carried a large coil of rope on his arm. They waved their caps to the fellows below.

"Here we are!" shouted Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Couldn't you get the boat round?" called out Tom Merry.

"Can't be did! The rocks are in the way, and the current would have bashed us on them. It's the most dangerous spot on the whole coast!" said Figgins. "This is the part the Clavelly fishermen warned us to keep clear of!"

"But it's all wight, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "We landed furthah up the shore, and we've come along the cliffs lookin' for you!"

"Jolly lucky we found you, too!" said Kerr. "If you hadn't heard us shouting—"

"But we did hear you!" said Tom Merry. "There's no way down here from where you are, and there's no way up there. You've got a rope?"

"Yes; sixty feet!" said Kerr.

"Good; that will be plenty! It will stand two of us? Blake's got a gammy foot!"

"That's all right!"

"Lower away, then!"

The rope came rattling down the face of the cliff. Tom Merry caught the end of it, and called out:

"That's enough!"

"All wight!"

"Here you are, Blake!"

Blake hesitated.

"Look here. I think I can manage——"

"Rats! I'm going to hold you!"

"The rope might give——"

"Oh, it's strong enough, and the cliff is smooth enough, too! It will be all right!"

Tom Merry fastened the rope under Blake's arms, and held on to it himself, and gave the signal for hauling.

The rope tightened at once.

"Pull away!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The rope strained and swung. The two juniors were pulled off their feet, and they swung against the face of the cliff.

"It's all right," muttered Tom Merry. "I've got you!"

He held Blake in one arm, and held the rope with his free hand, as they were dragged up the cliff.

Slowly, slowly, they rose in the air.

Higher and higher!

Sea and sky seemed to swim round them, and the sea-gulls, crossing the wide blue, seemed to be swooping upon them.

Higher and higher!

They were at the edge of the cliff.

"Oh!" groaned Blake.

His injured ankle had knocked on the cliff, and the lad

almost fainted with the pain. Tom Merry's arm closed upon him more tightly.

"Buck up, old chap!"

Blake did not reply. His senses were swimming.

Higher! And now they were against the cliff top, and Monty Lowther and Figgins reached down and grasped them with their hands, and helped them over the verge.

With reeling brain, the two juniors were dragged upon the green top of the cliff, and they lay there, endeavouring to collect their senses.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! Poor old Blake!"

Blake gasped.

"I—I'm all right! My ankle's got a bit of a twister, that's all."

"Safe again, anyway," said Figgins, with a gasp of relief. "We'll carry Blake to the boat—we left it nearly a mile away, down by the shore, when we came over the cliff path. We'll carry him in turns."

Tom Merry sat up, panting.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed.

"What for? We'd better be getting back as quickly as possible," urged Figgins. "Blake ought to have his ankle seen to at once."

"Yaas, wathah! I suggest that we huwwy like anythin', deah boys."

"Come on, Tom Merry!"

"All serene!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But we've got to bring up the other one first."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Which!"

"What other one?" asked Monty Lowther, fearing for a moment that what he had been through had made Tom Merry's mind wander. "What are you talking about?"

"The other chap, of course! He will have to be fetched up!"

"But there isn't any other chap, old man."

"Ha, ha! Yes, there is, isn't there, Blake?"

"What-ho!" grinned Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"Then who is it?" demanded Figgins.

"Chap named Calcroft!"

"What!"

"Mate of the schooner Red Wing."

"What! What!"

"You've found him!" shouted Kerr.

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"You've found the castaway?"

"Yes."

"My hat! Where is he?"

"Down yonder, by the cove," said Tom Merry coolly. "Two of us had better go down for him, while you wait here with Blake. We'll have him up in next to no time."

"Bai Jove! You have weally found him, then?"

"You bet!"

"Then the paper was worked out all right?" said Kerr, with considerable satisfaction. "The chap was really along here all the time, you see."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here, what are you chipping in for, you chap?" demanded Monty Lowther. "I can't have strangers chipping into the conversation in this way."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"It's against all etiquette, you know."

"Undah the circs——" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"I'm afraid that I can't consent to hold long conversations with strangers, under any circumstances," said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Let's go down for that chap."

Blake rested on the cliff, while Figgins and Lowther swung themselves down on the rope.

Tom Merry had given them accurate directions, and they easily found the crevice where the castaway lay. The certainty of rescue had reanimated Calcroft, and he was able to walk to the cliff, with the assistance of Figgins and Monty Lowther. With some difficulty, but successfully, the castaway was drawn up the cliff, as Blake had been.

Arthur Augustus patted him on the back.

"Awf'ly glad to see you, Mr. Calcroft," he said; "and I am vevy glad that I've been the means of rescuin' you, with the help of these fellows."

"Well, of all the cheek——" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.

"Weally, Wynn——"

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 181.

A Grand, New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Better hurry now," said Fatty Wynn. "We want to get in before dark if we can,—and, I say, ain't any of you fellows getting hungry?"

"We've plenty of sandwiches," said Figgins.
 "Have you?" said Fatty Wynn, with great interest.
 "Then you might hand over a few of them, Figgy. I'm peckish."

"You're carrying them."
 "Oh, those!" said Fatty Wynn, looking quite disappointed.
 "Yes, those," said Figgins. "They're all right, aren't they?"

"Yes, they were all right."
 "Were!" howled Figgins.
 "You see, I've been having a snack or two as we came along, and—and—"

"You blessed porpoise! I—"
 "You see, I get so jolly hungry at this time of the year, and—"

"Oh, come on! I believe you'll start eating one of us if we don't get in to dinner to time," said Figgins, with a snort. And the party started for the boat.

CHAPTER 17.

Arthur Augustus Comes Round.

TOM MERRY & CO. were in a jubilant humour. They had succeeded in their expedition, and they had succeeded in what was really a very short space of time.

There was no doubt that they had saved the life of the castaway. The man, lying exhausted in the crevice by the cove, could never have moved without aid, and even if boats had passed the cove, he could have made no signal to them. The St. Jim's juniors had saved his life, and it was a keen satisfaction to them. He owed his life more to Kerr than to anybody else, for the Scottish junior had worked out the true meaning of the message from the sea, and without that the rescue could not have taken place. But Kerr did not put on any airs on that account. Calcroft would never have known that he had had anything to do with it, if the others had not explained.

Calcroft and Blake were got down to the boat with some difficulty. Dusk was falling on the Devonshire coast when the two boys were placed in the boat, and the juniors pulled off.

"Bettah let me steer, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

"What for?" demanded Lowther.
 "Because it will be wathah wisky gettin' back to Clovelly aftah dark."

Lowther sniffed.
 "Well, we don't want to increase the risk, then," he said.
 "Weally, Lowthah—"

"I'll steer, as I know the coast," said Figgins; "and listen to me when I give order, you bounders. We don't want to run ashore and get Mr. Calcroft drowned after rescuing him."
 "Wathah not!"

"I wish that stranger wouldn't keep on chipping in like this," said Monty Lowther, in a peevish tone. "I wonder where he was brought up?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should be sowwy to have to give you a feahful thwashin', Lowthah, on such a happy occasion as this; but if you dwive me to it—"

"Order!" sang out Blake.
 "I wefuse to ordah—I mean—"

"There are the lights of Clovelly!"
 "Hurrah!"

The juniors brought the boat safely to land. They landed, Blake limping on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's arm, and the other fellows helped the mate of the Red Wing ashore. Calcroft was able to walk now, with assistance.

"You're coming to my uncle's house now, Mr. Calcroft," said Figgins. "He will be delighted to see you, and we can put you up and look after you, you know."

"Thank you!" said Calcroft gratefully. "I don't know how to thank you lads, but I'm grateful."
 "Oh, that's nothing."

"Nothin' at all, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gracefully. "Pway don't mench."
 "Don't which?" demanded Lowther.

"Mench."
 "What on earth do you mean by mench?"
 "It's an abbreviation of mention, deah boy."

"Well, of all the chumps—"
 "Weally, you wottah—"
 "This way!" said Tom Merry. "Get a move on!"

"Yes, for goodness' sake, buck up!" said Fatty Wynn.
 "I'm feeling simply famished, and Mr. Calcroft must be hungry, too."

The juniors were not long in reaching Cliff Lodge. Mr. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 181.

Gandish was at the gate, waiting for them, rather anxious as they had not returned before dark. The old gentleman uttered an exclamation of relief at the sight of them.

"Oh, here you are!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid that something had happened to you."

"That's all wight, deah sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I have been lookin' after them, Mr. Gandish. I wegarded myself as responsible."

"You are all here?" asked the old gentleman. "Dear me! Who is this? A friend of yours?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We've found him."
 "Found him?"
 "Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"But—but I do not quite understand," said Mr. Gandish, in astonishment. "How have you found him, and who is he?"

"He's Mr. Calcroft—"
 "What!"
 "Mate of the Red Wing—"

"Goodness gracious!"
 "The giddy castaway, uncle," said Figgins jubilantly. "We've rescued him, and we've brought him home."

"Dear me! Bless my soul! This is really—really surprising!" exclaimed Mr. Gandish. "Most surprising and most gratifying! Come in, my dear sir! You are very welcome—very welcome indeed! Pray come in!"

And the kind old gentleman shook hands with the mate of the Red Wing half a dozen times at least, and drew him into his house. And the rescued castaway was looked after by Mr. Gandish and the juniors, and provided with everything that he needed. In a suit of Mr. Gandish's clothes, and looking very much better, the castaway took his place at the dinner-table, and he outvied Fatty Wynn himself in his exploits there. He had the want of three days to make up for, and he did his best.

Mr. Gandish beamed over the table in the highest good-humour. He was very pleased at what had happened. Arthur Augustus was beaming with good-humour, too. In the course of the dinner the swell of St. Jim's rose to speak.

"Gentlemen—"
 "Hear, hear!" sang out Blake.
 "Hallo, who's that fellow talking?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I don't know him."
 "Weally, Lowthah—"
 "Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, undah the circs.—"
 "Three cheers for the circs.!" said Manners.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Undah the circs., on the happay and joyous occasion of the wescue of our friend the castaway, I have wescolved not to allow myself to treat you chaps as you deserve, for playin' a wotten twick on me."

"Hear, hear!"
 "I am goin' to ovahlook the whole occuwence," said Arthur Augustus graciously. "I am goin' to westore you to my friendship."

"Hurrah!"
 "Go it!"

"If you have tears, prepare to shed them now," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I shall westore you all to the list of my acquaintances, and wegard you as fwiends," said Arthur Augustus nobly.

"Undah the circs., I feel that I cannot do less."
 And Tom Merry & Co., with one voice, said:
 "Hear, hear!"

THE END.

"THE INVENTOR'S RIVAL!"

A Splendid, New Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

and

A Grand Long Instalment of

"THE ALLIANCE OF THREE!"

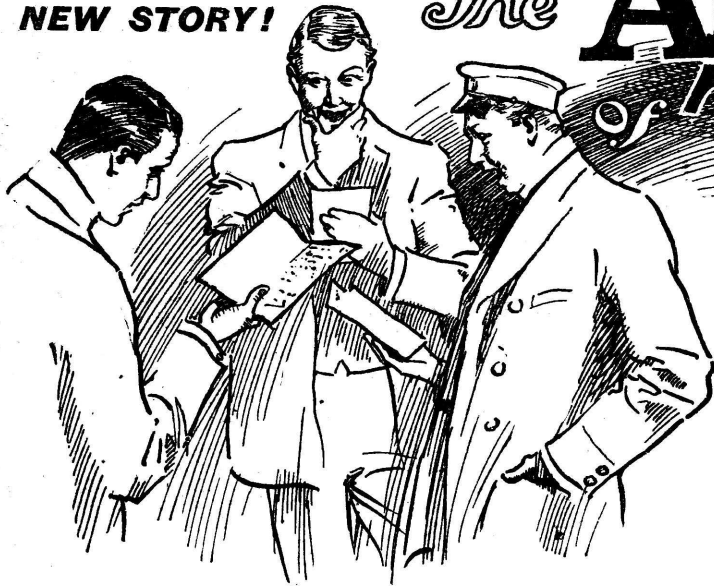
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NEXT THURSDAY'S ISSUE OF

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A long instalment
of a grand
NEW STORY!

The ALLIANCE of THREE



The First Chapters of a Splendid,
New, Short Serial Story.

.. By ..

A NEW AUTHOR.

A Brief Resume of Last Thursday's Opening Instalment.

Three friends—Bob Harding, Ralph Chesterton, and Tom Manton—who meet in Cairo, are seated on the verandah of the Hotel du Nil, when they are suddenly startled by a cry for help. The three rush into the street, and are soon engaged in a fierce fight with five Arab thieves, who are attacking a young lady—Miss Helen Fortescue by name. The three chums beat off the Arabs and escort Miss Fortescue to her hotel, where her father, William John Fortescue, warmly thanks them for what they have done, and asks them to visit him next morning. As the three are returning to their hotel, however, they are attacked by the Arabs they had previously defeated, and have to fight fiercely for their lives.

(Read on from here.)

A Fight Against Odds.

The incident had happened with startling rapidity, the group of five Arab bandits appearing as if from nowhere, as silently as the grave. They had approached from the rear, and were, of course, the same five whom the three chums had defeated the same night. Had not Ralph half-turned as he was walking to speak to Bob, Tom would have assuredly received his death-blow. But the cry of warning had had its effect, and Tom, with the lightning rapidity of an experienced boxer, faced round to receive the onslaught.

The Arabs had, presumably, attacked him first because he had, in the previous fight, performed a great part of the work. Before the bandit could bring his knife down, Tom lunged out straight from the shoulder, catching the fellow a terrible crack on the point of the jaw. With hardly a sound, the Arab dropped his knife and crashed to the hard stones. Tom faced round, his eyes blazing, his whole attitude one of alertness and grim determination. His blood was up, and, being one of the finest boxers in the Navy, he was just enjoying the battle.

Things were going rather badly with the other two, for the odds were two to one. Tom very soon altered the aspect of matters when he started, for one blow of his sturdy fist caused another ruffian to fall into a state of oblivion in a manner rather more abrupt than pleasant.

"By jingo," gasped Tom excitedly, "what on earth do these fellows take us for? If they think they can play about with Britishers as they like they'll jolly soon find out their mistake! They're handy enough with their knives, but when it comes to fists— There you are, my beauty, how do you like the flavour of that?"

Dancing up and down in his excitement—for Manton absolutely enjoyed a fray of this kind—he had tapped a swarthy son of the desert none too gently on the mouth, thereby causing the latter to lose several very useful members of his upper complement of teeth.

Ten seconds further, and the Arabs were forced to the con-

clusion that the three Britishers were distinctly more than a match for them, even when taken at a disadvantage. The three chums stood back to the wall, breathing heavily and smiling triumphantly. Their assailants could do nothing but take to their heels, for hope of victory was now out of the question. One after another they scrambled to their feet, and collected in a sullen group, their flowing attire smothered with the dust of the dirty street. Suddenly, the tall one stepped forward and shook his fist menacingly.

"You have defeated us, you cursed British," he snarled, in almost perfect English; "but I, Halil Ahmed, swear to have my revenge before many days have passed! The wrath of Allah is great, and you shall pay for your—"

"By the beard of the Prophet," mocked Tom, "you can have what vengeance you like, you dirty-necked scoundrels! I give you my word that if you're not clear of here within two minutes, you'll find yourselves being used to mop up the road!"

Halil Ahmed made no reply, but snarled out a few muttered words in Arabic, turned on his heel, and strode away, followed by his fellow-ruffians.

"Talking about adventures," exclaimed Ralph, proceeding to rub the dust from his clothing, "I consider we've started with a rush! We were only a minute before talking on the subject."

"These Arabs are confoundedly vindictive sort of cattle," said Bob, "and I never dreamed of their turning on us in this manner. And, from the way he spoke, Halil Ahmed, or whatever his heathen name is, means to have another pot at us before long. We shall have to keep our eyes wide open in future. Jove, but the way you went into the fight, Tom, was a sight for the gods!"

"I'll warrant the skunks are feeling a little bruised," agreed Tom, grinning. "I don't believe in boasting about my boxing, but I will say I can knock spots off any dirty Arab who likes to come along! I don't reckon we shall sleep after all this excitement."

"We've only got to stop in this country long enough," Bob smiled, "and we shall look upon these sort of things as mere appetisers. But come along. We shall find ourselves locked out if we're not pretty sharp. I suppose there's room in the Du Nil to put me up?"

"Heaps," replied Ralph. "You'll have to move your things there first thing to-morrow, so that we are all together."

They set off down the road at a smart pace, their conversation dealing solely with the events which had just come to pass. For the moment, all thoughts of Mr. Fortescue and his pretty daughter were banished from their minds.

From the manner in which the Arab leader had spoken, it appeared as though Bob, Tom, and Ralph were to receive their further attentions. Not that the three chums heeded the threat; and, anyhow, they were quite prepared for what might come.

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NEXT THURSDAY! "THE INVENTOR'S RIVAL"

A Grand, New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

As they were walking up the garden-path of the old hotel, Bob Harding suddenly came to a halt. He looked at his companions in the starlight with great earnestness. For a moment there was silence, even the breeze having dropped, so that the bushes and trees around them were completely motionless. The scent of the flowers filled their nostrils, and this, combined with the blaze of the stars in the heavens, made them realise how strange it was that they should all be together in this land of unsolved mysteries.

"It strikes me," exclaimed Bob slowly, "what a very peculiar coincidence it is that we three old school chums, having been separated since we left college, should come across one another in Cairo by accident, and all, at the same time, having nothing particular to do."

"It certainly seems peculiar," agreed the others.

"It is more than peculiar," declared Bob. "It seems to me Providential. Something within me—I couldn't for the life of me explain what—tells me that we three are to have many adventures together. What they will be, and what course they will take, it is impossible to hazard. But before we enter the house, I want you fellows to agree with me that we will stick to one another as long as we are out of our respective vocations. None of us are hard up for money, if it comes to that, and none of us care for idleness, so, while your nine months of inactivity is passing, Ralph, I suggest that Tom and I keep you company, and go off on some adventure or other. It is the opportunity of a lifetime."

"Agreed," cried Tom. "It matters little to me whether I join the *Aspia* immediately, or another ship some time in the future. Ralph has got nothing to do, and you, Bob, are a free-lance. Yes, by jingo, it seems as though we've met here for the express purpose of joining forces."

"What the adventure will be," exclaimed Ralph, "must be decided to-morrow, for, before anything, Mr. Fortescue's plans must be considered. Personally, I am convinced that we shall need to go no further. The old fellow has taken to us, and intends, I believe, to set us a considerably difficult task."

"Then," said Bob, "the best thing to do is to adjourn to bed. We'll shake hands on the matter, and settle it to-morrow."

In silence the three grasped hands in warm friendship. Then, as if by common impulse, turned and made towards the main entrance of the hotel.

Fifteen minutes later the three young English "effendis" were settled for the night in their respective bedrooms. And, in all their minds, the same thoughts predominated. What was the disclosure about to be revealed to them on the morrow? And what part in it would Helen Fortescue take?

The Three Envelopes.

"Half-past ten exactly," exclaimed Bob Harding, as the three friends arrived at the entrance of Shephard's Hotel. The scene was considerably different now, for overhead the fierce African sun blazed down scorchingly. In Cairo, however, it is practically possible, at all times of the day, to find welcome shade in which to walk.

The streets were thronged with a very miscellaneous selection of people, comprising units of all nations. It was a novel spectacle to a new arrival in Egypt, there being an ample variety of interesting sights and scenes.

The roads were filled with traffic, consisting of hired arabiya's and closed carriages, in which could be seen wealthy Egyptian ladies, with white gauze veils drawn across their faces up to the eyes. Now and again magnificent white donkeys, with bridles adorned with silver chains, passed on their way, carrying rich native merchants to and from their respective businesses.

Smaller animals of the same type bore on their sturdy little backs humbler inhabitants, or casual hirers; while constantly passing were dark-skinned fellahs, in felt tarbushes and cotton gowns, driving in from the country with baskets of geese and other wares, exactly as they were represented thousands of years ago.

Bob Harding was the most interested of the three, for the scenes were new to him, and he found them vastly entertaining. They had started early from their hotel for the especial purpose of lingering upon their way. The time now was exactly ten-thirty, and they were standing on the steps of Shephard's Hotel, which was the centre of the European quarter. Here could be seen English, American, and foreign visitors of all descriptions.

In the entrance hall they gave instructions to a polite Arab servant to escort them to Mr. Fortescue's apartments.

"Fortescue effendi is awaiting you in his library," murmured the servant, leading the way up to the first floor.

"He is alone?" asked Bob.

"I think so, effendi."

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The Arab servant proved to be right, for when they were ushered into Mr. William John Fortescue's library the latter was seated by the window jerkily smoking a rather strong Egyptian cigarette.

He glanced round as his visitors entered.

"Ah!" he cried, rising to his feet. "You are punctual! I knew you would be. I am glad to see you, my boys—very glad! Sit down, all of you, and make yourselves at home. I do not mean to detain you long—not very long."

He wrung their hands with the same vigour as on the night before, and his face, healthy and glowing, displayed unmistakable signs of pleasure. There was a twinkle in his eyes the chums could not quite make out—a twinkle of amusement, excitement, and anticipation combined. In his customary brusque manner he motioned them to their seats.

"I shall not explain anything I am about to say, but before I have finished you will understand," he exclaimed, puffing at his cigarette spasmodically. "You will think me an eccentric old fellow, and you will be right. I am eccentric—very eccentric! Now, see here! I have been in business most of my life, and realise the value of time. I don't mean to beat about the bush a minute, but will start right away."

He picked up a piece of paper which lay on his desk and glanced at it for a moment, his eyes twinkling a little. Then he turned, with that disconcertingly sudden movement of his, and faced Bob Harding.

"Now, sir," he exclaimed, "kindly tell me if these facts are correct. You are the son of Robert Harding, the famous railway magnate? You are the only boy, but have two sisters?"

Bob gazed at Mr. Fortescue in surprise. How on earth the old gentleman had learnt these facts was more than the young man could fathom.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "What you say is perfectly correct."

"Good! Now, let me see. At the age of nine you went to the public school known as St. Elmer's. You were not very inclined to go in for sports, but were always very studious, remaining indoors and reading a great deal. In spite of this, however, you found time to indulge in the school games to a certain degree, and what you did, you did well. You won prizes for"—Mr. Fortescue glanced at the paper—"for geography, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and engineering—a most noteworthy list. On leaving the school you went to Oxford, and, on account of your perseverance, very rapidly worked your way to the front. You are now a very accomplished young man indeed, and, from what I can see, have a fine character."

"Well, sir, as far as the facts go, you are certainly correct," admitted Bob, in a puzzled voice. "but—"

"Thank you! Very good! And now for you, Master Ralph."

The latter expected something of the kind, but was every bit as puzzled as his companions as to how Mr. Fortescue had got hold of his information. Tom had certainly not told him, and yet he knew every fact with regard to their careers.

"You," exclaimed Mr. Fortescue, pointing his finger at Ralph, "are the second son of Sir Raymond Chesterton, the notable general who distinguished himself so magnificently in the Boer War. You also were educated at St. Elmer's, and your chief accomplishment there in the direction of sport was your fine batting at cricket. You were very good at chess, although, with regard to general learning, you were only fair. Leaving St. Elmer's, you went down to Sandhurst, and there, being in your element, distinguished yourself. Am I right?"

"I was certainly more successful at Sandhurst than at school," admitted Ralph. "It was always my wish to be in the Army."

"Quite so. You made up for the time you lost when younger, and showed that you could make an excellent swordsman, rifle shot, and, in fact, a good soldier. Leaving Sandhurst, you entered your regiment, and became the champion swordsman. You have not been on active service, but, from what I can learn of you, would prove a most valuable man to England in time of war. You are voted by your fellow-officers to be a good fellow and an upright man. Since your accident you have been on leave, and will not return for a matter of nine months."

"Yes, sir, you are quite correct, only I can't see—"

Mr. Fortescue smiled at his young companions knowingly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "There's plenty of energy left in me yet, and I have ways and means of finding things out for myself. But to come to you, Tom," he added, turning to Manton suddenly, "I have a few words to say about you, for you may not have told your friends what you have done since leaving school, where you were all chums together in the same House. The fourth son of Admiral Manton—a fine old stock, that—you went to Osborne and trained for the Navy. Your father and mother are both dead, but the rest of your family are all doing well. At Osborne you proved

"But there will be time. You are not going to be married for a good time yet, I hope! This is merely preparation, and I am delighted to hear your words, little girl. You couldn't have said anything better—anything more thoughtful. Few girls would have taken such a common-sense view of the matter as you have done."

He turned abruptly to Bob Harding, who had risen to his feet.

"You see what a prize you have got to work for?" he exclaimed. "There's not another girl like her in the world, and the one of you who secures her will be a lucky dog!"

"There is no doubt on that point, sir," declared Bob gallantly; "but Miss Fortescue, I think, must make the final decision. This proposal has been sprung upon us rather abruptly, and we must, at least, have time to think it over. We are all interested parties; Miss Fortescue in particular, and perhaps it would be as well if you tell us the conditions under which we may hope to gain your daughter's hand. Not that we are worthy—"

"Tut-tut, sir; none of that!" cried the millionaire. "You know you are worthy, or, if you don't, I do! But the conditions? Ah, you have yet to learn them!"

As he spoke he crossed over to his desk and pulled out one of the little drawers. From this he produced three envelopes of the foolscap size. On them was inscribed the names of the three chums, in a bold, firm handwriting.

"These," said the owner of the handwriting, "are the conditions. I have placed them in writing because I want you to learn them when you are alone, when you can think without restraint. Therefore, take them, and go straight home. When you get there, open them, and read their contents. That is all I have to say. Nothing further need be discussed at present. You will learn everything from these!"

Mr. Fortescue handed the envelopes to their respective owners, smiling meanwhile to himself. Helen, although she did not display it, was curious to know what the envelopes contained. She knew that she would be told before long, however.

"Then we have to return to our hotel and read our instructions?" asked Tom, rather nervously. "When shall we see you again, Mr. Fortescue?"

"Before many hours have passed, lad," replied this very eccentric individual. "Now, off you go; I do not wish to detain you a minute, for I know you are simply burning to see what your letters contain. I am a keen business man, and, as I said, realise the value of time. There is not another word to say until after you have read the contents of these envelopes!"

Mr. William John Fortescue shook hands without another word. His action clearly showed that he wished his visitors to be off—being anxious, doubtless, to see what result the perusal of the conditions would have.

And so, having said au revoir, the three friends took their departure, their minds in little less than a whirl. As they walked round the Esbekiyeh Gardens neither remembered what he had said to Miss Fortescue at parting, and occasionally they gave one another a sidelong glance.

Not much was said as they hurried as fast as possible down the crowded Muski. As a matter of fact, they had never experienced these precise sensations in their lives before, and they hardly knew what to make of it. What remarks were made were mainly in connection with objects of interest they passed, for, as if by common impulse, the subject which was foremost in their minds was barred from the conversation.

It did not take them long, at the smart pace at which they were walking, to reach the lovely garden of the Hotel du Nil. The narrow alley leading down to it was dusty and stifling, and the sudden change to the cool, fragrant, and green garden was really delightful. There were several visitors seated in the shade of the many trees, but Bob, Tom or Ralph hardly noticed them as they hurried indoors to the joint sitting-room they had engaged.

Bob closed the door securely, then turned round and faced his chums, who had flung their hats on the table, and were looking at one another expectantly.

"Now for the envelopes!" exclaimed the civil engineer grimly. "I don't quite know whether I'm on my head or my heels, whatever you chaps feel like. For, if ever I was flabbergasted, I am this morning! Before we touch these, however," he added, holding up his envelope. "I just want to say a few words. It's quite evident that Mr. Fortescue is giving us something jolly big to undertake. What that is we shall learn in a moment. Our compact must not be forgotten, though, for, if we are going into some big adventure, we must do so together."

"Rather!" agreed the others immediately.

"Then give me your hands on it again!" said Bob, with enthusiasm. "We will stick to one another as long as we are on this adventure Mr. Fortescue has planned for us!"

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"The very idea!" cried Tom, his usual even voice rising a little higher in his suppressed excitement. "We will form an alliance of three, as it were!"

And once more they grasped hands in warm friendship, but this time it was more sincere, more earnest if anything, than on the previous night.

Bob picked up his envelope with a steady hand.

"There's a feeling in me," he exclaimed, "that the perusal of these letters will lead to many adventures. What they will be nobody knows, but that they will be exciting and hazardous I am convinced of. My words may appear foolish, but somehow I feel compelled to utter them. I do not think I shall be wrong, but if I am—"

He broke off, and with a sudden rip the flap of his envelope was open. At the same moment the others followed his example, and for a second the only sound was that of the tear of tough paper. The contents were not much to look upon, each being a single sheet of notepaper, and each was covered with Mr. Fortescue's bold handwriting. For a moment there was not a sound in the room except the quick breathing of Bob, Tom, and Ralph. Then, practically simultaneously, they all burst into exclamations of astonishment, wonder, and incredulity.

"Great Scotland Yard!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

The Comrades Come to a Decision.

After those exclamations of astonishment, the three comrades stood looking at one another in utter silence. Then they glanced at their respective letters again.

"This is beyond me!" exclaimed Ralph Chesterton suddenly. "What on earth can Mr. Fortescue mean?"

"That's more than I can tell you," said Bob, in the same puzzled tone. "To tell the truth, I'm hanged if I can make head or tail of the thing. Wait a minute, though; let's compare the three—that might give us a clue!"

They laid the three pieces of paper on the table before them, and after a moment's scrutiny gave further expressions of surprise.

"Why," cried Tom Manton, "they're all the same! What the dickens can the old chap mean? And what has it got to do with Miss Fortescue—her name is not even mentioned!"

"And yet these are the conditions of which he spoke—the conditions we have to fulfil in order to—to marry his daughter," said Ralph; "or, I should say, for one of us to marry her. He said these letters would tell us everything, but I'm just as much in the dark now as I was before. Suppose we read them again?"

Ralph picked up his again, and slowly read over the words which were written upon it. They were abrupt and of a peculiar nature:

"There is trouble in Tecaguay. The battleship Venebia appears to be doing quite a vast amount of work. Don't you think something could be done? In a case such as this, if the Venebia happened to sink to the bottom, nothing but good could come of it. What do you think, lad? Of course, it would not necessitate the loss of life in any way—not even one. Think it over carefully—very carefully. On this day, two years hence, at ten-thirty in the morning, be at Shepherd's Hotel. I shall know then what to do. But let me know your views with regard to the Venebia to-night. Do you agree with me—'yes' or 'no'?"

"Well, of all the rum communications," exclaimed Tom, scratching his head, "I don't mind saying that this is the rummest I have ever seen!"

"It is certainly puzzling," agreed Bob Harding thoughtfully. "But Mr. Fortescue tells us to think it over carefully. This is an extremely grave matter, and there must be some hidden meaning to his words. What we have to do is to find that out."

"But Tecaguay!" protested Ralph. "That is a potty little Republic in South America, isn't it? And here we are in Egypt, thousands of miles away! How can it bear on the subject we discussed with Mr. Fortescue this morning?"

"It does do so at all events," remarked Bob. "Let me see—Tecaguay? There's been a lot in the papers about that place lately, hasn't there? Some squabble or other—"

Tom Manton suddenly brought his fist to the table with a bang.

"By Jimmy!" he cried. "I've got it! That's what Mr. Fortescue means! It can't be anything else!"

He glanced excitedly from one to the other of his two companions, his curly hair looking ruffled and untidy, owing to the habit he had, when puzzled, of running his fingers through it, as though in search of inspiration. Bob smiled.

"Well," he said, "since you seem to know all about it, Tom, you might let us into the secret as well. What is this new idea of yours?"

yourself to be an exceptionally fine swimmer, boxer, and wrestler, though at which art you most excel it is difficult to say. You were conscientious, and left Osborne in record time to join the cruiser Calpho as midshipman. In due course you were raised in rank to sub-lieutenant, and still occupy that position. The reason for your leaving the ship was no fault of your own, but owing to the bullying nature of your lieutenant. I uphold you in what you did. You are rather frivolous, taking life light-heartedly, but nevertheless a brave man, which is proved by your action in saving, at the risk of your own life, a man from drowning two years ago in the North Sea. That is all, and, taking you altogether, you are a trio of fine specimens of British manhood. I am proud to have the honour of shaking you all by the hand."

Mr. William John Fortescue suited the action to the word, and wrung their hands one after another in his usual fervent manner.

"May I ask, sir, how you became aware of all this information?" inquired the young engineer hesitatingly.

"Yes, my young friend, you may certainly inquire," cried the old gentleman, his face beaming with pleasure. "While you were sleeping I was up and out—at four-thirty I rose, sir—and dispatched wires by the score to the old country. The replies to my numerous questions came through with as little delay as possible. I may tell you that for the space of an hour the whole cable was at my disposal. Now, after this digression, we will get along with the subject."

He glared from one to the other of his visitors, meanwhile pointing at them with his cigarette as though he were about to pass some sentence. Bob, Tom, and Ralph could certainly do nothing but agree with him as to his eccentricity.

"The subject I am about to speak to you on is the dearest and the sweetest in the world—my daughter. Ah, you look surprised!" he chuckled. "I knew you would be—I knew you would be!"

He threw his cigarette out of the window with a quick gesture, unmindful of the fact that the pavement beneath was crowded with people, and that the cigarette was alight.

"Yes," he continued, "my daughter. She's the best little girl in the world, and you'll say so yourselves. You think so now—I know you do! All I live for is to increase my fortune so that when I die she will be the richest woman in the world—yes, the very richest! You know how wealthy I am now, but if Heaven is good I mean to double my fortune before I leave this earth. And it's all for her—every penny for her, and the man she marries. You understand?"

His listeners glanced at one another sideways, for they certainly could not quite understand Fortescue's effendi's words.

"Well, sir," started Bob hesitatingly, "we can't quite see—"

"No, of course you can't! But I haven't done yet, no! Let me tell you plainly that the man who marries my daughter isn't going to be a skunk of a fortune-hunter. He's got to be a man—a real man—not six foot of cowardice and brutality. There are hundreds of those kind of men about—good-looking enough, but they won't do for me. My little girlie has got to have the man I choose for her. You understand? I've had more experience than she has, and know where to put my hand on the right sort."

Mr. Fortescue glanced at his listeners shrewdly.

"Money needn't come into the matter at all. She'll have plenty of money—enough for twenty couples, come to that—and financial questions may be eliminated immediately. My future son-in-law can be penniless if he likes, but he's got to be brave—he got's to be a man!"

The millionaire—for Mr. Fortescue was such—rose to his feet and paced the room for a few moments in silence. Then he strode over to his visitors and stopped dead in front of them.

"Now, look here!" he said. "You three boys have given me a puzzler. I like you all, for I know you to be brave men—honourable men. Besides having proof of that last night, I can see it for myself—see it in every inch of your faces. You are the type of men I like—upright, open Britishers. There's not a man in the world to compare with a Britisher, my lads, not a man! Which of you is going to marry my girlie?"

Bob, Tom, and Ralph were utterly taken aback at this abrupt question and the peculiarity of its nature. For a moment they could do nothing but stare at Mr. Fortescue in undisguised embarrassment. They had all turned red with confusion, and at the sight of this Mr. Fortescue chuckled afresh.

"Ah!" he cried. "Helen's charms have begun to work, eh? I knew they would, for no man on earth can resist them."

"Really, Mr. Fortescue," stammered poor Bob confusedly, "I—I hardly know what to say."

"Of course you don't!" exclaimed Mr. Fortescue, rubbing his hands together. "What young man would? But there's

the question all the same—I want one of you to marry my daughter. I don't care a jot which it is, for I like one as well as the other. You're all first-class specimens of Englishmen, and well worthy to marry Helen. Now, which is it to be?"

"Well, sir—"

"I—I— Hang it all—"

"You've flabbergasted us, sir—"

"Speak up—speak up!" chuckled the millionaire. "Good—good! You're all as nervous as kittens, as you should be. I like to see it."

"It's taken our breath away, sir," exclaimed Bob desperately. "We cannot overlook the compliment and honour you are paying us by thinking us worthy of your daughter's hand, but the matter isn't one to be decided in a moment. We all like Miss Fortescue, but as to— Well, it's rather an abrupt proposition."

"Well spoken, Harding—well spoken! Upon my soul, I don't know which of you I like best! But look here! Don't imagine for a moment that you are going to marry my daughter without showing yourselves even worthier still. At present you're a set of lazy rascals—nothing else but lazy rascals! It won't do, my boys! But I've got something for you that'll make you look up! Ha, ha! The one which marries Helen has got to win her. You'll discover very soon what you have to do, and, by gad, you won't find it easy! You've got to work—work with a will!"

"We're all willing to do that," said Ralph; "but don't you think, sir, that Miss Fortescue would like to have a word on such a matter as this? She is, you must admit, an interested party."

"Helen? Bless my soul, I know what I'm doing, lad! Helen likes all of you well enough, and if she refuses the one who wins her— But she won't, for she's far from being a fool."

Mr. Fortescue crossed the room without a word, and disappeared through a doorway, leaving Bob, Tom, and Ralph looking at one another with no comfortable glances. They were too surprised to speak for a moment, and, anyhow, their thoughts were quite busy enough. Although neither would admit it, Mr. Fortescue's plan was not in the least unwelcome. Helen was a very beautiful girl, and a magnificent prize. All of the three chums had taken a strong liking to her immediately, a liking which would very rapidly develop into something more. Before either of them could speak Mr. Fortescue returned, accompanied now by Helen, who, attired in a pretty muslin frock, looked prettier than ever. She crossed over to the three chums with a smile of welcome on her features.

"Well," she exclaimed, "what has dad been talking to you about? You seem to be uncomfortable over something," she added, with frank curiosity.

"Good reason for it," murmured her father to himself; "they wouldn't be men if they weren't uncomfortable!"

"Why, father, what do you mean?" asked the girl.

"Eh—eh? What's that? Good gracious, I must have been talking aloud!"

Mr. Fortescue spoke as though he had never done such a thing before in his life. He took Helen's hand, and pointed to the three chums, very considerably to their discomfort.

"Now, little girlie," he said seriously, "I've told your friends yonder that one of them has to become your husband. It doesn't matter which, for they're all worthy of you—all good—"

Helen blushed violently under the gaze of the three young men.

"But, dad," she exclaimed, "you cannot be serious when you say that!"

"Serious! Gad, but it's the most serious thing I ever said in my life! You are life and soul to me, Helen, and it will nearly break my heart when you have to go! But you'll have to, some day, and I don't believe in leaving it to chance! There are three fine fellows before you now, and one of them, before two years have lapsed, will claim you for his wife. Which that one will be, depends upon themselves and upon you. I've seen enough of misery in my time caused by marriages turning out badly to learn a lesson by it! The man you marry, Helen, will be a good man, a brave man, and one who will make you happy!"

Helen looked round her a little puzzled, her self-possession having quickly returned. Then she smiled brightly, and that smile, as if by magic, dispersed the uncomfortable tension which had, up till that moment, existed between the three visitors. They could do nothing but return the smile.

"Really, dad, I can't think of anything to say," exclaimed Helen, with perfect frankness. "You know I like these gentlemen very much; indeed, I should be very cold and ungrateful did I not do so after the occurrence of last night. But as to what you say—well, there has hardly been time to decide such a matter as that, has there?"

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A Grand, New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"But there will be time. You are not going to be married for a good time yet, I hope! This is merely preparation, and I am delighted to hear your words, little girl. You couldn't have said anything better—anything more thoughtful. Few girls would have taken such a common-sense view of the matter as you have done."

He turned abruptly to Bob Harding, who had risen to his feet.

"You see what a prize you have got to work for?" he exclaimed. "There's not another girl like her in the world, and the one of you who secures her will be a lucky dog!"

"There is no doubt on that point, sir," declared Bob gallantly; "but Miss Fortescue, I think, must make the final decision. This proposal has been sprung upon us rather abruptly, and we must, at least, have time to think it over. We are all interested parties; Miss Fortescue in particular, and perhaps it would be as well if you tell us the conditions under which we may hope to gain your daughter's hand. Not that we are worthy—"

"Tut-tut, sir; none of that!" cried the millionaire. "You know you are worthy, or, if you don't, I do! But the conditions? Ah, you have yet to learn them!"

As he spoke he crossed over to his desk and pulled out one of the little drawers. From this he produced three envelopes of the foolscap size. On them was inscribed the names of the three chums, in a bold, firm handwriting.

"These," said the owner of the handwriting, "are the conditions. I have placed them in writing because I want you to learn them when you are alone, when you can think without restraint. Therefore, take them, and go straight home. When you get there, open them, and read their contents. That is all I have to say. Nothing further need be discussed at present. You will learn everything from these!"

Mr. Fortescue handed the envelopes to their respective owners, smiling meanwhile to himself. Helen, although she did not display it, was curious to know what the envelopes contained. She knew that she would be told before long, however.

"Then we have to return to our hotel and read our instructions?" asked Tom, rather nervously. "When shall we see you again, Mr. Fortescue?"

"Before many hours have passed, lad," replied this very eccentric individual. "Now, off you go; I do not wish to detain you a minute, for I know you are simply burning to see what your letters contain. I am a keen business man, and, as I said, realise the value of time. There is not another word to say until after you have read the contents of these envelopes!"

Mr. William John Fortescue shook hands without another word. His action clearly showed that he wished his visitors to be off—being anxious, doubtless, to see what result the perusal of the conditions would have.

And so, having said au revoir, the three friends took their departure, their minds in little less than a whirl. As they walked round the Esbekiyeh Gardens neither remembered what he had said to Miss Fortescue at parting, and occasionally they gave one another a sidelong glance.

Not much was said as they hurried as fast as possible down the crowded Muski. As a matter of fact, they had never experienced these precise sensations in their lives before, and they hardly knew what to make of it. What remarks were made were mainly in connection with objects of interest they passed, for, as if by common impulse, the subject which was foremost in their minds was barred from the conversation.

It did not take them long, at the smart pace at which they were walking, to reach the lovely garden of the Hotel du Nil. The narrow alley leading down to it was dusty and stifling, and the sudden change to the cool, fragrant, and green garden was really delightful. There were several visitors seated in the shade of the many trees, but Bob, Tom or Ralph hardly noticed them as they hurried indoors to the joint sitting-room they had engaged.

Bob closed the door securely, then turned round and faced his chums, who had flung their hats on the table, and were looking at one another expectantly.

"Now for the envelopes!" exclaimed the civil engineer grimly. "I don't quite know whether I'm on my head or my heels, whatever you chaps feel like. For, if ever I was flabbergasted, I am this morning! Before we touch these, however," he added, holding up his envelope. "I just want to say a few words. It's quite evident that Mr. Fortescue is giving us something jolly big to undertake. What that is we shall learn in a moment. Our compact must not be forgotten, though, for, if we are going into some big adventure, we must do so together."

"Rather!" agreed the others immediately.

"Then give me your hands on it again!" said Bob, with enthusiasm. "We will stick to one another as long as we are on this adventure Mr. Fortescue has planned for us!"

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READ the Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of School Life, entitled: **"SAVED FROM DISGRACE,"** in this week's "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now On Sale, One Penny.

"The very idea!" cried Tom, his usual even voice rising a little higher in his suppressed excitement. "We will form an alliance of three, as it were!"

And once more they grasped hands in warm friendship, but this time it was more sincere, more earnest if anything, than on the previous night.

Bob picked up his envelope with a steady hand.

"There's a feeling in me," he exclaimed, "that the perusal of these letters will lead to many adventures. What they will be nobody knows, but that they will be exciting and hazardous I am convinced of. My words may appear foolish, but somehow I feel compelled to utter them. I do not think I shall be wrong, but if I am—"

He broke off, and with a sudden rip the flap of his envelope was open. At the same moment the others followed his example, and for a second the only sound was that of the tear of tough paper. The contents were not much to look upon, each being a single sheet of notepaper, and each was covered with Mr. Fortescue's bold handwriting. For a moment there was not a sound in the room except the quick breathing of Bob, Tom, and Ralph. Then, practically simultaneously, they all burst into exclamations of astonishment, wonder, and incredulity.

"Great Scotland Yard!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

The Comrades Come to a Decision.

After those exclamations of astonishment, the three comrades stood looking at one another in utter silence. Then they glanced at their respective letters again.

"This is beyond me!" exclaimed Ralph Chesterton suddenly. "What on earth can Mr. Fortescue mean?"

"That's more than I can tell you," said Bob, in the same puzzled tone. "To tell the truth, I'm hanged if I can make head or tail of the thing. Wait a minute, though; let's compare the three—that might give us a clue!"

They laid the three pieces of paper on the table before them, and after a moment's scrutiny gave further expressions of surprise.

"Why," cried Tom Manton, "they're all the same! What the dickens can the old chap mean? And what has it got to do with Miss Fortescue—her name is not even mentioned!"

"And yet these are the conditions of which he spoke—the conditions we have to fulfil in order to—to marry his daughter," said Ralph; "or, I should say, for one of us to marry her. He said these letters would tell us everything, but I'm just as much in the dark now as I was before. Suppose we read them again?"

Ralph picked up his again, and slowly read over the words which were written upon it. They were abrupt and of a peculiar nature:

"There's trouble in Tecsaguay. The battleship Venebia appears to be doing quite a vast amount of work. Don't you think something could be done? In a case such as this, if the Venebia happened to sink to the bottom, nothing but good could come of it. What do you think, lad? Of course, it would not necessitate the loss of life in any way—not even one. Think it over carefully—very carefully. On this day, two years hence, at ten-thirty in the morning, be at Shepherd's Hotel. I shall know then what to do. But let me know your views with regard to the Venebia to-night. Do you agree with me—'yes' or 'no'?"

"Well, of all the rum communications," exclaimed Tom, scratching his head, "I don't mind saying that this is the rummist I have ever seen!"

"It is certainly puzzling," agreed Bob Harding thoughtfully. "But Mr. Fortescue tells us to think it over carefully. This is an extremely grave matter, and there must be some hidden meaning to his words. What we have to do is to find that out."

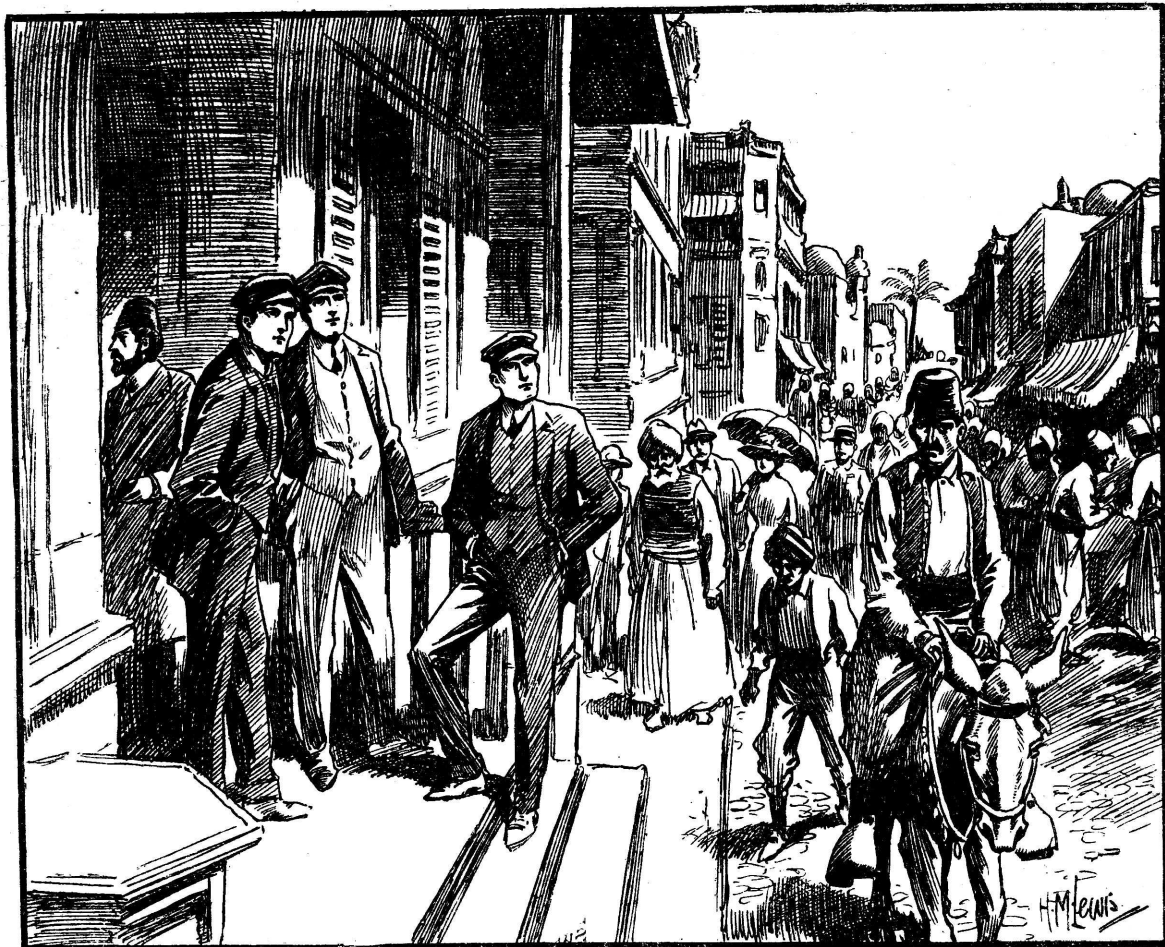
"But Tecsaguay!" protested Ralph. "That is a potty little Republic in South America, isn't it? And here we are in Egypt, thousands of miles away! How can it bear on the subject we discussed with Mr. Fortescue this morning?"

"It does do so at all events," remarked Bob. "Let me see—Tecsaguay? There's been a lot in the papers about that place lately, hasn't there? Some squabble or other—"

Tom Manton suddenly brought his fist to the table with a bang.

"By Jimmy!" he cried. "I've got it! That's what Mr. Fortescue means! It can't be anything else!"

He glanced excitedly from one to the other of his two companions, his curly hair looking ruffled and untidy, owing to the habit he had, when puzzled, of running his fingers through it, as though in search of inspiration. Bob smiled. "Well," he said, "since you seem to know all about it, Tom, you might let us into the secret as well. What is this new idea of yours?"



The three friends stood on the steps of the hotel, watching the miscellaneous selection of people, comprising units of all nations, who thronged the streets of Cairo. (See page 22.)

Tom jabbed his finger on the letters.

"It's something big," he exclaimed. "Something very big the old gentleman wants to embark on. Being a naval man, I know all about it, and I was an ass not to have remembered before. Of course, you've only seen the bare newspaper reports."

"That's all," agreed the others.

"Well, the true facts are these: there's the very dickens of a dust-up between the Republics of Tecsaguy and Argendor, both insignificant little countries in South America. They are both on the coast, and Tecsaguy has got decidedly the upper hand. And it's all because of this battleship. The president—I don't know what his heathen name is—is a fellow with no more feelings in him than this table has, and his game has simply been wholesale massacre."

"We've seen vague reports something to that effect," put in Ralph.

"Well, the truth is there are atrocities of the vilest character being perpetrated over there at this very time. The Venebia is the only battleship there, and she makes periodical visits along the coast of Argendor, and pots away at the towns and villages, ruining simply everything, and killing men, women, and children without the slightest compunction. The inhabitants of Argendor can do nothing, having no ships to defend themselves with. And so it goes on. And, by the look of it, will do so until this brute of a president has satisfied himself by destroying every coast town in the rival Republic."

"But surely," exclaimed Bob, "something can be done? Surely somebody can come to the help of Argendor? If it comes to that, England could send out a cruiser or two!"

Tom thumped the table again.

"That's just where you're wrong!" he cried. "Britain can't do anything of the sort! And why? Simply because

there'd be the biggest international war that ever happened if we sent out a fleet to lend a hand!"

"But why?" asked Ralph. "I can't see—"

"You will in a minute. Neither Argendor nor Tecsaguy have anything to do with Great Britain, and if we did as you say, there'd be the very dickens of a row. Germany, Russia, and I don't know who else, would step in and ask us what the blazes we are sticking our spoke in for. It's all a mass of rotten red tape, but there it is, and must be taken as it comes! England is helpless, and so is practically every other country for the same reason—somebody else would step in and kick up a fuss, which would invariably end in war!"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Bob thoughtfully. "I begin to understand now. What a shrewd old gentleman Mr. Fortescue must be! He knows all this—knows of the massacres which are being carried on, and that they cannot be stopped, so has thought of this plan!"

"You mean," said Ralph, looking at his two comrades steadily, "that these letters are, to all intents and purposes, our orders to go over to Tecsaguy and sink this battleship?" would be better at the bottom. But, for all that, his meaning Fortescue wants us to do. There can be no other interpretation of these notes. He merely suggests that the Venebia would be better at the bottom. But, for all that, his meaning is quite clear. He realises the helplessness of Great Britain and that hundreds of innocent people are being done to death daily, and so thought of sending us out to do this work. His patriotism is as great as his tender-heartedness."

"And to have the opportunity of winning Miss Fortescue we must continue to do his bidding for two years!" said Ralph. "That is what I make of it from his words."

"I think you are right, Ralph," said Bob. "For, although Mr. Fortescue's instructions are rather vague at

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first sight, they are, nevertheless, after careful thought, quite clear and lucid. Just look at the shrewdness he has displayed. He wants to prove our worthiness. I think you will admit that he could not have thought of a better plan than this, for it is not like big-game hunting, or exploring Central Africa—it is something for the good of our country; something which, as well as testing our courage, will, if we should be successful, save hundreds, perhaps thousands, of innocent people from a totally undeserved death!"

"It's a ripping wheeze!" cried Tom, who never could take anything seriously. "I'm for accepting his proposal and going right away!"

"Wait a moment, Tom," put in Bob gravely, as he seated himself in one of the chairs. "This matter must be carefully thought over before we come to any decision. The undertaking with regard to the battleship, to start with, is about as hazardous as it can possibly be. Personally, being a free lance, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to go on this expedition of mercy—for it is nothing else when you come to think of it."

Ralph looked into Bob's eyes steadily.

"I am with you!" he exclaimed. "With you through thick and thin, Bob!"

"But your regiment?" began the civil engineer.

"My regiment!" cried Ralph quickly. "Dash the regiment! Sha'n't I be of more use to my country out there, in action, than fooling my time away cooped up in barracks?"

"When you put it that way, old chap," said Bob. "I cannot do anything but agree with you. Yes, in Tegsaguay there is work to be done, but at home, nothing. And you, Tom?"

Tom rose to his feet excitedly.

"Me?" he exclaimed. "You already know my views. We're in search of adventure, aren't we? Well, there's plenty to be had if we carry out Mr. Fortescue's plan. We can all go out together—stick together, and fight our way through side by side! It's an alliance of three with a vengeance!"

"Then we're all agreed to do as Mr. Fortescue wants?" said Bob Harding, looking at his two companions with cool, thoughtful eyes. "We are all agreed to go into this venture together?"

"Absolutely!" cried the others simultaneously.

"Then give me your hands. Once more we will seal the compact, but this time we know what is before us—we know what we have to do, and what dangers there are besetting our path. But it will all be in the day's work, and I know you chaps well enough to place every confidence in your pluck and ability."

They grasped hands for the third time, and on this occasion, now that they knew what lay in front of them, they were even more enthusiastic than previously. Their friendship was absolutely sincere, and this compact they had just made, although a verbal one only, would stand for all time. They had allied themselves together, not only for friendship's sake, but because, so formed, they could lend their country exceedingly valuable assistance.

"And we have to tell Mr. Fortescue our decision to-night," said Ralph, picking up the envelope which had contained his letter. "I am pretty sure he is expecting our answer to be in the affirmative, as it will be—Hallo, what's this?"

He added the last portion of his sentence as he pulled from the envelope a small slip of paper, which he had not before perceived. He opened it out and glanced at its contents. Then he smiled.

"The old chap has prepared everything," he said. "This is an invitation for us all to dine at Shepherd's to-night. He wants us to be there at seven o'clock, sharp."

Bob smiled.

"It is easy to see why he has sent this invitation," he said. "It is to give us an opportunity of letting him know our decision. Well, there is plenty to do before to-night arrives. There are our kits, firearms, etc., to attend to, not to mention booking passages and no end of other things. We must write home and let them know what we are doing. Oh, yes, there's plenty to be done before to-night."

"And to-morrow?" questioned Ralph.

"Well, to-morrow," replied Bob Harding quietly, "must take care of itself. By this time twenty-four hours hence, we shall, in all probability, be started off for South America, bent upon the biggest thing we ever attempted!"

The day passed quickly enough, all three of the chums being kept busy making preparations. They took no interest in Cairo now, for all their thoughts were centred on this new adventure. By tea-time, practically everything was ready, for there was no knowing but what they would have to start without the delay of an hour.

(This grand NEW serial will be continued in next week's issue of The "Gem" Library. Please order your copy in advance, price 1d.)

A Thrilling Tale of Modern Adventure on Land and Sea.



By ROBERT W. COMRADE.

The Dart at Work.

Carson Gray enjoyed the voyage very much. Until the Dart reached the open sea she was kept on the surface. Right down the Thames she went at a fairly good speed, past Greenhithe, where the training-ship Worcester is situated, then Gravesend, until the Nore was sighted. Once round the North Foreland, and past the Goodwins, she picked up speed tremendously, and soon was bowling along in spanking style, much faster than any motor-boat could travel.

The day was a magnificent one, the sun shining down with almost tropical fierceness upon the sparkling blue waters of the Channel. As Carson Gray and Kingston looked at the passing shipping, which seemed exceptionally clean and flag-bedecked, owing to the festive nature of the season, they thought it almost impossible that the foul plot which had been forced from Capelli's lips the night before could be true.

Yet it was true—terribly true—and those battleships, lying so complacently off Spithead, would have certainly been blown to atoms had it not been for Kingston's intervention. How was the fleet to know that a dastardly enemy was at work under their very noses, in a special type of submarine, which had been kept strictly secret by the makers?

On the gallant little Dart went, well knowing what a large foe it had to contend against, for the Brotherhood's submersible was nearly twice the size of the Dart. The bright afternoon grew into evening, and still the speed was maintained. The journey was no light one; but at last, when it was quite dark, and when the clouds were moving slowly across the star-bespangled heavens, the tiny submarine slid under the solid hulls of the Home Fleet and came to a standstill.

"We're there, Gray, and just at about the time I reckoned!" exclaimed Kingston, with satisfaction. On the way he had been explaining to the others exactly how he meant to set to work. "By this time the Unicorn is sure to have arrived, and it is now our task to find out her position."

"By Jove, I'm beginning to feel quite excited!" exclaimed Carson Gray. "But, I say, we shall have to go jolly easily, you know, Kingston. I don't much relish the idea of finding our way through a mass of wires, the slightest touch of which may cause a terrible explosion."

"They won't do that, my dear fellow," replied Kingston easily. "You seem to forget that the mines are of the variety which are perfectly safe until the electric current is switched on from the firing-station—in this instance, the Unicorn. If we blundered into the lot and severed them all we should do no harm, beyond giving those aboard the yacht a warning that something was wrong. And as I don't want to do that, we'll go very easily, as you say."

The Dart rose slowly to the surface, and happened to be in a spot practically clear of shipping. All around, however, were the thousand and one lights of the British Fleet, intermixed with the lights of sailing and other vessels. The watertight manhole of the submarine was opened, and Kingston and Gray stepped on deck. The former, armed with a pair of night-glasses, scanned the horizon for a few moments without speaking.

"I think I have spotted her, Gray," he said at last. "That vessel over yonder, lying quite by itself, seems to follow the cut of the Unicorn. Besides, it's just the position she would take up. In any case, we'll run over that way, and see from a nearer distance."

So the Dart proceeded cautiously along the surface until she was near enough to the yacht for those on deck to see that it was indeed the Unicorn. Kingston and Gray retired below briskly, and the trap-door was once more closed.

"We'll get below and see how matters stand," said Kingston. "As soon as we get below the surface, Fraser, I'm going to turn the light on, and I shall expect you to stop the very instant I give the word."

"Sure, sir!"

The little vessel began slowly descending again, Kingston meanwhile lifting up one of the planks in the flooring, exposing a sliding plate. Underneath this was a large square of solid glass, through which the sea could plainly be seen.

"Have you got the lamp, Gray?"

Carson Gray replied by suddenly switching on an almost blinding light from a large, peculiarly-shaped lamp. It was electric, and an invention of Professor Polgrave's. Considering its size, the light it threw out was really astounding, for when the beam was shot downwards through the glass the sea could very plainly be made out beneath them, with numerous fishes swimming constantly to and fro. It was a novel experience, and Carson Gray was enjoying himself immensely.

"Stop!" ordered Kingston suddenly. "Send her forward, Fraser, as slowly as possible."

Fraser did so, and Gray, looking through the thick plate of glass at his feet, distinctly saw a thin, black, insulated wire slowly disappearing astern as the Dart moved forward.

"That's one of them," said Kingston grimly. "We're in a maze here, Gray, but once we find a clear passage it will be straightforward enough. Now, then, Fraser, you can drop her again, and after we've descended another ten feet, turn sharply to the left, and keep on until I give the word."

It was wonderful how the little vessel answered the controls, for under Fraser's able guidance it proceeded to form the evolutions exactly as Kingston required. For a second or two there was silence, then Kingston moved across to the conning-tower.

"Bring the light over here, Gray," he asked. "We're probably beneath the Unicorn, but from here we can direct the light upwards."

Gray complied immediately, and directed the rays of the powerful lamp through the glass sides of the conning-tower. Then an exclamation of satisfaction escaped Kingston's lips, for, plainly visible above, not fifty yards distant, could be seen the dark steel hull of a vessel. And equally as visible were a group of wires similar to the one they had already seen, trailing upwards to a point where they all disappeared into the hull through a watertight plug.

The vessel was without a doubt the Unicorn, and she was wired up in readiness for the ghastly work which was planned to take place the following night.

Aboard the Unicorn.

"Now, then, Gray, there's no time to waste, so just help me into that diving-suit, if you don't mind."

It was some ten minutes later, and the Dart was once more upon the surface. Having made certain of his ground, Kingston intended proceeding to business immediately. His eyes were shining a little more, and Gray could see that his jaw had set itself very determinedly.

It took some little time to get into the heavy diving-suit, but at last it was done, and Kingston proceeded up the ladder on deck. Fortunately for the enterprise, it was pitchy dark, so, although the Unicorn was fairly close, those on board could not possibly see the tiny deck of the Dart as it floated just above the surface.

The holes previously mentioned in the submarine's deck were for the purpose of passing the air-pipes through to Kingston, who intended standing on the deck when the vessel was lowered beneath the surface. It was a risky proceeding altogether, but he took it all as a matter of course, and had not the slightest fear.

At the expiration of a further ten minutes the Dart was below the surface, and Kingston was clinging to the little rail. The sensations he experienced were altogether novel, and, if anything, he was rather enjoying himself.

The Dart needed some little manoeuvring to get her in the exact position so that Kingston could snip through the wires where they disappeared into the Unicorn's hull. At last he did so, and Gray, who was watching from within, uttered an involuntary "Bravo!" as he saw the twelve wires sink away into the darkness of the sea.

"He's done it, Fraser!" he exclaimed, with satisfaction.

"Whatever they do aboard the Unicorn now, they can't blow up the battleships. Now back away, and as slowly as you can, and then rise to the surface. I don't feel very comfortable with Kingston riding on the outside."

"No, sir, it do seem out of place for him to be there, don't it?" remarked Fraser, as he proceeded to carry out the order. Kingston was none the worse for his adventure when he slipped out of the diving-suit, and he smiled at Gray as the latter slapped him on the back.

"My dear chap," he exclaimed, "it was as simple as A B C. Now I've just got to slip those plugs in again, and we can proceed below the surface. Now, let me see, what is the time?"

"Seventeen minutes past eleven, exactly," replied Gray promptly.

"Splendid! The two tugs containing the Scotland Yard men will not put in an appearance till something after midnight, so I have got ample time to do all I wish. The next move will be the most risky one as regards myself, but before attempting it I think I'll—"

Kingston paused as a very curious throbbing motion was felt throughout the vessel. The next minute Kingston darted up the steps and looked out. He stood for a moment before the others quite knew what was in the wind.

"By Jove," he exclaimed quickly, "the other submarine's not fifty yards off! Get those plugs in quickly, Fraser, or they'll see us as sure as fate! We must get below the surface immediately."

Fraser flew to do as he was bidden, and rapidly screwed the watertight plugs into position. Then, without a second's delay, the Dart slid beneath the surface. But it was too late! They had already been seen, and Kingston, watching from the glass windows of the conning-tower, was momentarily blinded by the powerful rays of a searchlight which proceeded from the bows of the other submarine, which was a giant in comparison to the little Dart. It was racing forward at tremendous speed, and Kingston set his teeth hard as he realised that it was endeavouring to ram his own craft. If it succeeded in doing so there could be no doubt as to the result.

"Fraser!" he called sharply. "Drop as fast as you can for fifty feet, then turn sharply to the left and go for all you're worth! Yes, Gray, they're after us, and it looks as if it's going to be a stern chase."

Carson Gray was beside him now, and the two watched fascinatedly as the following craft, every moment getting nearer, kept exactly to the same course. The Dart dipped her nose downwards suddenly, and glided lower. Then, in accordance with Kingston's commands, she turned abruptly to the left. And as she did so Kingston caught his breath in sharply, for he had seen something which his companions had missed.

"By jingo," he murmured, "that was a near thing!"

Gray was too occupied to notice what he was saying, for he was intently watching the larger submarine. It shot downwards, but instead of following the Dart in its sudden curve, for some unknown reason it kept straight on. The next second it was out of sight, and plainly audible to the watchers' ears came a dull and muffled crash.

"Great Scott! What's that?" asked Gray.

"I don't know for certain," replied Kingston, "but I think I can guess. You did not see, Gray, that if we hadn't stopped descending at the moment we did we should have run full tilt into the rusty hull of a sunken steambot. I can only imagine that our enemy has inadvertently met the fate we just managed to escape."

The Dart was turned round, and now proceeded slowly back, dropping slightly as it went, the light being turned full on. As Kingston had surmised, the enemy had indeed met with a terrible fate, for the large submarine could be seen lying half across the battered hull of a wrecked tramp steamer. Its back was completely broken, as could be seen by a terrible gash. All was quiet and still, and the lookers-on could guess the fate of the two Inner Councillors and those under them.

"There's no necessity to stay here longer," said Kingston quietly at last.

So the Dart rose to the surface again. The incident was so terrible in its tragic suddenness that it affected them all to a certain degree.

But the time was getting on, and Kingston's biggest task had yet to come. He did not waste time in talking, but approaching the Unicorn as near as possible, he removed his disguise, ascended to the deck, and calmly slid overside into the water. Being summer-time, the experience was rather to his liking. He struck out powerfully against the strong Channel current, and very soon was touching the plates of the Unicorn. He swam round the whole length of the ship, and finally came to a stop underneath a large, wide-open port, through which a bright light gleamed.

Slowly Kingston raised himself upwards by means of an overhanging rope and looked into the cabin. After one glance he caught his breath in a little, and then smiled with peculiar satisfaction. What he had seen was this—a brilliantly-lit cabin, luxuriously furnished, but with a rough bench up one side. On this were a number of electrical instruments and several switches, and seated in a chair, with his back to the port, sat Lord Mount-Fannell, the Chief of the Brotherhood of Iron, alone.

(Next week's issue of THE GEM LIBRARY will contain the concluding chapter of this story.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 181.

A Grand, New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

OUR NEW WEEKLY FEATURE

**Will this New Feature be Popular.**

Judging from the large number of letters and postcards which I receive from readers of the GEM Library in all parts of the world, I have no doubt at all that this special page at the end of the book will be more than welcomed, and I am expecting a large post-bag full of congratulatory letters and postcards as soon as the first number containing the new feature is before my friends.

I again repeat my offer and request, and that is, if any reader requires advice and information, I will do my best to reply to them on this page, providing, of course, that the subject is of sufficient general interest to warrant publication.

My request is that my friends will endeavour to take a real personal interest in this—their corner, and I again invite you to send up any contributions which you think may interest a fellow Gemite.

Next Thursday's Story.**"THE INVENTOR'S RIVAL."**

Under this title, Martin Clifford has written his cleverest, and, without a doubt, his best story dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's. The tale tells of a wonderful invention made by Bernard Glyn, the Lancashire mill-owner's son, and many and varied are the exciting incidents when Bully Levison steals the plans and attempts to patent the "invention."

Brother and Sister Readers.

Here are a couple of letters, typical of hundreds that I receive weekly, and particularly interesting from the fact that they come from a brother and sister, and show how the GEM is regarded by lasses as well as lads.

This is Miss E. P.'s nice, neatly-written little note:

"Dear Editor,—Many thanks for the prompt way in which you sent along 'Tom Merry & Co.' I had taken my brother's copy to read at a picnic; and lost it on the way home, and as he wanted it particularly, I was grateful that you sent it so soon.

"My brother reads the GEM, and so do I. I consider it to be a clean, healthy book for any boy—or girl—to read, and I should not think much of a boy who could not read a GEM.

"The 'Terrible Three' and D'Arcy and Figgins & Co. are old friends of mine, and often when I am in the 'dumps' I read a back number of the GEM, and the pranks of Tom Merry & Co., and the delightfulness of D'Arcy, cannot fail to make one feel better. My brother spent six months in France, and every week we posted the GEM to him, but I always read them first. I wonder if you have many letters from girls whose brothers read the GEM? I hope you will not object to receiving one from—Yours faithfully, E. P."

This is the sort of letter that I appreciate. My girl reader has my very best thanks for it, and for the nice things she says about our little journal. I have very many letters from girls who are as regular readers of the GEM as their brothers, and they are amongst the most welcome contents of my postbag.

Now for Miss E. P.'s brother's letter:

"Dear Editor,—My sister is writing to you, so asked me to enclose. I fully endorse what she has said in her letter. I certainly think the GEM a perfectly healthy book, fit for anyone to read, and at the same time cannot help but be amused at the antics and practical jokes of the Terrible Three and Figgins & Co. and Blake, etc. Having been a reader since the paper started, I still look forward as eagerly as ever for the next number.—Yours truly, W. H. P."

Here, again, is a welcome letter indeed. It is extremely gratifying to find the same high opinion of the GEM shown

so whole-heartedly by both brother and sister, and this only adds to the proof that I am constantly receiving, that the difference between the clean, healthy tone of the GEM Library and its companion paper, the "Magnet" Library, and that of some other journals which are offered to British boys and girls, is very generally appreciated.

An Interesting Article.**No. 2.—CAMPING OUT AND HOW TO DO IT.**

The United Kingdom is full of rivers and canals, some of them, like the Thames, well known and popular, others, like the Irish Shannon, the Medway or the Kennet, and Avon Canal, comparatively unknown, therefore cheaper and less crowded and in almost every way preferable.

The Thames has, of course, one great advantage for the holiday-maker from London. It is so close at hand. You can hire a boat at Richmond or Teddington, or even Putney, and start straight away. But you will never be out of touch with civilisation until you get above Oxford, and another serious objection is that all the best camping-places are usually occupied, while riparian owners are very chary of letting you land at all.

On other and less known waterways,

camping by boat

has immense advantages over most other forms of holiday under canvas. In the first place, rowing is the easiest and cheapest form of locomotion. You can carry far more luggage in a boat than in anything else, except a waggon, and waggon camping, owing to the hire and feeding of the horses, is the most costly form of outdoor life. In the second place, waterways are much more pleasant than the road in the summer heat.

Another advantage of boat-camping, which must not be forgotten, is that when a party of three or five friends go together, there's no need for them all to work at once, as is the case when cycling or walking. Part can pull while the others rest, and vice versa. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that an agreement should be made at the start as to

length of rowing spells,

and strictly adhered to all through the excursion.

If, then, it be decided to go by boat, the next question is, what sort of boat. For inland waters, either river or canal, nothing excels an in-rigged pair oar. Some prefer a Canadian canoe, and it has one great advantage. It is so light that it can be easily lifted and carried round rapids or locks. This is a consideration in some places, particularly some canals, where, from sheer disuse, the locks cannot be opened. But, on the other hand, paddling is much harder work than rowing.

A party of three or even four can travel comfortably in a pair oar with their tent and luggage, and can make twenty-five miles a day without tiring themselves. The boat should be provided with a mast and small sail, and also with a towing line. Towing forms a pleasant change from rowing.

If the intention of the camping party is to travel upon tidal waters such as the Essex Blackwater, the Broads or the Crouch,

a small open sailing-craft,

provided, of course, with oars, is preferable. Quite a heavy sea is knocked up by a breeze over tide on such waters, and to navigate them in a Thames pair oar is needless risk. A boat of the type known as a dinghy is the best for those who mean to use the tidal waters. A good sailing-dinghy will stand almost as much weather as a decked five-ton yacht.

(Another of these interesting articles in next Thursday's number of The GEM Library. Please order your copy in advance. Price One Penny.)

THE EDITOR