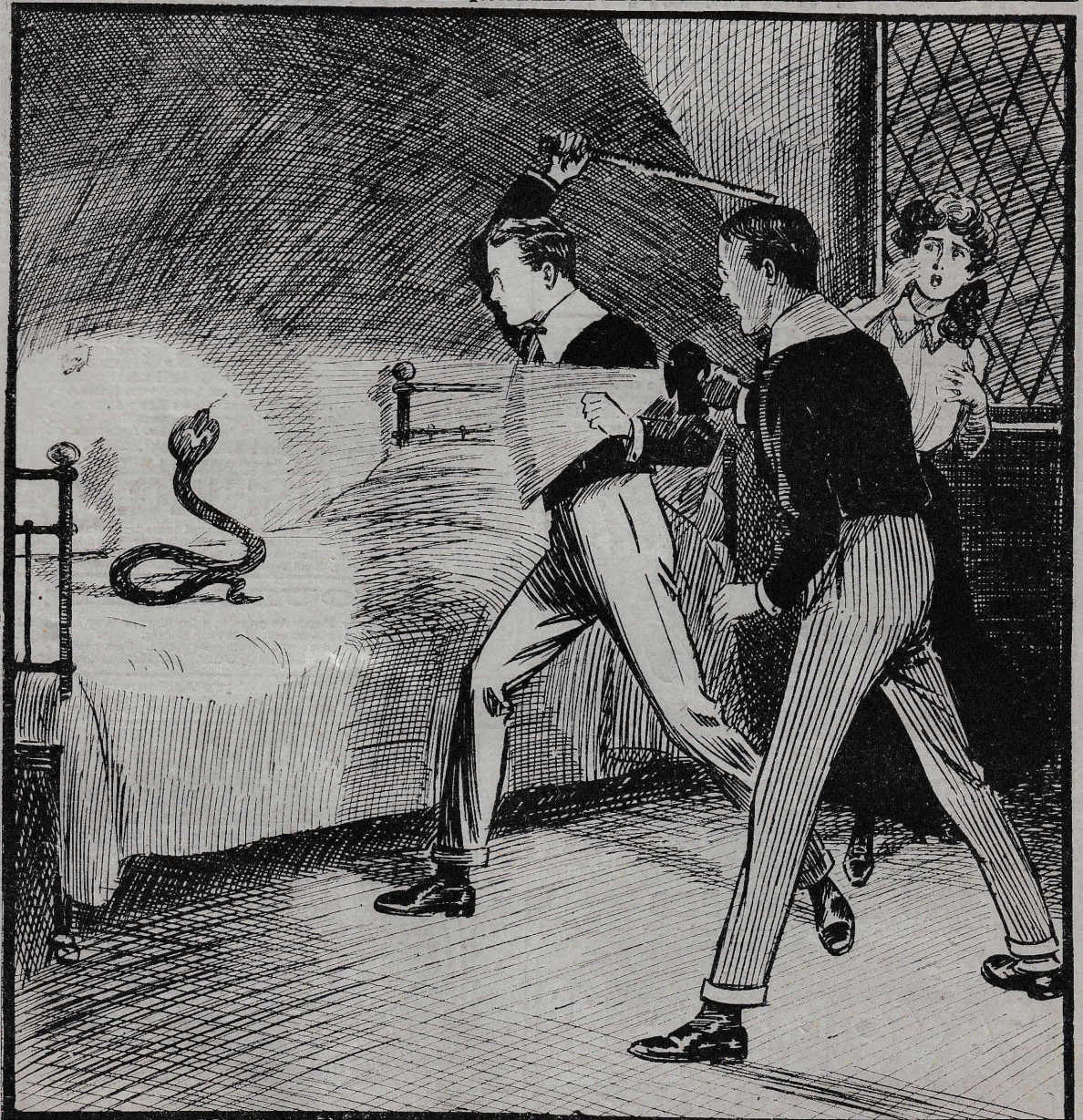
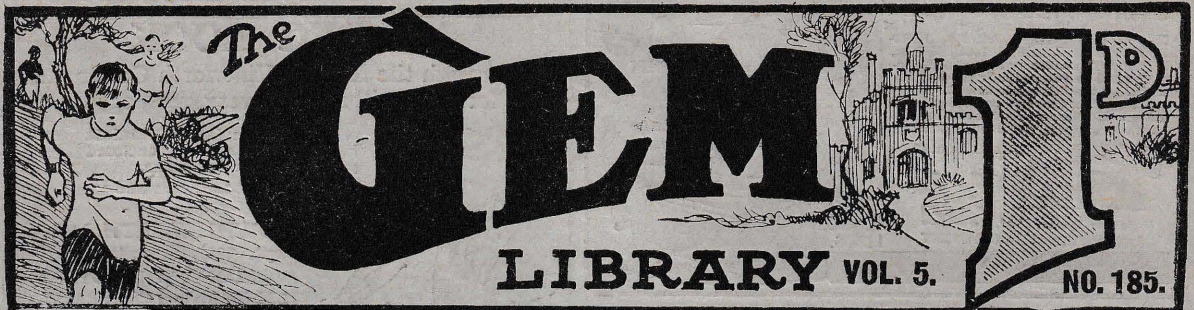


"THE BLACK HOUSE ON THE MOOR."

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

Also: "DEEP SEA GOLD." By Reginald Wray.



THE MYSTERY OF THE RED ROOM!

muttered the swell of St. Jim's, between his chattering teeth.

then Figgins leaped towards the bed, slashing madly with the cricket-stump. He rained blows on the pillows, on the white coverlet, his face white and set, his eyes staring, his arm tireless. Crash, crash, crash! The soft whispering sound changed now—it became a loud, fierce hissing, and it was no longer possible to mistake it. It was the hissing of a furious snake!

Figgins grasped the cricket-stump in his right hand with a firm grasp. He reached out and touched D'Arcy on the arm. "Ready?" he whispered, "Yaas!" "The light—quick!" came the command, and

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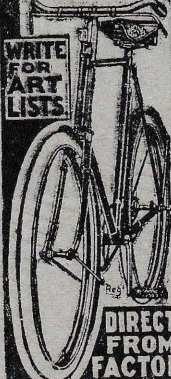
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CHAPTER I.

The Terror of Cousin Ethel.

"HALLO!"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "What the—why the——"
 "Figgy's off his wockah!"
 "Why, what——"

Tom Merry & Co. uttered those startled exclamations in varying tones of amazement. They had cause to be surprised.

They were standing outside the cricket pavilion, chattering after a match. School House juniors had drawn with New House juniors, and so each team was perfectly well satisfied with itself, each side being firmly convinced that only the very worst of bad luck had prevented them from scoring the odd run and licking the other side.

They were talking cricket on the best of terms, and Figgins was holding forth on the subject of late cuts in general and his own special brand of late cut in particular, when suddenly he was guilty of the most extraordinary conduct.

He left off in the middle of a remark, leaving the remark unfinished. He gave a little ejaculation, and rushed off the cricket-ground as fast as his legs could carry him.

The junior cricketers stared after him in blank amazement.

Kerr and Wynn, his chums in the New House, were as surprised as the School House fellows. Figgins, as a rule,

was a quiet and easy-going chap, and not at all given to sudden bursts of excitement or unaccountable actions. To see him break off and dash away in this manner was simply amazing.

"My hat!" said Kerr. "What the dickens——"
 "He's off his wockah!" repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with emphasis. "That is the only possible explanation. I disapprove of Figgy's conduct. I wegard it as wude."

"But what the——"
 Tom Merry & Co. stared after Figgins. He was off the cricket-ground already, and had passed the belt of elms, and disappeared. They could hear his flying footsteps in the distance, mingled with a sound of wheels.

"Somebody's just come in in a trap," said Kerr. "Figgy may have caught sight of them."

"But that's no reason——"
 "I wegard Figgy as an ass!"
 Monty Lowther, of the Shell, tapped his forehead significantly.

"I always feared it was coming," he murmured. "It's come at last. If you New House chaps get up a subscription for a strait-jacket, you can put me down for twopence. I'll do that much for Figgins."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Oh, rats!" said Kerr. "Figgy must have caught sight of the trap before it went behind the trees."

"Perhaps he's hungry," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully.

"What?"

Next Thursday:

"THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S!" AND "DEEP SEA GOLD."

No. 185 (New Series).

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"I shouldn't wonder," said Fatty. "I've often come over suddenly hungry myself, and felt that if I didn't get a pork pie or something quick I should collapse. And a fellow gets specially hungry this time of the year."

"I'm going after Figgy," said Tom Merry. "Either somebody important has arrived, or else he's off his rocker."

"It might be Cousin Ethel."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"It isn't Ethel," he said; "Ethel's not able to come here now. Since her mother went abroad, she's been in the charge of Dr. Gadsby, and he doesn't like St. Jim's or the St. Jim's fellows. He's had the astounding check to tell me so—me, you know! He doesn't like me!"

"Extraordinary!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Let's go and see what's the matter with Figgy," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy joined Fatty Wynn and Kerr, who were hurrying after Figgins already. The other fellows strolled more slowly in the direction of the School House.

Tom Merry was first through the elms, and he caught sight of a trap on the drive, with a girl seated in it. The trap had halted, and Figgins was half-mounted on the step. The girl was alone in the trap, and although her back was to the juniors, they knew her at once.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in amazement. "It is Ethel! It's my cousin! Somethin' must have happened!"

"Great Scott!"

The four juniors ran on their hardest. Cousin Ethel was very popular with the chums of St. Jim's. At one time the girl had been accustomed to visit the school very frequently; but that had been stopped of late, and Tom Merry & Co. had missed her a great deal—perhaps not so much as Figgins, though. Figgins thought a very great deal of Cousin Ethel, and, indeed, had sometimes unconsciously assumed an air of proprietorship over her that excited the wrath of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus looked upon his cousin as his own property, and cast a very disapproving eye upon other fellows who showed too great a regard for her company.

There was no doubt that Figgins had caught sight of Cousin Ethel as the trap passed the trees. It was really amazing how Figgy seemed to know, by some mysterious kind of instinct, when Cousin Ethel was anywhere near. Nobody else had seen the trap or Ethel, but Figgins had. And he had reached the trap, and stopped it on the drive in an amazingly short space of time.

"Cousin Ethel!"

The juniors all uttered the name together. The girl turned her head, and then they all exclaimed again.

For Cousin Ethel was not looking her usual self.

The charming face, which they had always seen rosy and bright, was deadly pale. There were dark hollows under the eyes, and in the eyes themselves there seemed to lurk a strange expression of fear and apprehension which the juniors had never seen there before.

"What's the matter—what's the matter, Ethel?" Figgins was saying, and in his anxiety he had taken the girl's hand, and was holding it tightly between his own. "Ethel—Ethel dear! Good heavens! What's the matter?"

Ethel did not reply. Her lips moved, but she said nothing. It seemed as if the words would not come.

"Ethel," gasped Tom Merry, "what can it be? What's the matter, Ethel?"

"Oh, I—I—"

Her voice broke away in a sob.

The juniors looked at her in utter consternation. Ethel was not a girl with nerves; she was never hysterical. And when she was so disturbed as this it was certain that there was some weighty reason for it.

"Ethel! Somethin' happened to your mothah, deah?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

The girl shook her head.

"What is it, then, Ethel?"

"I—I—I—oh, I am so terrified!" The girl covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out some fearful sight. "Figgins, help me! Oh, I—I—"

Her voice died away. A white, fixed look came over her face, and Figgins had just time to catch her as she swayed from her seat. Figgins, his own face as white as chalk, held the girl tenderly, with as much care as if she had been a delicate piece of porcelain, liable to break at the slightest rough touch.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Bai Jove!"

"She's fainted!"

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CHAPTER 2.

The Horror of the Red Room.

COUSIN ETHEL had fainted!

There was no doubt about it. The white face was cold and still; she lay inert, motionless, in Figgins's arms.

"Oh!" muttered Figgins. "Ethel—Ethel dear! Oh, Heavens!"

"Get her to the house—quick!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Figgins nodded. Tom Merry ran to the pony's head, and led him quickly towards the New House; it was nearer than the School House. In a few moments the trap was at the door, and the girl was lifted down.

Ethel's eyes opened as Kerr dashed cold water in her face. The Scottish junior had filled his cap at the fountain. Her gaze turned upon the juniors, and rested upon Figgins.

"Save me!" she muttered.

"Ethel, what do you mean? Are you in danger?"

"Yes—oh, yes! Save me!"

Figgins set his jaw squarely, and his fists clenched hard. There was a gleam in his eyes that boded ill to anyone who should threaten Cousin Ethel with danger.

"You're safe here, Ethel," he whispered. "Buck up, Ethel dear! You're safe here."

The girl tried to calm herself. Fellows were coming towards the spot from all directions, seeing that something was wrong. The colour flushed into Ethel's face as she realised that all eyes were turning upon her.

"Take me in—quick!" she murmured.

"Can you walk?"

"Yes, yes."

And Cousin Ethel, leaning heavily upon Figgins's arm, entered the New House. It was almost deserted; all the fellows were out of doors in the bright summer's afternoon. Figgins opened the door of the junior common-room, and led Ethel in. There was no one else in the room.

"Shut the door!" said Figgins.

Fatty Wynn closed the door.

Ethel sank into a chair, her breath coming and going in short gasps. The colour had faded from her face again, leaving her deadly white. The juniors stood round her with anxious faces, in wonder and alarm. Figgins fanned her gently with an exercise-book.

The girl tried to smile.

"I—I am afraid I have been very foolish," she murmured. "I—I think I must have fainted. Oh, I have been so frightened!"

"Drink some of this!" said Kerr.

He placed a glass of water to Ethel's lips. The girl sipped it.

"Thank you! I—I am better now. It was foolish of me to faint. But I—I have been through so much, I have been so frightened."

Figgins's nails dug into the palms of his hands.

"Who has frightened you?" he asked hoarsely.

"Yaas, wathah! Tell us the wottah's name, Ethel, and we'll smash him!"

The girl's lips quivered.

"You—you can't protect me," she whispered. "I—I was foolish to come here. I—I knew it would only make you anxious, but—but oh, I was so frightened! I know that I am in danger."

"Danger of what, Ethel?"

"Death!"

The girl shuddered as she spoke the word.

"Good heavens!" said Figgins hoarsely. "Ethel! What are you saying? Ethel, dear, what has happened? Who is it?"

"Dr. Gadsby!"

"Oh!"

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"Your great uncle?"

"Yes; my mother's uncle. Oh, he frightens me! I know he means that I shall never leave the Black House alive—oh!"

The girl sobbed.

"The villain!" said Figgins. "But—but how is it—Ethel? What has happened?"

"I'll try to tell you," said the girl. "You cannot help me, but—I must tell you. As soon as I found that the Black House was near St. Jim's, I—I determined to come here and see Fig—and see you all, and tell you. I know you will save me if you can. I—I have stolen out to-day. I walked through the wood to Rylcombe, and hired the trap there. Dr. Gadsby will know that I have come here—he will follow—he may arrive at any moment. He will take me away with him."

Figgins clenched his teeth.

"He can't! He sha'n't! If you're in danger—"

The girl moaned.

"I can't prove it! It's only suspicion—such horrible



The door of the common-room opened, and Mr. Ratcliff, followed by a thin, white-haired old man, strode into the room. "Dr. Gadsby complains that his niece has left home and come here without his permission," Mr. Ratcliff said, frowning. "I see that is the case." (See Chapter 3.)

suspicious! But—but there have been two others—they were in the Red Room—and they—they died!"

"Ethel!"

"Twy and calm yourself, deah gal!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was trembling with excitement himself. "You must tell us what has happened, in case the man comes. We jolly well sha'n't let him take you away if you don't want to go!"

The girl made an effort to still the wild beating of her heart. She drank the cool, clear water again, and collected herself.

"I must be quick!" she said, in a steadier voice. "He may come at any time, and as he has a car, he would reach St. Jim's very quickly, when he discovered that I was gone. You—you know that my mother has fallen ill again, and has had to go to the South of France. Last time she went I was placed at school, at St. Freda's; but this time Dr. Gadsby persuaded my mother to leave me in his charge. His wife was very kind to me; and he has very great influence over my mother. He is a clever man—a dreadfully clever man! I fear him—oh, I fear him so much!"

She trembled violently.

"Dr. Gadsby had a house in Eastbourne then, and I stayed there. But since then, he moved to the Black House on the moor—you know the house—it is on the moor on the north side of the Wayland Road."

"I know it," said Tom Merry. "It has never been occupied."

"It was unoccupied for a long time, till Dr. Gadsby came to live there, but it always belonged to him," said Ethel. "Mrs. Gadsby came, too, but she became ill, and the doctor sent her back to Eastbourne. Before she went—oh—"

Her voice trailed off again.

"Twy to be calm, deah gal!"

"Before she went, I—I tried to persuade the doctor to let me go with her, but he refused. He said she would return to the Black House soon, but she has not returned. And—and she told me—she told me that she was afraid for me, that I must be careful, and advised me to write to my friends to come and see me, and to leave the doctor if I could—she would not tell me why—she is terribly afraid of him, and—and she was frightened at having told me so much. And she told me never, never to live in the Red Room, even if Dr. Gadsby ordered me to take that room."

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S!"

A New Tale of Tom Merry & Co. Jack Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"The Red Room?"

"Yes. It is a room in the turret—there is a turret in the corner of the house, with one room that is away from all the rest—a room with thick, solid stone walls, and an old-fashioned chimney—it is painted in red, and is called the Red Room. I did not know why I was not to have the Red Room, unless because it was lonely; but—but I was frightened and curious, and I inquired about the Red Room. I—I learned something about it from an old woman who lives in Lower Wayland—she told me—and I heard it again from others—that Dr. Gadsby's first wife died in the Red Room—and his uncle died there."

"Oh, Ethel!"

"And—and both of them died in such a way that inquests were held," said the girl, shuddering. "But the cause of death was unknown—it was called heart failure, but both of them had been healthy enough up to a short time before they died."

"Ethel!"

"And—and the day after Mrs. Gadsby went away, the doctor said that he required my room to use as a laboratory, and ordered Martha—he keeps only one maid, a deaf old woman named Martha—he ordered her to take my things into the Red Room, and said that I was to occupy that room in future."

The juniors listened with pale faces. That anyone, especially a relation, should intend harm to the girl, seemed incredible; but surely Cousin Ethel's fearful terror could not be without grounds!

"I was so frightened, that I could not help showing it in my face," went on Cousin Ethel, in low, broken tones, "and he—he saw it! I think he never knew before then that I suspected anything. His face became as black as a thunder-cloud, and I thought for the moment that he would strike me. He did not, however; he became calm again, and smiled—such a terrible smile. He told me not to argue with him—that I was to do as I was bidden. And I took the Red Room. I—I wrote three letters that day, and put them in the hall to be posted as usual—and they disappeared. I know that he took them—one was to you, Arthur—you did not receive it?"

"No, dear girl."

"Then I determined to post more letters myself. As I was going out, I was stopped by Dr. Gadsby. He forbade me to leave the house, and turned his bloodhound loose in the grounds, and warned me that if I tried to leave, I should be torn in pieces."

"Oh! The brute—the brute!"

Figgins clenched his teeth hard.

"I—I have occupied the Red Room now two days," said Ethel. "Oh, I have been so terrified at night! Each of those who died there died in the night—without a sign to show how they died."

"Oh!" muttered Figgins, clenching his hands.

"To-day I—I resolved that I would come here. I had an opportunity—when the doctor went out—he often goes for long rambles on the moor, and till lately he always took his dog with him. When he went out to-day the dog followed him, and he appeared to forget his new custom of leaving the bloodhound on guard. I saw him go, from the window of the Red Room, and saw the dog follow, and he did not send it back. I stole down from the turret, and ran—and ran—oh, dear!"

"You did right to come here," said Tom Merry. "But—but what is the danger you fear, Ethel? Why should he want to kill you?"

The girl shuddered.

"I—I know that he does! Why should he put me into the Red Room—where others have died—so strangely, too? And why should Mrs. Gadsby have warned me never to enter the Red Room! And—when his first wife died, Dr. Gadsby had all her money, and there was very much of it—she was older than he was, and very rich—his second wife told me that. And he is very extravagant in his scientific experiments—he spends money like water, and he is in debt now—many people know that, and that he is in danger of being sold up. And his uncle, who died in that room, was a rich old man and all his money was left to Dr. Gadsby—though he has wasted it since."

"But you, Ethel—if anything should happen to you would the man benefit in any way?" asked Kerr.

"Yes, yes, yes! He would gain ten thousand pounds!"

"Good heavens!"

"I am to have that, as you know, Arthur, under my grandfather's will, when I am of age. My grandfather on my mother's side, you know—Dr. Gadsby's brother. He left it to me because I was his favourite grand-daughter, but—but in the event of my not living to the age of twenty-one, it was to go to his brother, Dr. Gadsby. He was very fond of his brother, and he left him a large sum of money, which the doctor has spent along with all the rest in scientific research."

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Mrs. Gadsby told me that he has spent more than fifty thousand pounds in that way, and is now quite poor—and she is supported in Eastbourne by her own people. But—but if she were rich I—I believe that she would die as his first wife died."

And Ethel sobbed.

"I know she thinks so, too—she knows him so well—she is afraid of him, though now he has no motive to kill her. He is utterly unscrupulous; in his experiments, he tortures animals—I have heard their shrieks from the turret."

"What is he experimenting in?" asked Figgins.

The girl's voice was hushed with horror as she replied:

"Poisons!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Whisper of Death.

TOM MERRY & Co. stood silent, their faces white as chalk. They could no longer doubt that the peril was real—that Ethel Cleveland was in terrible danger. Figgins had unconsciously taken her hand. He was holding the little white fingers in his big brown palm, and Ethel let them remain there unconsciously. In Figgins's touch she seemed to find strength and courage.

"Good heavens!" said Tom Merry, at last. "What can we do—what can we do? You must not go back to the Black House, Ethel."

"Wathah not!"

"I must—I must! He will guess I have come here—he will follow—he will take me away!"

"He can't! He sha'n't!"

"He will! I can prove nothing. At each of the inquests he was exonerated from any blame—and that was years ago. His name is high in his profession; it is known that he is a vivisectionist, but many people uphold that. They don't know that a man who is cruel to animals is quite likely to be cruel to human beings, too. He will take me away—he has the legal right—and the power. I cannot stay here!"

The juniors clenched their hands.

It was true enough.

Dr. Gadsby had the right and the power to take the girl away with him—the law was on his side—until he had committed some crime, no one had a right to interfere. And when he had committed the crime he contemplated, Cousin Ethel would be dead.

Figgins gave a wild cry at the mere thought of it.

"Ethel, you can't go—you sha'n't go!"

"Oh, I must—and he will be here soon! He will come here instantly he knows I have gone from the Black House. Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do?"

"Ethel dear! Has anything happened yet—anything to show that—that he means you harm? Has he hurt you?"

The girl shuddered again.

"No. He is kind, in a strange way. I believe he is fond of me—he always seemed to be—he first won my mother by his regard for me. But—but he would let nothing stand in the way of his experiments—he would sacrifice me as readily as one of the poor little rabbits, or the dogs. He has cages and cages of them—rabbits, and dogs, and snakes—especially snakes. He makes experiments in serpents' venom, and I have seen the poor little animals all twisted out of shape by the poison he has injected into their veins, in his horrible researches. Once a snake, a little black thing that was horrible to look at, escaped into the house, and he said that if it had bitten anybody, that person would have been dead in three seconds—and he laughed when he said it, as if it were amusing."

"The horrible brute!"

"And—and his uncle had been in the Red Room for four days when he died. He was on a visit there. He was fond

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of his uncle, I believe—people said so, anyway, and that helped, I suppose, to prevent suspicion. And—and Mrs. Gadsby told me that on the third night the old gentleman was in the room he heard something—he told her about it on the following morning—a sound in the room as of someone whispering. He got up and searched the room, but there was no one there."

"Someone whispering!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yes, a sound like whispering, but no words—just a whisper. And when the first Mrs. Gadsby died, her husband was away from home, and it was reported at the inquest—I have read it in an old Wayland paper—that the night before her death, she had imagined that she heard a whispering in the room. She told old Martha so in the morning, but she set it down to her imagination. But—but how could it happen twice like that, if it was imagination? Both of them who have died heard the same sound the night before they died—and—and when I go to bed at night, I fear to hear it every moment, and I cannot sleep."

Zip-zip-hoot!

It was the sound of a car in the quad

Ethel sprang to her feet.

"It is Dr. Gadsby! He has come for me!"

Figgins still held her hand.

"Quiet!" he muttered. "He shall not take you away!

We'll stop him, somehow!"

Figgins spoke desperately. In his heart he knew that there was no stopping the doctor. He could call upon the police to aid him if he were resisted.

The girl was shuddering in every limb.

"But you have not heard that sound in the Red Room yet?" asked Tom Merry, in a low voice.

"Not yet; but I fear—I fear—"

"It would seem that the danger does not arise till that sound is heard, by the two cases that have happened. Ethel, dear, if this man takes you away—Ethel, if you should hear that sound, let us know, and we shall know you are in danger, and we will save you, if we have to come and take you by force."

"But—but how can I let you know?"

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"After this, I shall be closely watched. I shall not be allowed to leave the house, or to send a letter or a telegram. I shall never see the world again—never! I am going to my death!" sobbed Ethel.

Figgins groaned aloud.

"I think I have it," said Kerr quietly.

Figgins turned to him quickly. In a time when hard thinking was required, Figgins had a great faith in his Scottish shun.

"What's your idea, Kerr?" he said.

"We must make a code," said Kerr. "Suppose, for instance, you wired to us, 'The picnic must be postponed.' Dr. Gadsby would let that come."

"Yes; but—"

"The word 'picnic' means 'danger,'" said Kerr quietly. "If you send us a letter or a wire, and the word 'picnic' occurs in it, we shall know that you are in danger. Make up any innocent-sounding sentence, but if you are in danger let that word occur. Do you understand?"

Cousin Ethel's face brightened.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes! He could never guess that."

Figgins nodded.

"Oh, it's ripping!" he said. "Trust Kerr to think of a way out. Ethel, you could get a telegram like that through. You could word it so that the old villain would think you were putting us off from paying a visit."

"Yes—yes."

"Don't forget," said Kerr. "There seems to be no danger till you hear that sound in your room, and as soon as you hear it, you're to get that message through. If we don't get a wire of some sort, we shall know you've been stopped, and we'll come scouting. But write or wire, if you can, and any letter that doesn't contain the word 'picnic' will be taken to mean that you're all right. Dr. Gadsby would rather let you seem to be unrestrained, I should think, so long as he reads your letters, and sees nothing suspicious in them."

"Yes, yes, yes."

"Hark!"

The door of the common-room was pushed open, and Mr. Ratcliff, the sour House-master, came in with a frowning brow. After him came a thin, white haired old man, with a skin so wrinkled and puckered up that it looked like ancient parchment. But from the parchment face, two bright eyes glittered and gleamed like diamonds.

Ethel trembled at the sight of him.

"Dr. Gadsby!" she murmured.

Mr. Ratcliff frowned.

"Dr. Gadsby complains that his niece has left her home, and come here without his permission," he exclaimed. "I see that it is the case."

"Come, Ethel!" said the doctor, in a honeyed tone.

"I—I will not come back!" exclaimed Ethel.

"My dear child," said the old doctor softly, "why should you leave my house in this way? Really, you will give people reason to make unpleasant comments upon your conduct. My dear child, you must come back immediately."

The old gentleman's voice was kindness itself, and, save for the deep glitter in his eyes, his face expressed only benevolence. The juniors could hardly believe their eyes. Was this the monster Cousin Ethel feared—this kind, queer old gentleman, who appeared to be a most affectionate uncle? Arthur Augustus, who knew the doctor well, and had always considered him a kind old fellow, looked dubiously at Ethel. Was the girl allowing the loneliness and evil reputation of the Black House on the moor to work on her imagination, and give rise to groundless fears?

Even Ethel seemed to be moved. She gazed at the doctor, in surprise mingled with horror, but the kind smile never changed from his old face.

"Come, Ethel dear; I cannot allow these wild escapades," he said. "If you do not wish to remain with me, you shall go to your aunt's in Eastbourne to-morrow. But you must come home now, my dear child."

"Let me remain here with Mrs. Holmes, till I go to Eastbourne!" exclaimed Ethel.

"Impossible! We could not trouble her in that way, and besides, I cannot have my authority in my own house flouted. You must come home, child."

"I—I will not!"

"Do not compel me to exert my authority," said the doctor gently. "You must know that I am your legal guardian during your mother's absence, and I can call upon the law to assist me, if you persist in defying my authority."

"You—you sha'n't take her!" muttered Figgins. "You sha'n't!"

CHAPTER 4.

Taken Away.

FIGGINS clenched his hands hard.

He knew he was attempting the impossible. He could not defy his House-master; he could not defy the forces of the law. But to allow Cousin Ethel to be taken back to the house she dreaded—to allow her to be placed once more in the room of death—he could not consent to that. His face was white and drawn, and he stood trembling from head to foot with excitement and anger.

"She can't go! She sha'n't go!" he exclaimed.

"Figgins!"

"She doesn't want to go back to that man's house, sir. She can stay with Mrs. Holmes. The Head and Mrs. Holmes would be glad to have her!"

"Yes, yes!" said Ethel.

"Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a brow like thunder—"Figgins, you are acting disgracefully—encouraging a young girl to treat her lawful guardian with disrespect. You will take a thousand lines, Figgins, and if you say another word I will cane you severely."

"You can cane me, then, sir," said Figgins recklessly. "Cousin Ethel sha'n't go back to that man's house if I can stop it. I'll appeal to the Head."

"I think you must have taken leave of your senses, Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff, in amazement. "Miss Cleveland, your guardian has come for you. I will not give my opinion upon the subject of this indecorous flight from his house. But I must ask you to return with him at once."

"I must go," said Ethel.

Tom Merry caught her hand.

"Come to the School House," he said. "Mr. Ratcliff is master here, but not over the way. Come with us."

"I insist upon my niece coming with me," said Dr. Gadsby.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed at him.

"She sha'n't come, so there!"

"She will be taken by force."

"You'd better not try it."

"Merry," exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, "are you mad? If you do not let the young lady go at once, I will send a message to your House-master."

"You may send it, sir."

Ethel shook her head.

"I must go," she said. "I—I knew I could not stay here."

If Mr. Raiton or the Head came here, Tom, they could only submit to the law—my guardian has the right to take me away. I must go."

It was true enough. The juniors realised it. Kerr drew the excited Figgins back, and held his arm. Figgins looked as if he would rush upon the doctor, but that would only have made matters worse.

"She can't go!" muttered Figgins.

"She must, old man! But we will look after her," Kerr

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whispered. "We can't keep her here. The Head would have to let her go if we called him in."

Figgins groaned.
"Come, Ethel," said Dr. Gadsby, in the same soft and gentle tones. "Come! I am sorry you do not like staying in my house, but this is not the way for a young girl to act. To-morrow you shall join Mrs. Gadsby in Eastbourne."

"Very well," said Ethel dully.
The juniors stood in helpless rage while the girl followed Dr. Gadsby from the house. They could do nothing—noting!

The car was waiting. Dr. Gadsby handed the girl into it, and mounted himself. Tom Merry & Co. looked on from the doorway. They waved their hands to Cousin Ethel as the car swung down the drive.

But the girl did not wave back.
She sat in her seat like a statue—white, motionless, lost to everything but the terror that was filling her very soul.

The car whizzed out of the school gates, and disappeared. Figgins gave a groan.

"Oh, Ethel—Ethel! And we had to let her go!"
"I—I feel quite in a fluttah," said Arthur Augustus faintly.
"It's howwid, you know."

Tom Merry set his teeth.
"We shall look after her," he said, "and if anything should happen, we can help to bring the scoundrel to justice. But—"

"But isn't it possible that—that Ethel has been a bit frightened because people have died in that room," Blake hazarded. "The doctor certainly seems a kind old chap enough, to judge by his manner."

"He has always been vevy nice to me," said D'Arcy thoughtfully.

Tom Merry looked dubious. But Figgins had no doubts. Figgins's faith in Cousin Ethel was firmly founded as upon rock.

"Ethel's a sensible girl," he said. "She wouldn't imagine things. If she thinks there's danger, there's danger."

And Kerr nodded.
"What do you think of the chap, Kerr?" asked Tom Merry. Like all the others, he had a great faith in the keenness and penetration of the Scottish junior.

"If he was acting, he was doing it jolly well," said Kerr. "And, upon the whole, I believe he was acting."

"But he could have taken Ethel away by force if he'd liked," said Tom Merry. "Why should he take the trouble to put on kindness, if it wasn't real?"

"To keep up appearances, so that it would be said afterwards that at all events he appeared kind and considerate enough," said Kerr. "You see, questions may be asked afterwards, at the inquest."

The juniors shuddered.
Figgins pressed his hands to his temples.

"I shall go dotty, I think, if she remains with that villain," he muttered thickly. "What can we do?"

"Nothing," said Kerr. "But it seems that the danger doesn't arise till that sound is heard in the room; that's how it was in two cases that happened there. Cousin Ethel hasn't heard that yet."

"What could the sound be?"
"Perhaps the opening of a secret panel. Perhaps the sound of a syringe spraying some poison into the room," said Kerr quietly. "You never know! That man is clever—you can see it in his face, and he is a specialist in poisons. If we get that wire from Ethel we shall know."

"But to wait!" groaned Figgins.
"Patience, old boy!"

"Come and have something to eat, Figgys," said Fatty Wynn sympathetically. "It will buck you up."

Figgins shook his head.
"Some jam-tarts," said Fatty Wynn, in his most persuasive tones. "Some of Dame Taggles's fresh jam-tarts—or what do you say to cream-puffs?"

"Oh, dry up!" said Figgins.
"H'm! Look here, a pork-pie would—"

Figgins walked back into the house. Mr. Ratcliff met him in the hall. The House-master's sour face was sourer than ever.

"Figgins," he said, "you have acted disgracefully. I shall expect that thousand lines from you."

Figgins made no reply; he did not even hear. He was in no mood for the henpecking of Mr. Ratcliff just then.

"Did you hear me, Figgins?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, raising his voice.

Figgins started.
"Eh? No, sir."

"You have a thousand lines to do."

"Eh? Yes, sir! All right. Don't bother."

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Mr. Ratcliff jumped. He had never been told not to bother before, by a junior in the Fourth Form.

"Figgins!" he shouted. "This insolence—"

"Oh, can't you let a chap alone?" exclaimed Figgins.

"Come into my study."
And Mr. Ratcliff led Figgins into his study, and caned him there and then. Figgins endured it quietly; and Mr. Ratcliff never knew how terribly near he was, just then, to getting a terrific upper-cut from the sturdy junior.

CHAPTER 5.

The Prisoner of the Black House.

COUSIN ETHEL sat quiet, without a word, in the car, as Dr. Gadsby drove it along the country roads. The doctor did not look at his niece. All his attention was given to driving the car. Through the village of Rylcombe, and by the bridge to the Wayland road, and then by the road across the moor, the car whizzed at a rapid rate, and finally the doctor turned it from the road upon a rough path through the gorse. Against the blue sky a black mass rose to view, silhouetted on the blue. It was the Black House on the moor.

The house was very well known in the neighbourhood, and the juniors of St. Jim's had frequently passed it in their paper-chases, and indeed had ventured more than once into the wild, unkept ground to gather fruit. A high wall surrounded the grounds, and over the wall peered the top of the house, with the high turret in the east corner. Creepers grew over every wall, and shrouded the turret. The woodwork of the house was painted black, and the old stones were almost black with age and moss; which had doubtless given rise to its sombre name. Cousin Ethel raised her eyes as the house came in sight, and shuddered a little.

The doctor, though he was not looking at her, divined her feeling. He turned towards her with a kind glance.

"My dear Ethel, what are you afraid of?"
The girl did not reply.

Dr. Gadsby alighted and opened the gate himself, and then drove in the car. He closed the gate behind him, and locked it, putting the key into his pocket. He might have been a warder taking back an escaped prisoner who had been recaptured. There was a deep bay, and a huge dog came bounding from the ragged bushes that filled the unkept gardens. It was a great bloodhound. Ethel shrank back in the car; but the dog did not notice her. He rubbed his head against the doctor as the latter turned from the gate. Dr. Gadsby's face lighted up as he fondled the huge head of the bloodhound. If there was affection in his nature, it was expended upon the dog.

Ethel stepped from the car, and ran into the house. An old woman, with the peculiarly stolid expression of one who has long been very deaf, met her at the doorway.

"So you have come back, miss," she said, in a cracked voice.

"Yes, Martha," said Ethel.
The old woman shook her head.

"It wasn't any use, miss," she whispered. "He's too clever. It wasn't any use. Don't you try it again."

"Chattering, Martha?"
It was Dr. Gadsby's voice. His tone was quite pleasant, but there seemed to be an under-current of something in it that terrified the old woman. She changed colour, and hurried away, muttering, without replying to the doctor.

The doctor was left alone with Cousin Ethel.

The girl's heart was beating wildly. His manner was kind, his look was gentle; but she had seen the same kind expression upon his face when he was going into his laboratory to torture helpless animals in his horrible experiments, and she knew how much it was worth. Indeed, she had more than once suspected that too much scientific research had unhinged the brain of the doctor, and that he was not wholly in his right senses—though, with the cunning natural to the insane, he contrived to conceal the fact from the outer world.

"Now, Ethel," said the doctor, "tell me why you ran away."

"I—I wanted to see my friends at St. Jim's," said the girl.

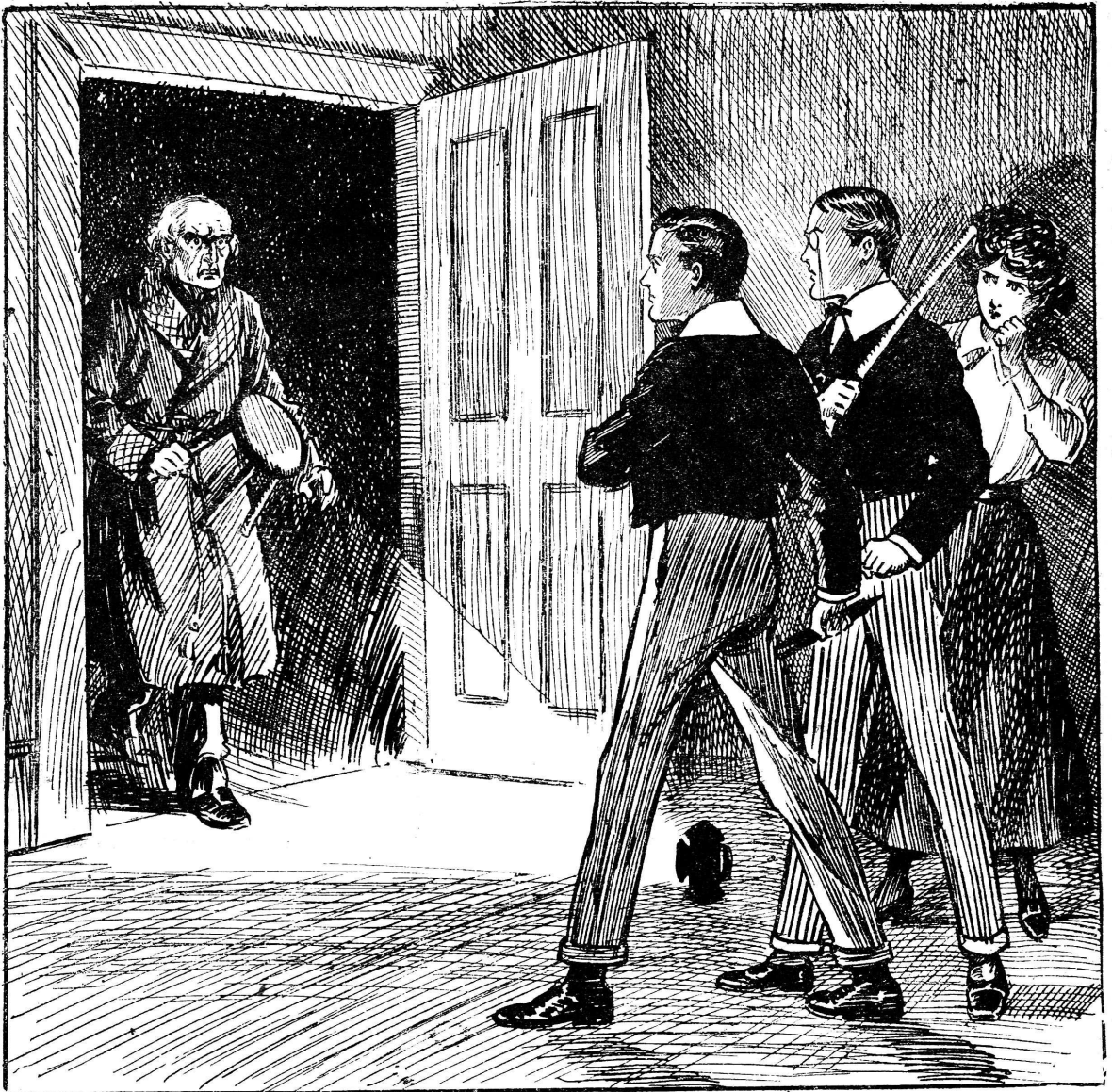
"My mother always used to let me go there. Why should I not go?"

"But I had forbidden it, Ethel."

"You had no right to forbid it."

"Your dear mother placed you in my charge, Ethel."

"But my mother understood that Mrs. Gadsby would be with us always," said Ethel. "If she had known where you were going to keep me, and in what way, she would never have placed me in your charge. You did not make this change until after she was abroad, and until after my brother had left England with his regiment. You know you would not be allowed to keep me here if they knew."



The door, no longer fastened, flew violently open. Dr. Gadsby staggered in with a heavy stool in his hands. "You here!" he hissed between his teeth, as he saw Figgins and D'Arcy. "Y—You here!" (See Chapter 16.)

"Nonsense, Ethel—nonsense!" said the doctor, rubbing his hands together. "I do not know why you should distrust me."

"I think you mean me harm," said Ethel, in her fearless way.

He clenched his hands.

"Why?"

She was silent.

"I have always shown you affection, Ethel," said the doctor. "I have always been fond of you, my dear girl—very fond. But if you do not wish to remain with me, you shall go."

"Let me go to-day."

"That is impossible. But to-morrow, or the next day, you shall go—for good."

"I hope you will keep your word, sir," said Ethel. "You have not kept your word to my mother."

"What have you told the boys at St. Jim's, Ethel?"

The doctor's tone was still quiet and calm; but there was a trace of anxiety in it now. Ethel understood the reason. If anything happened to her, the boys would certainly tell what she had told them, and the result might be serious for the doctor.

"I told them I was afraid to remain here," she replied.

"Because I meant you harm?"

"Yes."

His hands worked like the claws of a wild animal now. Ethel shrank back against the wall with such terror in her face, that it recalled the doctor to himself. In an instant he was quiet again, and calm, and the kind smile was on his face.

"Ethel, dear, you have wronged me very much," he said gently. "This strange idea that has taken possession of your mind—that is why I will not allow you to see your friends, or to write to them. You have maligned me to the world—your talk would have the effect of blackening my reputation, and doing me a great deal of harm—and I need not say how it would distress your poor mother if it reached her ears. While you are in this extraordinary mood, Ethel, I have no resource but to keep you within doors—but that is my only motive."

Ethel did not speak.

"You must learn to think better of me, Ethel," said the doctor. "You must learn to trust me. Why do you distrust me? Has Mrs. Gadsby been talking any nonsense to you—before she returned to Eastbourne, I mean?"

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NEXT

"THE DAILY OF THE DIVAL CO'S!"

A New Tale of Tom Merry & Co. Jack Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

His eyes glittered as he put the question. "You need not ask me anything, uncle," said Ethel quietly. "I do not trust you—I cannot trust you. That is enough. I do not wish to talk about it. But—but others know now how I fear to remain in this house, and—and if anything happens to me"—her voice broke for a moment—"they will see that justice is done."

"Ethel!"

"I believe my life is not safe here!" cried Ethel. "Why have I been put in the Red Room? Your uncle died in that room, and your first wife. Why have I been put there?"

His face worked with fury. The kindness was gone now; it had dropped away like a mask, as it was.

"So you know that old story!" he exclaimed. "You have been spying—inquiring—eh? You shall learn better, my dear. Go to your room."

"To the room in the turret?"

"Yes."

Ethel clenched her hands.

"I will not go there," she cried; "I will not enter the turret-room again! I will not go there—I will not!"

"Girl!"—he strode towards her, and grasped her wrist so tightly that she cried out with pain—"come with me!"

"I will not—I will not!"

"Will you make me drag you by force?" shouted the doctor.

He drew her to the stair that led to the turret. Ethel followed; her strength was nothing to his, and she could not resist. The stair led out upon a flat, leaded roof, from which a door opened into the square, black turret.

The doctor threw the door open.

"Enter!" he said.

Ethel shrank into the room. The man stood in the doorway, regarding her with eyes that gleamed and glistened.

The room did not look terrifying. The afternoon sun streamed in at the broad window opposite the door—the window that opened on a sheer wall of a hundred feet. Excepting for the window and the door, there was no means of egress from the room, unless by the wide, old-fashioned stone chimney. The sun gleamed upon the red painted woodwork, upon the old oak furniture, upon the wide hearth, and the brass fender. The room looked comfortable enough. But in that room two inmates had died mysteriously—in that room, a sound had been heard that foretold a death to come—in that room, suspicion and horror lurked in every shadow.

The girl stood trembling in the centre of the room. Dr. Gadsby looked at her from the doorway, and his hands slowly unclenched, his face relaxed. The old kind expression came back; Ethel could watch the effort by which he restored it.

"Ethel, my dear, you should not anger me," he said. He glanced at her wrist; it was black with bruises where his savage grasp had compressed it. "I don't want to be cruel to you, Ethel. But you compel me to assert my authority."

"You are cruel," panted Ethel—"you are cruel to the animals you torture—you are cruel to your wife—you have a hard, wicked heart!"

"You had better remain alone," he said harshly. "To-morrow, Ethel, or the day after, you will see me no more, so be satisfied."

He drew back, closing the door after him.

Ethel was alone.

Alone in the turret-room—the Red Room! And the doctor's last words rang strangely in her ears. To-morrow—or the next day—she would see him no more! Did that mean that she was to be sent away, or— A cry broke from her as she realised what a fearful significance his words might have. The unhappy girl threw herself upon the bed and sobbed with sheer terror.

CHAPTER 6. Poor Old Figgy.

FIGGY, old man, cheer up!"

It was Kerr who spoke.

Figgins was walking to and fro in the old quad, under the trees, his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets. Kerr and Wynn were with him. They had been doing their best to cheer Figgy up, but without result. Figgy seemed determined to have the blues, and the very deepest dye of them.

"Cheer up, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn dismally.

Fatty's Wynn's plump face usually quite sunny and cheerful, was overcast now; he felt his chum's distress very keenly. Fatty Wynn had a sympathetic nature, capable of sacrifices. He was sticking to Figgins now Figgins was so very much down in the mouth, though the spirit within him was crying for the tuckshop. Fatty Wynn was hungry, but he paced to and fro with Figgins under the elms, and said not a word of it.

Figgins groaned.

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"I can't cheer up," he said. "I'm thinking of Ethel. She's in danger! Oh!"

"But it's all right for the present," said Kerr.

"You must have something to eat, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn distressfully. "You didn't eat anything at tea. I had hardly anything myself—only some ham and eggs, and a few tomatoes, and some potatoes and bacon, and a cucumber, and the pork-pies and a few sausages. I was feeling too upset to eat much."

"Better keep your pecker up, you know, Figgy," said Kerr. "If we have to do anything for Cousin Ethel, it's no use getting out of condition. You'll have to be fit."

Figgins stopped in his weary pacing.

"Can't we do anything?" he exclaimed.

"What can we do, Figgy?"

"Can't we raid the Black House, or something?" Figgins exclaimed desperately. "Tom Merry and Blake, and the rest of them would join us—we could raid the place, and— and carry off Cousin Ethel, and— and hide her somewhere in safety."

Kerr shook his head sadly.

"It can't be done, Figgy—you know it can't! If we tried anything of the sort, it would only lead to the police being called in, and we should be arrested, and most likely expelled from the school. That would worry Cousin Ethel, too. It's no good going in for heroics, old chap."

"Why can't you think of something?" demanded Figgins wrathfully. "You're a blessed Scotchman—you ought to be able to think of things."

"Well, I've thought of the dodge for Cousin Ethel to let us know if she's in danger," said Kerr. "We can't do anything else yet."

"I—I know we can't, Kerr. I'm an unreasonable beast," groaned Figgins. "But you, don't know how I feel about it."

"Yes I do, old chap—we all know it, and Ethel knows it," said Kerr. "She thinks more of you than of any other fellow at St. Jim's."

Figgins's face brightened for a moment.

"Do you really think so, Kerr?"

"I know it."

The cloud descended upon Figgins's face again.

"But I can't help her!" he groaned. "I knew she's in danger, and I can't help her. I feel inclined to thump my head against the wall."

"No good doing that! Hallo, here's Tom Merry."

Tom Merry was looking very grave as he came up with Manners and Lowther, and Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. All of them, in fact, were looking very serious. A weight was upon the minds of all the juniors who knew Cousin Ethel's peril.

"Not heard anything, of course?" asked Tom Merry.

"No."

"We're all feeling rotten," said Tom Merry. "Gussy has been proposing to raid the Black House."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So has Figgy," said Kerr. "But it can't be done. We must wait."

"But what might happen to-night?" muttered Figgins huskily.

The juniors were silent, every face was dark. A bell rang, and they parted to go into their Houses.

Figgins & Co. tramped up to their study. Figgins threw himself into a chair, and stretched out his long legs, and stared gloomily at the wall.

"You ought to get on with your prep, Figgy," said Kerr gently.

"Hang the prep."

"What about the thousand lines old Ratty gave you?"

"Hang the lines!"

"But to-morrow Ratty will—"

"Hang Ratty!"

Kerr gave it up. He ploughed through his prep, and Fatty Wynn did the same, while Figgins remained staring at the wall, the picture of gloomy misery.

"You fellows had better let me alone," he exclaimed at last. "I shall give you all the blues. I can't help it."

"We'll stick to you all the same," said Kerr. "Look here, you will have to show up some of those lines to-morrow."

"Blow the lines!"

"I'll begin them, then," said Kerr. "I can turn out a fist just like yours, when I try. No good having old Ratty down on you, in addition to your other troubles."

"You're a good chap, Kerr."

Kerr was a rapid writer. He had turned out four hundred of the lines by bed-time, working steadily away, and never saying a word. Fatty Wynn ate doughnuts and cake, but he considerably kept his back towards Figgins as he did so. He felt that perhaps he might not be expected to feel hungry in a time of distress; but unfortunately there never had been any occurrence in Fatty Wynn's life that affected his

appetite. Even a funeral did not diminish it—indeed, Monty Lowther had declared that nothing short of Fatty Wynn's own funeral would ever make a difference in that respect.

Figgins rose heavily at last when it was time to go to bed. He went up to the Fourth-Form dormitory with the rest, with a heavy heart and a slow step.

He did not speak a word while he was undressing. Figgins was generally cheery and chatty, and the difference in him excited great attention in the New House portion of the Fourth Form. But to all inquiries Figgins replied only with a grunt, and the juniors gave it up at last.

"You'll try to get to sleep, Figgy," said Kerr, as Figgins turned in.

"I'll try," said Figgins.

He did try, but without much success. Monteith turned the lights out for the Fourth, and the juniors were left in darkness. One by one they dropped off to sleep, but Figgins remained with staring eyes.

He could not sleep.

Once he closed his eyes, and dozed for a few minutes—and in that few minutes a fearful dream was crowded, and he woke up in a cold sweat. In his disturbed fancy he had seen Cousin Ethel surrounded by poisonous reptiles and strange beasts, in the Black House on the moor, and the glittering eyes of the doctor looked out upon her from sombre shadows.

Figgins started up in bed as he awoke.

His cry awoke Kerr, who was a light sleeper. Kerr sat up quickly in bed.

"Is that you, Figgy?" he called out.

"Eh? What?" muttered Figgins.

"Did you call out?"

"I—I think I did."

"What's the matter?"

"Only a dream."

Kerr lay down again.

"Oh, go to sleep again, old son! Repeat the multiplication table till it sends you off."

Figgins laid down his head upon the pillow, but he did not try to sleep again. Waking was bad enough, but sleep was worse. At least, while he was awake, he had only his troubling thoughts and not the horrid visions of sleep.

But the darkness of the dormitory was peopled with horrors for the disturbed and unhappy junior.

He heard the clock strike, and strike again, hour after hour. The terrified face of Cousin Ethel was always before his eyes, and he fancied that he could hear her voice, raised in terror, and calling for help. In the rustle of the branches outside the dormitory window, he fancied he heard the strange whisper which was the warning in the turret-room of the Black House.

It became intolerable at last, and Figgins rose from his bed and tramped up and down the dormitory in his pyjamas. Pratt woke up.

"Toothache, old man?" he queried sympathetically.

"No!" grunted Figgins.

"What's the matter, then?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Pratt yawned, and went to sleep again. Figgins tramped up and down. Midnight rang out from the clock tower, and he threw himself upon his bed again.

Midnight!

It was midnight, too, in the turret-room at the Black House—and what might be happening there?

Figgins buried his face in the pillow, and sobbed. Figgins was not the crying kind of fellow; it was many years since his eyes had been wet with tears. But wet they were now, and his pillow was wet. Figgins, the big, rugged, clumsy Figgins, was crying like a girl.

CHAPTER 7.

The Horror of the Night.

MIDNIGHT!

The hour that was full of anguish to the wakeful junior at St. Jim's, was fraught with fear to the girl who watched alone in the turret-room of the Black House.

Ethel was not sleeping.

She had retired to her room at the usual hour, but she did not go there to sleep. She was weary, but the greatest fatigue would not have induced her to close her eyes in the Red Room.

She had not gone to bed. The sense of danger had sharpened the girl's faculties. While an occupant of the Red Room, she had not slept in the bed, but on a couch near the window, but she was careful to disturb the bed so that old Martha, in the morning, would not know that it had not been slept in. Ethel was lying on the couch now, in the deep gloom, wide awake, and fully dressed, all her nerves tense.

She was listening.

Her door was fastened on the inside, and could not be

opened from the leads without. Her window gave upon a sheer wall. She had long ago examined the chimney, and was satisfied that she was safe there. The chimney was quite wide enough to allow anyone to pass, but there were iron bars crossed inside it to prevent passage. No one could enter the room. Yet she feared!

The walls were of solid stone, where they were not wood, and there could be no secret panel. And many times she had examined the walls, and there was no trace of a secret opening. But in other parts of the old, rambling house she knew that there were secret passages and hidden doors, and there might be one in the turret-room. But even enclosed by solid walls, she feared the cleverness of the man she doubted—she feared that his cunning—almost the cunning of a madman—would overcome any obstacle that stood in his way.

That he would have killed her, or anyone who was an obstacle to him, as easily as he killed the unhappy victims in his laboratory, she felt assured. All that restrained him was fear of the law—of public knowledge of his crime.

For that reason, if she perished, it was to be by some subtle means that would defy detection—as the others had perished in the turret-room.

The girl was awake and listening.

When the wind rustled the thick ivy that grew over the turret walls, she shuddered, seeming to hear in it the mysterious whisper she dreaded.

Suddenly she started.

A faint sound had come to her ears—a sound she could not define; but it was a sound, barely audible in the silence of the night.

What was it?

Ethel sat up in the darkness on the couch, her limbs quivering, her eyes staring into the gloom, her heart beating with great thumps.

It was danger!

She knew it—she was certain of it! Danger—terrible danger in the lone darkness of the night! But what was it, and whence?

She put her hand over her mouth to keep back the shriek of horror that rose to her lips.

She would not betray herself—betray the fact that she was awake, and that she was not in the bed.

The assassin must not know that she was on her guard.

What was that sound from the stillness?

Ethel's heart beat almost to suffocation. From the silence came a soft, low sound—a sound like a sibilant whisper.

She shuddered, and an icy chill passed through her limbs.

It had come at last!

It came, she thought, from the direction of the chimney. A low, strange, lulling sound, a sound as of a soft whisper with no words—only a whisper.

A soft, hisping, wordless whisper.

"Oh, Heaven!" the girl murmured. "Oh, Heaven have mercy on me!"

Whisper—whisper!

What was it?

She sat thrilling with terror, never moving from the couch. The strange sound was audible almost continuously now—the strange, hissing, whispering sound.

It was approaching the bed.

As she sat chained down with horror she realised that. The sound was moving closer to the bed—the bed in which she was supposed to lie asleep.

If she had been in that bed—if she had been asleep—

She knew that she would never have awakened again. What the horror was she did not know, but she knew that.

She sat dumb with terror.

Silence now! But there was a motion on the bed—a sound as of something passing softly over the pillow.

What was it?

Ethel could bear it no longer. She sprang to her feet with a wild, ringing shriek that echoed through the turret-room.

Shriek upon shriek.

Whether there was any further sound she did not know. She shrieked in wild, mortal terror till the turret rang again.

Knock!

It was a sharp tap at the door of her chamber from the leads outside. Then a harsh, angry voice was heard.

"Ethel!"

It was Dr. Gadsby's voice.

The girl ceased to cry out. She stood trembling in the darkness, shaking in every limb.

"Ethel—Ethel! What is the matter?"

She could not answer.

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 185.

A New Tale of Tom Merry & Co., Jack Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT THURSDAY: "THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S!"

"Open the door, Ethel! What were you crying out for?"

"I—I was frightened!" stammered the girl at last.

"What were you frightened for?"

His voice came harshly and strangely through the thickness of the oaken door. Ethel remembered with thankfulness how she had locked it and barred it. He could not enter.

"I—I thought I heard something, uncle."

"Nonsense! Open the door!"

She shivered.

"Open the door, Ethel!"

"I cannot."

"What do you mean, you cannot? Open the door at once!"

"I will not!" shrieked Ethel. "I am afraid—afraid! You want to murder me! I will not open the door!"

"Fool!" shouted the doctor. "Are you mad? Open the door! I command you to open the door!"

"I will not—I will not!"

A savage hand struck on the door. He knocked again and again, and again he commanded the girl to open. But Ethel did not stir.

"Ethel, you will be sorry for this!" said the doctor savagely. "I will punish you for your disobedience! Open the door!"

"I will not!"

"What are you afraid of?"

"I am afraid of you."

"Fool! Do you think that I would do you an injury?"

"Yes—yes—yes!" shrieked the girl.

"Fool! I will speak to you about this in the morning, Ethel! You shall not disobey me, child."

She heard his footsteps receding over the leads.

Silence!

The hissing, whispering sound was still—she knew that she was alone in the room now. Whatever had been in the room with her now was gone.

What had it been?

Nothing human, she knew that. But what—what was the horror that had penetrated the closed and barred room.

Ethel fell upon her knees and clasped her hands and prayed. She was still upon her knees when the light of dawn crept in at the curtained window of the turret-room.

CHAPTER 8.

The Warning Word.

ETHEL looked white and weary when she came down in the morning.

She was very late that morning. After dawn she had slept on the couch for some hours. After that she had searched through the room in the daylight, but nowhere in the thick walls had she discovered any trace of an opening. Yet that something had entered her room during the hours of darkness she knew.

Dr. Gadsby was out, as he usually was in the morning. But the great bloodhound was in the grounds, and when Ethel looked out of the door the animal bounded into view. He looked at her, and showed his great teeth, and the girl, shuddering, drew back into the house.

Old Martha served her breakfast, looking at the girl with strange eyes. Ethel ate nothing, and drank her tea in gulps. She was utterly unnerved by the terrible experience of the night.

"Martha," she said—"Martha!"

The old woman looked at her, and put her hand to her ear.

"Yes, deary," she said, in her cracked voice. "Speak louder."

"I want to send a letter or a telegram, Martha."

Martha shook her head.

"The doctor has forbidden it, deary."

"But—but couldn't you help me, Martha?" pleaded Ethel.

"Help me, deary—"

A harsh voice broke in from the doorway.

"So you are trying to induce Martha to disobey her master, Ethel?"

It was Dr. Gadsby. He had returned, and he was standing in the doorway looking at Ethel with angry, glittering eyes. The doctor, too, had a worn look.

Old Martha shrank from his gaze, and hobbled out of the room. Ethel tried to control her emotion as she met her uncle's eyes.

"Yes, uncle, I want to send a telegram," she said.

Dr. Gadsby laughed unpleasantly.

"You will do nothing of the sort, Ethel. I do not intend to allow you to spread malignant reports about me."

"But—but, uncle, this—this message is—is about a picnic," said Ethel. "If I do not send it they will come here for me."

The doctor started.

"Who will come here?" he exclaimed.

"Figgins and the others."

"Ah!"

"Let me send them a message," said Ethel. "I promised to do so. You shall read the message before it goes."

The doctor hesitated.

"If they came here they would not be admitted," he said; "but I do not want any public disturbance at my house, and that boy Figgins was a most insolent young scoundrel. What message do you want to send? Write it down, and I will read it, and if I approve of it, it shall go."

"Very well, uncle."

Ethel sat down at a writing-table and took up a pen. The doctor watched her with burning eyes as she wrote.

"Figgins, New House, St. Jim's.—I am sorry I cannot come to the picnic to-day.—ETHEL."

"That is the telegram, uncle."

Dr. Gadsby took it and read it, and his face cleared. His gaze was bent searchingly upon the girl.

"Is that all, Ethel?"

"That is all, uncle."

"That is what you intended to send by Martha?"

"Yes."

"Very well," said the doctor. "You shall not send a telegram; you shall write a letter, and you shall write it as I dictate. The letter can be posted in Wayland immediately, and will be delivered at the school by four o'clock, before afternoon lessons are over, and so it will reach Figgins in time."

"Very well, uncle," said Ethel submissively.

"Take up your pen."

She obeyed.

"Now write:

"Dear Figgins— I suppose you call him dear Figgins?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Very well. Dear Figgins,—I am sorry I cannot come to the picnic to-day."

Ethel's heart leaped. He had allowed her to use the code-word—he suspected nothing. She wrote down the sentence feverishly.

"I am sorry, too, that I came to St. Jim's yesterday. I was feeling very nervous and upset, owing to having received a letter from my mother, who is not well, and I was not at all myself."

"Uncle!"

"Write!" thundered the doctor.

"But it is not true!"

"Write!"

"Uncle—"

He strode towards her. The expression upon his parchment face was terrible, and the girl shrank back in her chair with a wild cry.

"Uncle—uncle! Don't!"

"Write as I dictate! Will you obey me or not?" he shouted.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes, uncle!"

"Then write every word I have dictated to you."

Her pen scratched over the paper. Her hand was trembling so violently that the words were scarcely decipherable.

"Good!" said the doctor. "Now go on:

"You must not take any notice of what I said—it was only because I was feeling upset and hysterical. I am going to Eastbourne to-morrow, and so I cannot come to the picnic, because I have to pack."

"Now sign it," said the doctor.

Ethel signed it.

Dr. Gadsby took up the letter and read it. His face had cleared again; he smiled in the old benevolent way.

"That is right," he said. "That's my own dear niece. Now, Ethel, make a better copy of this—your hand was trembling."

"Very well, uncle."

She wrote out the letter more firmly. The doctor folded it, and placed it in an envelope, and sealed it.

"Address it," he said.

Ethel obeyed. The doctor blotted the letter, and placed it in his pocket. Then his eyes glittered as they turned upon her.

"Now, this will undo the impression you made upon those foolish boys yesterday," he said. "And the letter will remain, to prove that you did not mean a word of what you said to them. I will post this letter in Wayland at once."

He strode away. Ethel watched him from the window. The gate clanged behind him; the great bloodhound prowled in the bushes of the wild garden.

Ethel clasped her hands; her heart was beating.

"He will post it. He thinks to blind them, but he is warning them of my danger with his own hands. They will understand; they will save me if they can!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 135.

READ the Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of School Life, entitled: **"THE SLACKER!"** in this week's issue of the **"MAGNET" LIBRARY,** Now on Sale. Price One Penny.



The juniors turned out to the task. They dragged on the ropes, and the Slacker clutched and clung desperately to his bed. But it was useless. He was jerked out of the bed, and rolled on the floor in his bedclothes. "Ow! You asses—you fatheads!" he roared. "Oh, stop it!"

(An amusing incident from the grand, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "THE SLACKER," by Frank Richards, contained in this week's number of "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

CHAPTER 9.

Danger!

"FIGGINS!"

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, fixed his eyes upon Figgins.

The Fourth Form were at afternoon lessons. All day Figgins had been most trying to his Form-master, and Mr. Lathom's patience had given way at last.

Figgins came out of a brown study.

"Yes, sir?" he stammered.

"What is the matter with you, Figgins?"

"N-n-nothing, sir."

"Are you ill?"

"N-no, sir."

"Then why do you not pay attention to your lessons?" demanded the Fourth Form-master sharply. "All day you have been making mistakes. You have just told me that General Wolsley commanded at the Battle of Hastings, and that Shakespeare lived in the reign of Pharaoh. Pray what is your authority for those statements?"

Some of the Fourth giggled. Certainly Figgins had been very unreliable in every branch of knowledge that day; but his answers in history had really passed the limit.

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir," stammered Figgins. "I—I—"

"If there is anything the matter with you, Figgins, I will excuse you," said Mr. Lathom. "You are usually an attentive pupil."

"I—I—I feel rather rotten to-day, sir."

"Oh, very well; I shall pass you over for the rest of the lesson," said Mr. Lathom. "You certainly do not seem yourself."

Figgins sat silent till the Fourth Form were dismissed. When the signal was given to dismiss, he still sat in his place, till Kerr shook him by the shoulder, and then he started.

"Come on, Figgy!" whispered Kerr.

"Oh, all right!"

The Fourth Form filed out. In the passage Fatty Wynn laid an affectionate hand on Figgins's broad shoulder.

"Now, Figgy old man, do come and have something to eat!" he said. "You had no brekker, and hardly a mouthful at dinner."

"I'm not hungry."

"But you must be," said Fatty Wynn, in distress. "You'll be ill if you don't eat, you know. It's awful to miss a meal. Eating enough is a duty a chap owes to himself, you know. Do come over to Dame Taggles's!"

"I can't!"

"Shut up, Fatty!" said Kerr. "Let him alone. You buzz off and feed."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 185.

NEXT THURSDAY. "THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S!"

A New Tale of Tom Merry & Co. Jack Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"I—I wasn't thinking of myself," said Fatty Wynn. "Goodness knows I feel as cut up about Ethel as anybody! But it's a duty to eat; we owe it to ourselves. Besides, if we have to do anything, it's best to lay a solid foundation."

"Oh, buzz off!" said Figgins.

"Well, if you don't mind, I'll go and have a snack."

And Fatty Wynn went, and his snack occupied him quite a long time. Figgins went slowly down the passage with Kerr, his hands in his pockets. Blake and D'Arcy and Tom Merry joined him.

"There may be a telegram," Kerr suggested.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's look!" said Tom Merry.

There was no telegram, but there was a letter in the rack for Figgins, in the hall of the New House. It was in Cousin Ethel's handwriting.

Figgins jumped as he saw it.

"From Ethel!" he exclaimed.

"Good!"

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins clutched down the letter, and the chums of St. Jim's hurried to a quiet corner in the quad, where they could read it undisturbed. Figgins sat down on an old bench under a leafy tree. His fingers trembled as he tore open the envelope.

The other fellows gathered round him, reading over his shoulder. The letter from Cousin Ethel, under the circumstances, of course was common property among the juniors who were in the secret.

They all read it together.

"Dear Figgins,—I am sorry I cannot come to the picnic to-day. I am sorry, too, that I came to St. Jim's yesterday. I was feeling very nervous and upset, owing to having received a letter from my mother, who is not well, and I was not at all myself. You must not take any notice of what I said—it was only because I was feeling upset and hysterical. I am going to Eastbourne to-morrow, and so I cannot come to the picnic because I have to pack."

"ETHEL."

Figgins stared blankly at the letter.

Kerr smiled grimly.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a perplexed look. "That's vevy queeah. Ethel seems to have got ovah her fwight, you know."

"I couldn't help thinking that perhaps she was a bit hard on the old man," remarked Jack Blake.

"He was always vevy kind to me."

"I can't understand it!" burst out Figgins. "Ethel uses the code word; she must intend it for that, as we arranged. The letter hasn't any sense otherwise, as we had not really arranged for any picnic."

"Bai Jove, that's wight enough!"

"It's clear enough," said Kerr, in his quiet tones.

"Blessed if I can see it!" said Tom Merry. "Make it clear to us, Kerr."

"Well, we know that Ethel isn't allowed to write letters, and so this letter must have passed through the doctor's hands, and he wouldn't have allowed it to be posted unless he chose."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ethel had to word it in a way not to excite his suspicions. And he took advantage of the fact that she wanted to write to us—about a picnic, as he supposed—to force her to write a letter unsaying all that she said yesterday. Don't you see, it's a trick; he has forced her to write this."

"The hound!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, it's clear enough now."

"But he knows nothing about the code we arranged, and he has allowed her to leave in the word which means danger."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins rose to his feet, the perspiration clotting on his forehead. He was white as chalk.

"You remember what the arrangement was?" he said. "If Ethel heard that sound in her room—the sound the others heard before they died—she was to use the word 'picnic.'"

"That's right!" said Tom Merry.

"And here's the word," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ethel has heard the whispering in the room," said Kerr quietly. "That's what that letter means. All the rest of it was dictated by Dr. Gadsby."

"Oh, the villain!"

"She's heard it!" muttered Figgins wildly.

"We've got to save her!" said Tom Merry.

Figgins groaned.

"But how?"

"We've got to do it!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

"We promised her that if we were warned we'd rescue her, and we'll do it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

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READ the Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of School Life, entitled: **"THE SLACKER!"** In this week's Issue of the **"MAGNET" LIBRARY,** Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"She heard the sound in the room last night," said Kerr. "Each of the others died the next night after hearing it."

"It's howwible!"

"Cousin Ethel is alive and well now, or she couldn't have written that letter," said Kerr. "The danger won't come near her till to-night, when she goes to the Red Room to sleep. Keep cool, Figgys."

Figgins's hands were working, as if he were longing to have them upon the doctor. Perhaps he was.

"Ethel goes to bed at half-past nine, I believe," went on Kerr, in his calm and calculating way. "But if she is to be harmed, it won't be till later—till she's had ample time to go to sleep. That's pretty certain. Now, we go to bed at half-past nine here, and my idea is that we should bunk immediately after lights out. We can get to the Black House by ten o'clock if we buck up."

"Good!"

"But when we get there?" said Tom Merry.

"We've got to save Ethel," said Figgins. "If necessary, we'll take her away by force, and hide her, and defy that fiend."

"Yaas, wathah! Bettah than leavin' her to be killed, even if we all get sacked from the school ovah the bizney."

"I've got a better wheeze than that, if you fellows care to hear it," said Kerr, in his modest way.

"Go ahead, Kerr, old man!"

"My idea is to get into the Black House secretly, and get into Ethel's room—one or two of us—and keep watch. If the sound is heard again, we turn on a light suddenly, and find out what it is. That is the way to catch the doctor at his tricks, and show him up as an intended murderer."

Figgins clapped Kerr on the shoulder.

"Of course," he said; "that's it."

"The only way we can save Ethel is by showing her uncle up, and making it clear that he means her harm," said Kerr quietly. "And that seems to me to be the only way to do it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It will be a difficult biznay getting into the house," Blake remarked.

"We shall have to do it."

"There's the bloodhound."

Kerr nodded.

"If he's loose, of course it will make the business difficult. But we shall have to go prepared for that. I take it that we're not afraid of the danger, anyway?"

"Not much, Kerr!"

"No feah!"

"If we have to deal with the dog, we must go prepared," said Kerr. "I think we shall be ready for the bloodhound."

"Good!"

"Then we shall have to get into Ethel's room without giving the alarm. Luckily, the old villain has put her at a distance from the other rooms for his own reasons—in the turret. You fellows have seen the Black House; there's a flat roof outside the door of the Red Room in the turret. We might be able to climb up the ivy."

"We'll try," said Figgins.

"We shall see better when we're on the spot," said Kerr. "I think the five of us should go—we shall be quite enough, and it's no good letting others into the secret. We don't want the slightest danger of talk about it; we should jolly soon be prevented from going if the prefects got a hint on the subject."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then it's settled," said Kerr. "I'll get the stuff ready for the bloodhound, in case we need it—and we're all to get out of bed and be at the gates as quickly as possible after lights out."

"It's settled."

"Better take a cricket-stump apiece," said Blake. "We may need them. The dog may cut up rusty—or the doctor. And I think I should enjoy getting in a good whack at Dr. Gadsby with a cricket-stump."

"Yaas, wathah! I would give a whole term's pocket money to give the fearful wascal a thwashin'."

"He'll get worse than a thrashing—he'll get prison, and perhaps something more, if we show him up," said Kerr.

"When we bowl him out in this case, the police will get on the scent of the other cases, and he may have those to answer for." D'Arcy looked troubled.

"Bai Jove! It will be a howwible disgwate to the family," he said. "It will be in all the wotten papahs!"

"I'm afraid we can't think about that now, Gussy!"

"Wathah not; but it will be howwid all the same."

Figgins put the letter in his pocket.

"It's settled," he said. "We're going to save Ethel—and if I can't do the thing any other way, I'll brain that old scoundrel with a cricket-stump. He deserves it, anyway, for tormenting animals as he does. It makes me sick to think of him—and Ethel being in his power! It's horrible!"

"We are going to save her," said Kerr.

CHAPTER 10.

The Night.

THE dusk of evening was stealing over the wide expanse of Wayland Moor, and the Black House on the moor grew blacker. From the windows the sun was reflected in a glint of gold, but it died away, and shadow enveloped the old house. As the sombre night closed in upon the house, so it seemed to close in upon Ethel. That she had succeeded in communicating with the chums of St. Jim's—that she had warned Figgins & Co. of her peril—was knowledge that had borne her up during the day. But when night closed in upon the Black House, her terrors revived.

Darkness was upon the moor—from the windows could be seen the distant twinkling lights of Wayland, far off; the only sign of light in the blackness and loneliness. In the wild, unkept gardens of the Black House, the bloodhound was roaming loose. Within the lonely house, Dr. Gadsby was shut up in his laboratory, from which he had not emerged for hours. Ethel had tried to read, but the effort was a failure. She could not fix her attention upon her book. The hours passed on leaden wings to her. That the chums of St. Jim's had received her message was certain; but would they understand—would they act upon it? That part of the letter, which Dr. Gadsby had dictated for the purpose of deceiving them, would it have that effect? It was possible. But even if they understood; if they tried to help her—could they? What could they do? St. Jim's lay far away beyond the wood. Ethel was immured within the walls of the Black House, at the mercy of the grim and unscrupulous man whom she suspected of being half mad.

Bedtime had come, but Ethel did not go to bed. She dreaded the Red Room—she dreaded the solitude of the turret. She remained with her book, by the reading-lamp in the dreary, great room below, till Dr. Gadsby came out of his laboratory. The doctor came into the room, rubbing his hands together, with a satisfied smile upon his face. His experiments had evidently gone to his satisfaction.

Two or three letters lay upon his desk; one a large, legal-looking envelope. The doctor picked that up first, with a scowl replacing the smile upon his face, and looked at it, and opened it. He did not notice the girl sitting quietly in her corner. A muttered word escaped his lips as he read the paper.

"One thousand pounds—and fifty guineas costs!" he muttered. "H'm! An execution in seven days—h'm! Hang them! Cannot they wait a little?"

Ethel could not help hearing what he said, and she shuddered. She knew that Dr. Gadsby was being hard pressed by creditors, and had been so for months past, and that he was in sore need of money. He had had more than one fortune to spend, and it had flowed away like water in his toxicological researches. She made a slight movement, and the old man swung round towards her.

"Ethel! You there!"

His voice was hard and rasping.

"Yes, uncle!" said the girl, in a trembling voice.

"Why are you not gone to bed?" the doctor exclaimed harshly. "You should have gone. It is nearly ten o'clock."

"I—I—"

"Go at once!"

The girl rose to her feet. Her face was deadly white, and she was trembling. Her look might have melted a heart of stone; but it had no effect upon the man before her. His eyes were gleaming with anger.

"Go to bed at once!" he repeated. "Good-night, Ethel!"

"Good-night, uncle!"

She moved slowly out of the room. The doctor followed her. Ethel ascended the stair to the upper leads. She passed out into the open air under the stars; it was necessary to pass over the open leads to reach the door of the room in the turret. Outside the door of the room, she paused. She looked round in the gloom: the ivy, thick upon the old walls of the Black House, was rustling in the breeze.

The girl's whole nature recoiled from the room before her—the room of death! She could not enter it.

"Are you gone, Ethel?"

It was the doctor's voice from the head of the stair. Ethel shivered.

"I am here, uncle!"

"Why do you not go into your room?"

"Oh, uncle!" She turned back towards him. "Uncle! I am afraid—I am afraid! Uncle! Don't send me in there!"

He came towards her, his fingers working with anger. His eyes gleamed at her in the gloom, like the eyes of a cat.

"Go in!" he said angrily. "Go in! What are you afraid of?"

"I cannot go in, uncle! Don't—don't send me in there!" Ethel cried, the tears running down her cheeks. "How can you wish to do me harm! Take the money—I don't care for that. I will sign anything you like. I don't care; only—only don't do what you know you are planning to do!"

The doctor stood petrified for a moment.

"Ethel! So my wife has been talking to you—I know it now. The money! You know about that, too! I—I—Bah! Why do I waste words upon you? Go into your room at once, or I will fling you there! Do you hear me?"

Ethel, sobbing, ran into the room. The doctor drew the door shut behind her, and she heard him fasten it upon the outside.

She was a prisoner—a prisoner in the room of death.

She lighted her candle.

The glimmering light fell upon the old walls of the Red Room—upon the old curtain at the windows, the glimmering casement with drawn blinds.

The room seemed full of shadow and sombre mystery to the terrified girl. She took the candle in her hand, and moved about the room, examining the walls, the floor, the old chimney.

It seemed impossible that anything living could enter.

Yet the room had been entered the previous night by something—something horrible—something that meant death if it had reached her.

Ethel gave a sudden start as she came near the window. The couch had been removed. It was no longer in the room. Had the doctor guessed that she slept there instead of upon the bed—or had he merely suspected it? The couch was gone.

Ethel's lips set.

She extinguished the candle.

But she did not go near the bed. She sat in a chair near the window and waited. It was to be another night of terror and sleepless vigil—was it to be a night of doom?

CHAPTER 11.

Out of Bounds.

TOM MERRY half undressed himself when he went to bed that night. The fact did not escape the notice of his chums, and they asked questions. But even to Monty Lowther and Manners, Tom Merry had not explained. The matter was so terribly serious that it was best not to breathe a word to anyone. He turned in, leaving his clothes ready, and concealing his boots under the bed, along with the cricket-stump he intended to take with him.

"What's the little game, Tommy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I'll tell you to-morrow, Monty."

"Rats! Why can't you tell me now?" demanded Monty Lowther rather wrathfully. "I suppose it's something to do with Ethel's visit here yesterday."

"Well, yes."

"Then explain, you bounder!"

"I'd rather not, Monty—and we've agreed to tell no one. Figgins is keeping it dark, and so is Blake, and so must I."

"Like your cheek!" said Manners. "You're going out after lights, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And you want to keep it dark?"

"Yes."

"Keep it dark, then, and be blowed!" yawned Manners.

"I'm going to sleep."

Kildare saw lights out in the Shell dormitory. After he was gone, Tom Merry slipped out of bed, and put on his clothes and his boots again. Several inquiries were fired at him from the other beds, but he answered none of them.

"Blessed if this doesn't look rather shady to me!" said Crooke, of the Shell. "Looks to me as if Tom Merry is going on the razzle. Is it the Green Man this evening?"

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I don't follow on, and see what you're up to," said Crooke.

"You jolly well won't!" said Monty Lowther.

"Who'll stop me?" demanded Crooke fiercely.

"I will!"

"Of course I shouldn't take the trouble," said Crooke, with a yawn. "It doesn't matter to me. Tom Merry can go to the Green Man, or to Jericho, for all I care!"

Tom Merry quitted the Shell dormitory. He knew that he could rely upon his chums to stop any fellow like Crooke who was inclined to play the spy upon him. He closed the door softly, and stepped away on tiptoe towards the Fourth Form dormitory. Two figures were waiting for him in the dim passage.

"That you, Tom Merry?" It was Blake's voice.

"Yes, I'm here."

"Good!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I trust you have not forgotten the cwicket-stump, Tom Mewwy!"

"No; I have it here. Let's get out!"

"Wight-ho!"

The juniors quitted the School House by the lower box-room window. They dropped to the ground, and, keeping close in the shadow of the House, made their way to the

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school gates. Three juniors were waiting for them there; Figgins & Co. were already at the rendezvous. Figgins carried a lantern, and Kerr had three cricket-stumps under his arm, and Fatty Wynn had a parcel tied with string.

"What have you got there?" asked Tom Merry, looking at it.

"Sandwiches," whispered Fatty Wynn. "You never know what may happen, you know—and it's just as well to be prepared for anything. No good spoiling a good job through getting hungry, is it?"

"You ass!"

"Look here, you know——"

"Shut up," said Figgins. "Come on!"

The six juniors climbed the slanting oak in turn, and dropped on the outside of the school wall. Fatty Wynn was the last. He peered down anxiously at the juniors in the road as he prepared to drop.

"Catch my parcel, Kerr!" he said.

"Oh, all right!"

Fatty Wynn slung down the parcel, and Kerr missed it in the dark, and it fell into the road, and rolled to the foot of the wall. Fatty Wynn dropped from the wall, and there was a squelch as he alighted, and he rolled over with a gasp.

"Ow! You asses! What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I fell on something."

Kerr chuckled softly.

"I think it must have been your parcel."

"What!" howled Fatty Wynn. "Oh, you fathead!"

He was on his knees in a moment, groping for his parcel. He found it, and uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Ow! It's smashed! You chump!"

"Never mind. It doesn't hurt sandwiches to be squashed," said Blake. "You can eat them, all the same, you know. They'll only be a little mixed."

"B-b-but there were hard-boiled eggs in it, too, and some jam-tarts, and a jelly," groaned Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it will make a specially good mixture, then," said Blake. "You can't stop to sort 'em out now. Come on!"

"Look here——"

"Come on, Fatty!" said Figgins quietly.

"Oh, all right!"

And Fatty Wynn, reluctantly abandoning his squashed and burst parcel, tramped down the road with the other juniors.

The night was dark, only a few stars gleaming in the heavens. The tall, thick trees cast heavy shadows over the road. The juniors turned into the footpath through Rylcombe Wood, and came out on the other side in the Wayland Road, and tramped on towards the moor.

It was a good distance. Ten o'clock had rung out from Rylcombe Church as they went into the wood, and half-past ten chimed from Wayland as they reached the broad expanse of the moor.

Black and grim the moor lay stretched before them.

A rugged footpath led through the shadowy gorse in the direction of the Black House. Of the house nothing was to be seen. In the daytime it could be seen from the road, the top of the turret rising to view in the distance; but now it was swallowed up in the darkness.

The juniors paused on the footpath.

"You know the way best, Tom Merry," said Blake.

"Follow me!"

"Are you sure you are goin' quite wight, Tom Mewwy, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as they plunged on through the darkness of the moor.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"I wathah think we ought to beah a little to the left, or else to the wight. I can't remember which."

"Try both," suggested Kerr sarcastically.

"Weally, Kerr——"

"This way!" said Tom Merry.

"We ought to have bwrought a compass, weally. It was wathah thoughtless of you, Blake, deah boy, not to bwing a compass."

"Oh, rats!"

"I have heard of

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mawmahs steewing a course by the stahs," said D'Arcy thoughtfully, turning his eyeglass skywards. "I don't know how they do it, but pewwaps some of you fellows know."

"Don't talk, Gussy!"

"I am twyin' to disecvah a way out of the difficulty, Tom Mewwy."

"But there isn't any difficulty, Gussy. I know the way perfectly well."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"That's all very well, deah boy, but I have a feelin' that we ought to beah to the wight, or else to the left. I'm not sure which."

"Here we are!"

A black mass loomed up against the less opaque sky.

It was the Black House on the moor.

The juniors paused for a moment, looking at it. The square mass of the walls, the oblong roof over, and the square turret were unmistakable.

Figgins trembled a little. In that shadowy, sombre building was Cousin Ethel, in danger—in danger of death. Perhaps already— Figgins choked at the thought.

"Buck up, old man!" whispered Kerr.

"Is that the Black House?" asked D'Arcy.

"Yes."

"Pewwaps you may be mistaken."

"Oh, rats!"

"It would be wathah wotten to get into the y'ong house, Tom Mewwy, and I can't help thinkin' that we ought to have turned to the wight or the left."

"Hush!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Listen!"

A strange, low, musical sound came ringing faintly through the silence of the night from the direction of the Black House.

The juniors shuddered.

They did not need telling what it was. It was the deep howl of a bloodhound.

CHAPTER 12.

The Death of the Bloodhound.

TOM MERRY & CO. stood silent, still—listening. The sound came eerily through the silent night, and died away in low echoes on the moor.

Kerr was the first to break the silence.

"That's the doctor's dog," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!" muttered D'Arcy.

"The brute is loose of a night. We shall have to pass him," said Jack Blake. "You didn't forget to bring the staff, Kerr?"

"No."

"You've got it ready?"

"Quite ready."

"Good!"

"Come on!" said Figgins abruptly.

They tramped on. The huge mass of the Black House loomed up more distinctly.

The juniors avoided the gate, and paused under the wall at the side of the house. It was eight feet high, supported by brick buttresses at intervals.

"Not easy to climb," said Blake.

"We shall have to get on one another's shoulders," said Figgins. "I'll go first."

"Buck up, then!"

Tom Merry stood against the wall, and Figgins climbed actively upon his shoulders, and placed his hands upon the top of the wall. He drew himself up nimbly, and sat on the wall, his legs inside. From the house, in the daylight, he would have been clearly seen; but now he could hardly be seen by the fellows standing outside the wall, so deep was the gloom. There was no danger of discovery, so far—only from the dog.

But the bloodhound had to be passed. It was the first difficulty, and the greatest. As Figgins swung his legs down inside the wall and sat there, there was a rustle in

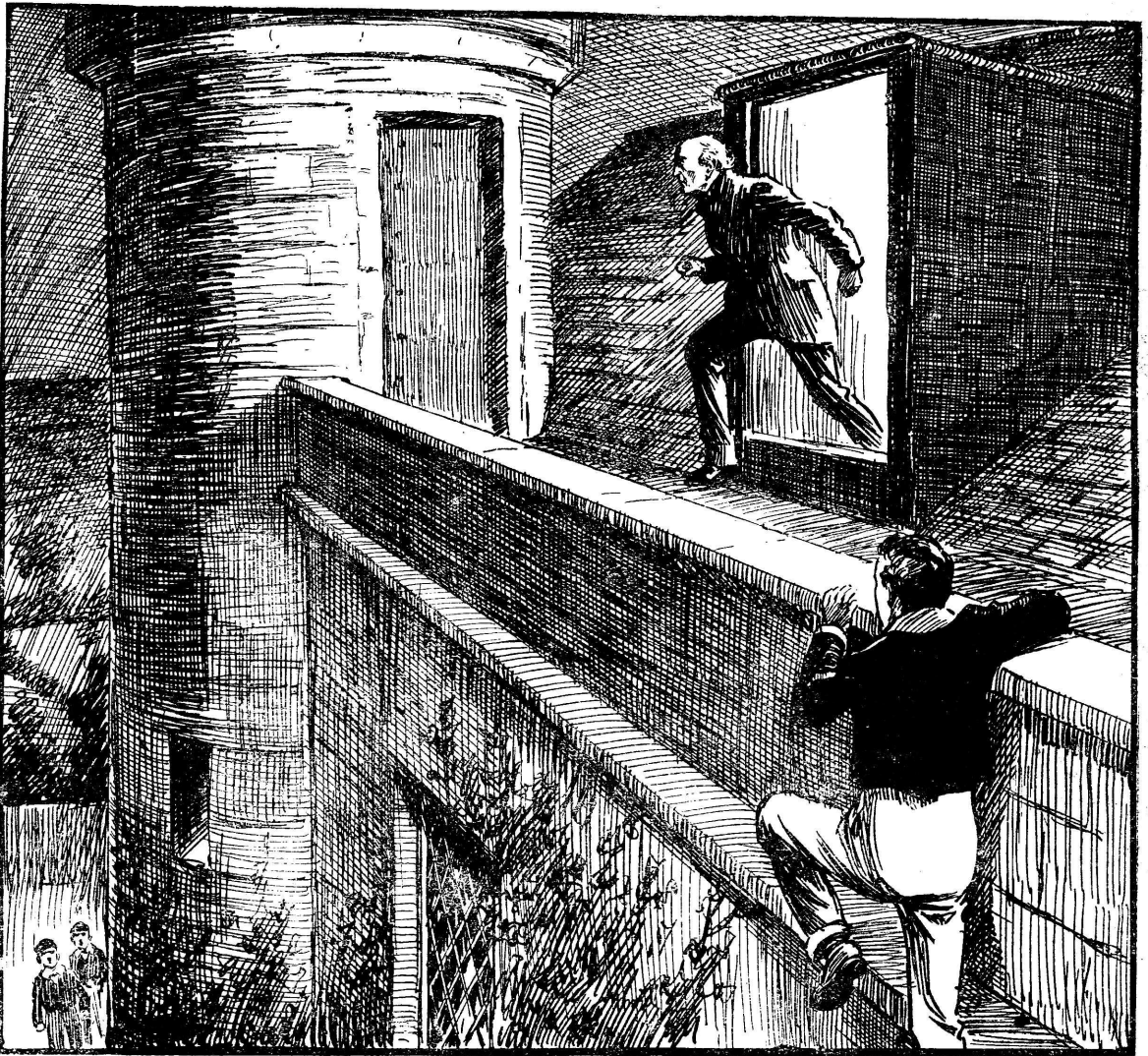
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A figure moved in the doorway of the turret, Figgins, crouching low on the leads, knew the spare, somewhat drooping figure of the scientist. The New House junior held his breath. (See Chapter 13.)

the ragged bushes of the garden, and a great dim body came into view. Two fierce eyes gleamed up, and Figgins caught a glitter of white teeth.

It was the hound!

He drew his feet up quickly. The dog stood below, looking up, and growling in low tones. The gleaming eyes were fixed upon Figgins.

Kerr came up second, on Tom Merry's broad shoulders. He put his chest on the wall, and looked over.

"The dog's here!" said Figgins, in a whisper.

"Yes; I know he is."

"Got the stuff?"

"Here it is."

Kerr drew the little parcel from under his jacket, and opened it. It had an odour appetising to the nose of a dog. The bloodhound watched them from below, and it was evidently his intention to fasten upon them if they dropped into the garden. He was growling softly. Arthur Augustus climbed lightly upon the wall.

Kerr tossed the poisoned meat into the garden. The bloodhound made a snatch at it as it fell beside him.

He turned his great nose towards it, and sniffed at it, and then looked up suspiciously at the juniors on the wall. Tom Merry and Blake had mounted now, and only Fatty Wynn remained at the foot of the wall outside.

"You fellows will have to pull me up," he muttered.

"Bai Jove!"

"It won't be easy," said Blake. "You'd better stay there and keep watch, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"I'm jolly well not going to do anything of the sort!" he replied. "There's no need to keep watch out here that I know of."

"Hush!" muttered Kerr.

The dog was turning over the meat with his nose.

"He won't eat it while we're in sight," said Kerr softly.

"Jump down!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors dropped from the wall again, and joined Fatty Wynn. They waited in tense anxiety.

If the hound did not touch the meat, they would have him to deal with. To tackle the huge animal at close quarters would be fearfully dangerous. But Figgins, at all events, had no hesitation. He took a case out of his jacket inside pocket, and opened it. It showed a large knife as he opened the lid.

"What have you got there?" muttered Tom Merry.

"A knife."

"What for?"

"For the dog, if he doesn't touch the meat," said Figgins quietly.

"Figg!"

"We're not going back!" said Figgins. "I'll kill the dog and the doctor, too, before I'll leave Ethel in danger!"

"Listen!" said Kerr.

In the silence they heard a faint sound from the garden within—a sound of worrying. The hound was devouring the meat.

They waited.

There was a growl, another growl, and a deep bay. Then a strange, unearthly howl from beyond the wall in the darkness.

"He's eaten it!" said Kerr.

"Poor brute!" muttered Tom Merry. "But it had to be done."

"Yaas, wathah! It was a beastly painful necessity," said Arthur Augustus. "It weally couldn't be helped, deah boy."

They waited a few minutes longer. There was silence in the garden. Kerr climbed the wall at last, and looked over. In the darkness he could see nothing at first; but the gleaming eyes had disappeared. He made out at last, as he peered down, a body that lay motionless in the bushes.

He dropped down into the garden. His heart beat as he did so; it was possible that the hound was not dead. But he was soon reassured.

The great beast lay still upon the ground, his jaws open, his eyes half-closed. He was quite dead. The poison had acted quickly.

Figgins looked over the wall.

"Kerr! Is it all right?"

"Yes."

"He's dead?"

"Stone dead."

"Poor beast!" muttered Figgins. "It's another rotten thing for that villain of a doctor to answer for! We couldn't help it."

He joined Kerr. Fatty Wynn climbed up next over Tom Merry's shoulders; he did not mean to remain till the last again. Tom Merry was sturdy, but Fatty's weight was a strain on him, till the fat Fourth-Former reached the top of the wall, and climbed, panting, over. Arthur Augustus, who was slim, and weighed the least of all, was left till the last, and Tom Merry hung on the wall with his hands, while the swell of St. Jim's climbed over him, and was helped from above by Jack Blake.

All the party dropped into the garden at last.

"Bai Jove, we're here, anyway," said Arthur Augustus, "and the way's cloah to the house, deah boys."

"Come on," said Figgins.

They left the hound where he had fallen, lying still in the ragged bushes. Their hopes were high now. Their most dangerous enemy had been overcome. The house was tenanted, as they knew, only by Cousin Ethel, the doctor himself, and old Martha, the servant; and Martha was deaf, and was not likely to hear anything. Whatever happened during the night, Martha was not likely to awake—probably the reason why the doctor kept her in his service. The juniors had Dr. Gadsby to deal with—alone!

They paused to consult when they reached the foot of the wall above which rose the turret. They knew that Ethel was in the turret-room, but there was no light in her window. The girl was sleeping, or watching in the darkness.

"There are enough of us to knock the doctor sky-high, if it comes to that!" Jack Blake muttered. "But—"

"But that's useless," said Kerr. "If he found us here, especially after we've killed the dog, he would have the right to treat us as burglars. He would simply put off his plans for a day or two, and, of course, it would be impossible for us to come again—and Cousin Ethel would be at his mercy."

"He's got to be shown up!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The question is, how are we to communicate with Ethel, and let her know we are here?" said Tom Merry.

"If we whistled—"

"The doctor would hear it."

Figgins looked up at the high wall. At the summit of it was the turret, in one corner, and behind the turret, the flat leaded roof, surrounded by a low parapet. The wall was thick with old ivy.

"I can climb this!" said Figgins quietly.

Tom Merry shuddered a little.

"Figgins! You—you can't! You'll break your neck."

"Is there any other way of getting up?"

"Blessed if I can see any."

"Then I'm going to do it!"

"Hold on a minute—let's think!"

CHAPTER 13.

To the Rescue.

Figgins waited. The wall rose huge and abrupt, with masses of clinging ivy. There was no other way to gain the leads—no way to the turret-room excepting over the leads. But to climb that dizzy height, even in the daytime, would have been terribly dangerous. In the darkness, the danger was fearful.

"Let's look round first," muttered Kerr.

"All right. You look round, and I'll wait here. Only don't be long—you don't know what may be happening."

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"Yaas, wathah! I'll stay here with you, Figgay. I know jolly well there's no other way up, and I'm goin', too!"

"Gussy—"

"I'm goin'," said the swell of St. Jim's quietly. "I'm Ethel's cousin, and I've a wight to go!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"It's no good talkin', Blake. Now, look here, the ideah is to get into the Wed Woom, and keep watch with Cousin Ethel, isn't it?"

"That's it."

"Well, I'm Ethel's cousin, and her natuwal pwotectah. I'm goin'. Figgins can come, too, but I uttaly decline to be left out."

And Arthur Augustus spoke in a tone there was no denying. There was reason in what he said. Ethel was in danger. At the same time, if any fellow was to be taken into her room late at night, it was better for the fellow to be her cousin. The juniors could not deny that D'Arcy was right to that extent.

"Let's all go," said Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't be done! One or two would be quite enough," he said. "And a crowd would only make it more risky. We don't want to alarm the doctor—that's the chief thing. If he takes the alarm, the whole thing's spoiled, and we shan't have a second chance. He will take care of that. He may take Ethel away somewhere where we can't get near her. Suppose he discovered us here, he might take her away the first thing in the morning, to some place where we couldn't follow."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Two will be more than enough," said Figgins. "One would be enough. But there's something in what Gussy says—Ethel would prefer to have her cousin with her. After all, Gussy is much the same as a brother to her."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, with unexpected warmth. "I wefuse to be wegardad as a bwothah of Ethel's. Don't talk wot!"

"Well, no need to argue," said Tom Merry hastily.

"Gussy and Figgins are going—"

"Perhaps Figgay would like me to go instead," Blake suggested.

Figgins snorted.

"Oh, no!" said Tom Merry quickly. "Ethel would like Figgins to be the one—no good blinking that. She thought of Figgay first of all. Figgins must go."

"Of course," said Kerr.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But hold on a few minutes while we look round."

Figgins and D'Arcy remained at the foot of the ivied wall, while the other four scouted round the building. D'Arcy and the New House junior scanned the wall, and calculated the climb while they were waiting for Tom Merry & Co. to return.

Tom Merry came back through the shadows.

"Nothing else?" asked Figgins.

"Nothing."

"The windows are all shuttered and padlocked," said Kerr. "The upper windows are barred. There's no getting in that way."

"We shall have to climb," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah."

"I suppose there's nothing else to be done," said Tom Merry unasily. "But it's frightfully risky."

"I don't care for the risk," said Figgins. "If I fall—"

"Figgay, old man—"

"If I fall," said Figgins quietly, "I shan't make a row! If I fall, one of you others will take it on—Tom Merry, I think. I don't care much if I do break my neck, so long as we have Ethel."

Kerr pressed Figgins's hand.

"Go it, old chap," he said.

"Pewwaps I ought to go first."

"Hold on, Gussy! Figgay goes first."

"But weally—"

"Shut up, old son!"

"I yield to the wish of the majowity," said the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity. "You can go first, Figgay."

"I'll see if the coast is clear when I get up there," said Figgins. "If it is safe for Gussy to come up, I'll drop something down—this matchbox. It won't make a noise. Until I give the signal, don't let Gussy come."

"All serene."

"I'm going now."

Figgins laid hold of the ivy. It rustled and whirred as the sturdy junior swung himself up by the thick tendrils.

He climbed actively.

In a minute he had disappeared from the gaze of the juniors below. They watched with keen, bitter anxiety. Only the slight swaying and rustling of the ivy showed that there was a climber in it, in the gloom.

Figgins climbed slowly and steadily.

The ivy was old and thick, and grew close on the wall. He found holds for his hands, and holds for his knees, as he carefully felt his way up.

The ivy swayed; here and there it yielded under his weight, and came away, but he always managed to secure a new hold in time.

The dust of the old ivy choked him as he went on, but he hardly paused for a moment till he was half up the wall.

Then he held back a little to look up.

Still high above him rose the wall. His arms were aching now with the efforts he had made, and he was perspiring, and the dust choked in his eyes and his nose.

He climbed on again.

Steadily, quietly, he won his way, till his head emerged at last from the masses of tendrils and leaves, and he found himself with the stone parapet of the leads before him.

He reached up, and caught the stone and drew himself up higher, and looked over the leads.

A gleam of light struck upon his eyes.

The doorway of the stair, leading to the leads from the interior of the house, was open. There was a light there, streaming out upon the flat roof.

Figgins caught his breath.

A figure moved in the doorway—he knew the spare, somewhat drooping figure of the scientist.

It was Dr. Gadsby.

Figgins held his breath. The doctor emerged from the stair. He came out upon the leads with stealthy, noiseless footfalls.

Without a sound, but with his figure casting a gigantic shadow across the roof as he moved in the light, the doctor crossed to the turret.

The turret door was closed. The room had no window looking over the leads—the only window was on the other side of the Red Room.

From the turret chamber the light and the doctor were invisible, as the door was closed.

Figgins set his teeth hard.

What was the man doing there? Why that stealthy tread—those cautious movements, unless he meant harm to the girl within the Red Room?

Figgins held himself in readiness. If the doctor entered the turret-room, Figgins was ready to spring upon the roof and dash after him.

But the doctor did not enter.

He paused at the door of the turret, and bent his head to listen. The light from the staircase door, streaming over the leads, showed him clearly. He was listening for a sound from the chamber of death.

Figgins's heart was beating with dull, sick throbs. Had the deadly work been done—was the horrible man listening for a last cry from his victim?

He listened for a full minute, while the junior, hanging upon the wall, hidden in the thick ivy, watched him with burning eyes of rage and hatred.

Then the man turned from the door, and with the same stealthy tread, crossed the leads again to the doorway of the stair.

He passed in, and closed the door silently; the light was shut off, and the leaded roof lay in deep blackness.

Figgins blinked in the sudden change.

The doctor was gone. All was silent and still again. Figgins dragged himself over the parapet, and stood upon the leads. There there was no concealment; if the doctor returned, he would see him. Figgins had to take the risk of that; but he did not imagine that the man would return.

He had evidently effected the purpose for which he had come to the roof outside the turret door.

Figgins stood for a moment, breathing hard. His efforts in climbing the ivy had told upon him. He took the match-box from his pocket. Then the ivy moved and swayed under a new climber.

CHAPTER 14.

A Terrible Vigil.

DEEP darkness in the turret chamber!

Cousin Ethel was not asleep.

She had been there—she did not know how long. She dared not strike a light to see her watch, lest a gleam of it should escape, and warn the doctor that she was watching instead of sleeping. If he knew that she was on her guard, that she was watching for the secret danger, what would he do? Would he not abandon his tactics, and perhaps effect his purpose by more open and violent means? It was only too probable, the girl thought, with a shudder. What had he meant when, the previous night, he had demanded that she should open her door?

The girl watched and waited.

She was sick with fear and apprehension—there was a pain in her heart. What were her friends doing? Did they

understand—were they coming to help her? And if they did, what could they do?

She waited.

At every moment she expected to hear the sound she dreaded—the sound of the low, hissing whisper in the darkness—the warning of death!

But it did not come.

How long had she been there—an hour—two hours—six or seven? She could not tell—she only knew that it seemed like centuries.

"Oh, they will never come—they cannot come!" the girl murmured. "Even Figgins cannot help me! I—I must die here alone, in the dark, as the others have done! Oh, Heaven help me! Oh, mother!"

Her cheeks were wet with tears.

Suddenly from the gloom came a slight sound. It was not the strange, soft whisper—it was not the sound she had heard in the chimney. It was a light tap at the door of the turret room—so light and faint that she scarcely heard it.

The girl started to her feet. Was it the doctor, come to ascertain whether she slept, so that he could proceed with his deadly work?

Tap again!

Ethel stood quivering in every limb.

She did not reply—she would not let him know that she was awake. She waited, with tense nerves.

"Ethel!"

It was a soft whisper from without, scarcely audible through the thickness of the door.

Ethel clasped her hands. Were her senses playing her false, or was it Figgins's voice.

She listened.

"Ethel!"

The whisper was louder this time.

Ethel ran towards the door in the dark. She tapped on it from the inside, and whispered back.

"Figgins! Is it you, Figgins!"

"Yes, Ethel!"

"Heaven be praised!"

"Open the door!"

"It is fastened on the outside."

"I have unfastened it; the key was in the lock."

Ethel unbolted the door. Figgins pushed it gently open from the outside. Ethel gave a low, soft cry.

"Figgins! Figgins! Thank Heaven! Oh!"

Then she started as a second figure was visible behind Figgins.

"Look—it is——"

"It's only Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "It's only I, Ethel, deah gal. It's all wight—it's all sewene!"

"Arthur!"

"We're here to save you, deah gal!"

"Come in, Gussy, quick!" whispered Figgins.

Arthur Augustus stepped into the Red Room in the turret, and Figgins closed the door noiselessly, and pushed back the bolts into their place.

Then he breathed more freely.

He had taken Ethel's hand in the dark, and he still held it. The girl leaned upon him, hardly conscious of what she was doing.

"Poor old gal!" said Arthur Augustus softly. "I can't see in the dark! Where are you, Ethel?"

"I am here."

"Mustn't show a light, you know," said D'Arcy. "He would see it from the window. Where is the doctor, Ethel?"

"He was in the laboratory when I came up to bed," whispered Ethel; "that was at ten o'clock. He brought me here and locked me in, and then I heard him go down to the laboratory again. He always spends hours there every night!"

"I have seen him," said Figgins.

"Seen him!"

"Yes. He came and listened outside your door while I was climbing up, and I saw him. I suppose he wanted to know if you were asleep."

The girl caught her breath.

"You climbed up! Up the wall?"

"Yes, on the ivy—and Gussy, too!"

"Oh, you might have been killed!"

"It's all right. You haven't been hurt yet, Ethel?"

"No."

"You heard the sound in the room last night—that was what you meant by your letter?" Figgins whispered.

"Yes."

"That's why we came; we understood," said Figgins.

"Oh! I am so glad you understood! Dr. Gadsby dictated the rest of the letter to me, and made me write it, and I feared that you might be misled."

"Wathah not, deah gal!"

"You have heard nothing yet, to-night?" asked Figgins.

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"Nothing."

"Good! We're in time."

The conversation had been carried on in the faintest of whispers. The blinds of the Red Room were drawn, and there was no ray of light. The juniors and the girl could not see each other. Perhaps that was why Figgins retained his hold of Cousin Ethel's hand.

"You're trembling, Ethel!" he muttered.

"I—I am so afraid!"

"We're here to look after you. I've got a dark lantern," whispered Figgins. "We've got a cricket-stump apiece. When we hear that sound—if we hear it—we shall find out what it is."

"Oh, Figgins!"

"We're going to watch all night. You don't mind, Ethel—I mean, you don't mind us being here. It's the only way."

"Oh, I feel so much safer since you have come!" murmured the girl. "Are you alone here—you two?"

"No; there are four chaps keeping watch down at the foot of the wall—Tom Merry and Blake and Kerr and Fatty. Two are enough to come up here—and less likely to make any noise and attract attention," Figgins explained.

"Yes, yes!"

"Listen!" muttered D'Arcy.

But it was only a moan of the wind round the old turret. It brought back the howl of the bloodhound to Ethel's mind.

"The dog!" she whispered.

"That's all right!"

"But—but what—"

"He's dead!"

Ethel shuddered.

"Dead!"

"We had to do it," whispered Figgins. "Hark!"

The moan of the wind again.

Figgins groped to a chair, and Ethel sat down. She was trembling violently. The hour was approaching when the warning sound must be heard, if it was to be heard at all that night.

And surely it must be. The preparations the doctor had made could only be for that end. The removal of the couch from the room—the locking of the door—the listening outside the door an hour after Ethel had retired. All proved this night was intended for the crime.

"You take the lantern, Gussy!" Figgins muttered, passing it to D'Arcy. "Mind you don't turn the light on till I give the word."

"Wight-ho!"

"I've got the stump ready!" Figgins went on. "If anything comes into this room to-night, it will be hurt. Ethel, what was it you heard last night?"

"A sound like a whisper—but without words—a sibilant sound—"

"It's strange! And you saw nothing?"

"Nothing. I had no light—I dared not have one. If the doctor—if he knew that I watched instead of sleeping, I—I fear—"

Figgins pressed her hand.

"I understand. But when you heard it—"

"I forgot everything but my fear, and shrieked and shrieked. I felt that I should go mad!" the girl murmured huskily. "Then the doctor came to the door, and asked me what was the matter. He commanded me to open the door."

"You did not?"

"No; I was afraid."

"Oh, the villain!"

There was silence in the Red Room. D'Arcy found a chair and sat down; Figgins stood beside Cousin Ethel, leaning on the back of her chair with his left hand, holding her hand in his right. The girl seemed to derive comfort and courage from his touch.

Her heart was beating less wildly now.

The minutes flew by on leaden wings—they could not compute the time. Figgins started as a faint sound came from the leads outside.

"The doctor again!" he murmured.

There was no doubt of it. The doctor was listening outside the door, upon the flat leads. Figgins's heart thumped; would the man discover that the key had been turned back in the lock? If so, discovery for the juniors was inevitable. But why should he notice the key, as he found the door closed just as he had left it, and had no suspicion that anyone had climbed the wall. The doctor still believed that the bloodhound was roaming the garden to watch for possible intruders.

The faint sound on the leads died away.

He was gone.

The two juniors and Cousin Ethel waited tensely. They felt that the crisis was coming now. It could not be long delayed.

More weary minutes, that seemed hours. And then—

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 165.

READ the Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of School Life, entitled: "THE SLACKER!"

A faint sound from the chimney.

All three heard it. Figgins pressed Ethel's hand, and she returned the pressure. Arthur Augustus made a slight movement.

"Quiet!" whispered Figgins, barely audibly.

They listened in tense silence.

In the stillness of the room—so still that they felt they could hear their hearts beating—there came to their ears a faint, indescribable sound. Figgins's teeth came together hard.

It was the low, hissing sound—the whisper of death!

CHAPTER 15.

The Secret of the Red Room.

SOFT and strange and low—it came through the stillness. Ethel's form seemed to become rigid. Her fingers closed upon Figgins's hand with a clasp like ice.

It seemed to her, for the moment, that her heart had ceased to beat. Then it thumped again wildly.

Figgins gently disengaged his hand. He had to be ready now for action. Horror, and something like fear, was creeping through his own veins. Arthur Augustus had set his own teeth hard to keep back the cry that rose to his lips.

What was it? Whence was it?

They listened with straining ears.

Soft and low and hissing!

It was as if a soft voice were whispering and lisping without words, and it came with curious distinctness at moments, and then was low and scarcely to be heard.

The sound was moving. From the broad chimney it glided towards the bed, which was close beside the disused fireplace.

"Oh, Heaven!" murmured Cousin Ethel, with frozen lips.

The juniors were silent.

They had hard work to keep their own nerves steady; but they did it. They knew how much depended now upon their courage.

Whisper, whisper, whisper!

The sound was on the bed now, and there was a low rustling sound with it, as of something soft dragging over the coverlet and pillows.

Figgins's teeth came hard together.

He guessed!

"Oh, good heavens!" he breathed.

Ethel sat still, turned to stone. If that low, menacing hiss had come near her at that moment, she would not have found the strength to move.

Whisper—whisper!

Figgins grasped the cricket stump in his right hand, with a firm grasp. He reached out and touched D'Arcy on the arm.

D'Arcy started, with a shudder.

"Ready?" whispered Figgins.

"Yaas!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's, between his chattering teeth.

"The light—quick!"

A sudden gleam of light in the darkened room! Light flashing through the gloom, dancing on the painted walls and the white bed.

Figgins leaped towards the bed, slashing madly with the cricket-stump.

He rained blows on the pillows, on the white coverlet, his face white and set, his eyes staring, his arm tireless. Crash, crash, crash!

The soft whispering sound changed now—it became a loud, fierce hissing, and it was no longer possible to mistake it.

It was the hissing now of a furious snake!

A snake!

It was a poisonous reptile that had been introduced into the room by a secret interstice in the old chimney, and Cousin Ethel understood at last!

She gave a cry, and slid from the chair, and lay upon the floor in a dead faint. But even for Cousin Ethel the juniors had no eyes at that moment.

Figgins was slashing madly with the stump.

The savage hiss was loud and continuous now, and in the light of D'Arcy's lantern the green eyes of the reptile gleamed.

The horrible thing had writhed off the bed, and was seeking to escape back to the chimney where it had entered; but the blows rained upon it, and it turned upon Figgins with savage hissing.

Crash, crash, crash!

Figgins, in his haste and fury, missed again and again, but many of his blows took effect, and the reptile writhed away from him.

Crash, crash!

In the midst of the din there came a furious knocking at the door of the turret-chamber; a furious voice outside.

"Ethel—Ethel! Open the door!"

The juniors hardly heard it.

D'Arcy kept the light of the lantern upon the snake, following its every writhe, and Figgins rained blows upon the flat, cruel-looking head. The horrible thing was still at last.

The head was crushed almost out of semblance to its shape; the glinting eyes were dark; the horrible hissing ceased.

Strong shudders still ran through the sinuous body, but the snake was dead. Figgins paused, gasping for breath.

"My Heaven!" he panted. "My Heaven!"

"It's dead!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, thank Heaven!"

Figgins dropped the stump, and ran to Cousin Ethel. He raised her up in his arms. The furious knocking at the door still continued.

"Ethel! Dear Ethel!"

"Bai Jove! She's fainted!"

"No wonder."

Hammer, hammer, hammer at the door.

The man outside was frantic with rage and terror. He could hear strange voices in the turret-room. He knew that strangers must be there. He was bewildered, terrified with the knowledge that his crime must be known.

What did he intend if the door were opened? What mad, murderous thoughts were in his unhinged mind?

The juniors did not heed him. Figgins supported Cousin Ethel in his arms, and D'Arcy laid down the lantern, and ran to the water-jug. He threw water over the girl's rigid face, and Ethel's eyes opened at last.

She turned them with a wild stare of terror upon the dead reptile, and shuddered and moaned.

Figgins promptly placed himself to shut off the horrible thing from her view. His arm supported her throbbing head.

"Ethel, it's all right now—the thing's dead. It's all right, dear Ethel!" he muttered.

"Oh—oh, heavens!"

"Ethel, don't be afraid now."

"It's all wight, deah gal," said Arthur Augustus. "It was howwible, but it's ovah now. There's nothin' to be fwightened about now, Ethel."

"Oh, I am afraid—I am afraid!" moaned the girl.

Crash!

It was a terrific blow upon the door. The man outside was growing desperate!

CHAPTER 16.

Rough Justice.

COUSIN ETHEL staggered to her feet, supported by Figgins's strong arm.

The girl was still moaning with fear. The horror of the night had been too much for her.

"The—the snake!" she murmured.

"It's dead, Ethel!"

"You—you have killed it—you're sure?"

"Yes, yes—quite sure!"

Ethel pressed her hands to her temples.

"It was a snake—it was a snake hissing that I heard last night, then. It was that that the others heard—those that died! Oh, heavens!"

"It was that, Ethel."

"Last night," moaned the girl, "I was here alone, with a poisonous reptile, sent into the room to kill me! Oh, Figgins!"

"It's all over now," said Figgins, holding Ethel in his arms, scarcely knowing what he did in his anxiety to reassure and comfort her. "Dear, dear Ethel, you are safe now—quite safe."

"Yaas, wathah, Ethel," said Arthur Augustus. "It's all wight—weally all wight."

"Put it out of sight!" muttered Figgins.

"Good ideah!"

Arthur Augustus approached the reptile gingerly. It was a hideous thing, with a black, sinuous body, with green marks upon it. The body was still writhing. The flat, cruel head had been beaten shapeless by Figgins's frantic blows.

D'Arcy pushed it under the bed with a cricket-stump, not caring to touch the horrible carcase with his hands.

Then he took the lantern, and looked into the chimney. One of the square stone blocks that composed the wall of the chimney towards the leads, was removed, and a dark orifice was seen.

Through the little opening the reptile had been introduced into the room. The scientist handled the thing with safety which it was death to anyone else to touch.

"The hound!" muttered D'Arcy. "The awful villain!"

Ethel clung to Figgins as there came another terrific crash

upon the door of the turret-room. The doctor was evidently wielding something hard and heavy, to smash in the door from the bolts. In attempting to unlock it, he had discovered that it was already unlocked on the outside. The bolts held the door fast, and the rain of blows on the outside did little more than shake it, so far. But there was no doubt that the door would give way if the attack were continued.

"We've got to tackle him, anyway!" Figgins muttered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ethel, dear—"

The girl shivered and trembled.

"Do not open the door!" she whispered. "Do not open it! You do not know him—he is desperate now, now that he knows he is discovered. He will murder you as well as me."

Figgins smiled grimly.

"He won't find it so easy to murder us," he said. "We are more than a match for him, Ethel. But he will have the door open soon, if we don't open it."

"Heaven help us!"

"We shall manage him, Ethel."

The girl tried to pull herself together. The reptile was out of her sight now, and no longer thrilled her nerves with horror.

"Try to be calm, Ethel."

"Yes, yes. I am calm now."

"Remain here while—"

Ethel caught his arm.

"No, no—do not leave me. Do not go out."

"He will be in a minute," whispered Figgins. "Courage, Ethel, dear; be a brave girl."

"I—I will! Do as you think best, Figgins."

"That's wight, Ethel, deah gal!"

Crash!

Figgins stepped to the door and drew back the bolts. The lantern was placed with its light falling upon the door. D'Arcy and Figgins grasped their stumps; they were pale, but cool and determined.

The door, no longer fastened, flew violently open. Dr. Gadsby staggered in, with a heavy stool in his hands.

The unexpected yielding of the door had taken him by surprise. As he staggered into the Red Room, Figgins leaped forward, and struck. The blow fell upon the desperate man's right arm, and the stool crashed upon the floor.

The doctor sprang back, with flaming eyes. His eyes glared in the light, and there was little doubt, at that moment, that the man was partly insane.

He stood glaring at the juniors, but there was no time to pause. They advanced upon him rapidly.

"Surrender, you scoundrel!" exclaimed Figgins. "Do you hear? Surrender!"

The doctor sprang back upon the leads. His hand was groping wildly in his coat, and the juniors knew that he was groping for a weapon—a revolver. But no weapon was there.

"You—you here!" he hissed, between his teeth. "You here! A thousand curses! I will kill you—I will kill you! You shall carry away no tales from this house! Wait! My revolver! Fool to leave it— Ah, you shall not leave the Black House alive!"

He muttered the words disjointedly as he retreated from the juniors. He made a motion once to spring upon them with his bare hands, and they struck at him; but he leaped back, and avoided the blows. Figgins and D'Arcy rushed forward desperately. The doctor was making for the stairway, and if he reached his room below, if he reached his revolver, they knew what to expect. It was death—death for them in the Black House, death for Cousin Ethel after all!

They rushed upon him. The doctor backed away, his eyes glittering, and made a sudden, fierce leap to gain the stair, just escaping the crash of a cricket-stump.

He gained the top of the stairs, and missed his footing there in his wild haste and the darkness. There was a loud cry as he fell.

Figgins echoed it.

"He's down!"

"Bai Jove, he's fallen!"

Crash!

A faint cry, and then silence.

The two juniors stood motionless, pale with horror. The man had been a murderer in intention; would have been a murderer in deed if he had reached his weapon in time. But what had happened to him?

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 125.

A New Tale of Tom Merry & Co., Jack Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



"THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S!"

Figgins and D'Arcy looked at one another in silence.
 "We—we'd better go and see him," muttered Figgins.
 D'Arcy nodded.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 Figgins stepped quietly to the top of the stair, and peered down. There was no light on the stairway.
 "Get the lantern, Gussy!"
 "All wight!"
 Arthur Augustus hurried back into the Red Room for the lantern. Cousin Ethel ran to him, with a cry.
 "Arthur, what has happened?"
 "The doctor is hurt, Ethel deah."
 "Not—not Figgins, or—or you?"
 "No; we're all wight."
 "Thank Heaven!"
 "Bettah remain here, deah gal," said D'Arcy. "I want to take the light for a minute."
 "I will come with you."
 "Bettah not. You see—"
 "I cannot remain here in the dark," said Ethel, with a shudder.
 "Vowey well, deah gal!"
 D'Arcy crossed the leads with the lantern in his hand. Cousin Ethel keeping close by his side. Figgins was still at the top of the stair.
 "Keep back, Ethel!" he said.
 "What has happened, Figgins?"
 "He fell down the stairs."
 "And he is—is—"
 "I'm afraid so. He hasn't moved."
 "Oh!" The girl caught her breath. "Figgins, you did not—did not—"
 Figgins shook his head.
 "No. I tell you he fell down the stairs. We were not even close to him at the time. He missed his footing, and fell. He was going for his revolver, and it was jolly lucky for us he fell, I think."
 Figgins took the lantern, and descended the stairs. A huddled body lay at the bottom, and it did not move as Figgins, shuddering, bent over it.
 Figgins came up in a moment or two.
 "Well!" said D'Arcy breathlessly.
 "Dead!" said Figgins. "I think his neck is broken."
 "Oh!"
 "Come back into the room, Ethel!"
 The half-fainting girl was led into the room. Figgins left D'Arcy with her, while he went to the parapet of the leads to call down to the juniors below.

CHAPTER 17.

All's Well That Ends Well.

TOM MERRY & CO. had waited in tense anxiety. For a long time there had been silence; and when the silence was broken, it was by indefinable sounds they could not understand.
 They heard the crashing of the doctor beating upon the door of the turret-room; but they had agreed not to climb unless Figgins or D'Arcy should whistle for help, and they waited, though sorely against the grain.
 But they had not long to wait after that. It was very soon after that sound had died away that a voice called from above:
 "Hallo!"
 It was Figgins's voice.
 "Hallo!" called back Tom Merry.
 "I'm coming down to let you fellows in," said Figgins.
 "No need for you to get up this way, now."
 His voice sounded strange and far off from the top of the high wall. The juniors could dimly see his head against the sky as he looked over the parapet.
 "What has happened?" called out Tom Merry.
 "The doctor's dead!"
 "Good heavens!"
 "He fell downstairs. The snake's dead, too. Ethel is safe."
 "Snake?" repeated Kerr.
 "I'll tell you presently. Ethel's safe; that's the chief thing, and she won't be in danger again. You fellows go round to the door; we're going to bring Ethel down now."
 "Right you are!"
 Tom Merry & Co. made their way round to the front of the building.
 Meanwhile, Figgins returned to the Red Room. Cousin Ethel was more herself now. The death of her uncle had given her a shock, but she could not help feeling a great sense of relief to know that her danger was over for ever. The cunning, scheming brain could devise no more plots against her safety now.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 185.

"Put your coat on, Ethel," said Figgins. "We're ready to go, I think."
 The girl started.
 "To go!"
 "Yes. You can't stay here, after what's happened, can you?"
 Ethel shuddered.
 "No, no; I could not."
 "You must come to St. Jim's. Mrs. Holmes will take you in, Ethel. She's very fond of you. And when we explain what you've been through—"
 The girl looked round the Red Room, with a shiver.
 "Yes, I must go," she said. "I would rather pass the rest of the night on the open moor than remain in the Black House."
 "Then get ready," said Figgins. "You can wait on the leads while I—while I clear the way."
 Ethel shivered. She knew what that meant. She put her coat on, and D'Arcy waited with her on the leads while Figgins descended the stair with the lantern.
 Figgins bent over the body again. He was sick with repulsion, but it had to be done. He could not let Ethel pass such a thing. He lifted the old, withered man, and bore him into the nearest room, and came out quickly, closing the door after him.
 Then he looked up the stairs.
 "Come on!" he said.
 D'Arcy brought Ethel down the stairway from the leads.
 "The sooner we're off, the better," said Figgins, in a shaking whisper. "This place is horrible."
 "But Martha," said Ethel.
 "What about her?"
 "I must wake her up. It would be too terrible if she found—that—in the morning. She has relations in Wayland. She can go there."
 "Very well, Ethel. It's just like you to think of her."
 Ethel showed the way to Martha's room, and the juniors waited in the passage while the girl awoke the old woman. When they went down to leave the house, Martha followed them; she had no wish to remain alone in the house of death.
 Figgins undid the fastenings of the door, and threw it open. Tom Merry & Co. were already waiting in the porch outside.
 "Ethel!" they exclaimed together.
 "Yaas, wathah! Ethel's all wight," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Figgins has helped me wippinly."
 Figgins only smiled. He had an idea that it was D'Arcy who had helped him, and not particularly ripping, either, but he did not say so. He was too happy, with Cousin Ethel quite safe, and leaning on his arm, to want to argue with anybody.
 "Come on!" said Jack Blake.
 They crossed the wild, dark gardens to the gates, and Tom Merry unfastened them. A minute more, and they stood on the path on the moor. Cousin Ethel seemed to grow stronger at every step in the keen, fresh air of the moor, and now that the house of death was left behind.
 In the sleeping town of Wayland old Martha left them. The juniors and Cousin Ethel tramped on by the footpath to St. Jim's.
 "You're not tired, Ethel?" asked Figgins anxiously. "We could knock up some inn, you know, and get a trap—"
 Ethel shook her head and smiled. She could smile now.
 "Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "This is lovely!"
 And Figgins walked on, with Cousin Ethel's hand on his arm, as happy as a fellow in a very pleasant dream, and feeling, indeed, as if he were dreaming.
 St. Jim's was reached too soon to please Figgins.
 Tom Merry rang a loud peal on the bell. The first glimmer of dawn was appearing in the sky, and tinting the elm tops with pale silver.
 Jack Blake rubbed his eyes.
 "It's been a night out, and no mistake!" he remarked.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 Tom Merry rang again and again. Taggles, the porter, had probably never been disturbed at that hour in his life before, but he had to turn out at last. In an old coat, with a muffler round his neck and a lantern in his hand, Taggles appeared at last, grumbling audibly.
 He almost dropped on the ground as he saw the group of juniors through the bars of the gate.
 "My heye! This is nice goings hon!" he gasped.
 Tom Merry laughed.
 "Open the gate, Taggles, old soul!"
 "Which I says—"
 "Say it all afterwards," said Blake. "Open the gate, and then go back to bed. You can have a nip of gin-and-water if you're a good boy."
 Taggles did not reply. He opened the gate, still in a state of the greatest astonishment, and the juniors entered. They took Cousin Ethel direct to the Head's house, and Tom

Merry rang. He had to ring there more than at the gate before a sleepy maidservant came down and opened the door, looking extremely drowsy and indignant, but at the sight of Cousin Ethel's pale face the maid's expression changed. Cousin Ethel had frequently stayed with Mrs. Holmes, and she was liked by everyone in the house, from the Head himself to the boots.

Dr. Holmes himself, amazed by the ringing at such an hour, looked down the stairs in his dressing-gown and slippers.

"Merry!" he exclaimed, catching sight of the hero of the Shell. "What is it? And Miss Cleveland too! Good heavens! What has happened?"

"May we come in and explain, sir?"

"Yes, yes! Certainly!"

Five minutes later Cousin Ethel was in bed, with the motherly Mrs. Holmes hovering about her, while the amazed Head listened to what the juniors had to tell him. When Tom Merry had finished the Head sent them to bed, and wrote a note, which he despatched by Toby, the page, to the police-station in Rylcombe.

The juniors were glad enough to get to bed. They were sleepy and tired, now that the excitement of the wild night had passed away.

But Figgins was in a very cheerful frame of mind. Figgins & Co. turned in, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn closed their eyes at once. Fatty Wynn was too sleepy even to remember that there was a cold chicken in the cupboard in the study.

Figgins, however, did not seem inclined for sleep.

"Kerr, old man!" he called out.

"Eh?"

"Ethel looked a lot better when she got in, didn't she?"

"Groo!"

"I say, Kerr——"

Snore!

The snore might have been real or simulated. Figgins grunted, and called out to Fatty Wynn.

"Fatty! I say, Fatty, old man!"

"Groo!"

"Fatty! I say, Fatty! You're not asleep yet, surely! Did you think that Ethel still looked rather pale when we said good-night to her?"

"Grooh!"

"I suppose she will be feeling pretty fit by the morning, though. What do you think, Fatty?"

"Grooh!"

"What do you think, Kerr?"

"Grooh!"

"Now, look here, you chaps——"

Snore—snore!

Figgins gave it up, and went to sleep himself.

Cousin Ethel seemed almost her old self in the morning, and the juniors of St. Jim's were very glad to see it. The death of Dr. Gadsby, and the story of the poisonous reptile introduced into the Red Room created quite a sensation on the country-side. The whole story had to be told at the inquest, and the juniors told it frankly. The verdict was one of accidental death—Dr. Gadsby had escaped punishment. His death had been accidental, but it had come about through his own wickedness, and there were few, if any, to pity him. Cousin Ethel remained for some days at St. Jim's, and they were happy days for Figgins, who was her chief escort on all occasions, but in all her many rambles round the old school Cousin Ethel never went in the direction of the Black House on the moor.

THE END.

"The Rally of the Rival Co.'s," is the title of next week's grand long, complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford. Also a splendid long instalment of "Deep Sea Gold," by Reginald Wray. Order your copy of The "Gem" Library Now. Price One Penny.

JOKES FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

Moving, Very.

When the man with decided tendencies towards looking after everybody's business but his own saw a furniture removal van being loaded near his house, he sallied forth on investigation bent.

"I say, carter," he began bumptiously, "are the people upstairs moving?"

The carter looked at him scornfully. Then he wiped the perspiration from his manly brow.

"No, sir," he retorted grimly; "we're just taking the furniture for a drive!"

Answered.

With the boundless enthusiasm of his kind, the food faddist harangued the mob on the marvellous results to be obtained from chewing soap and eating nut butter.

"Friends," he cried, swelling and slapping his chest, "two years ago I was a walking skeleton—a miserable, haggard wreck. What do you suppose brought about this great change in me?"

He paused to let his words sink in. Then a voice rose from the crowd:

"Wot change?"

Hustling Without the Hustle.

The hustling boss and two of his men met in the yard.

"Now then—now then!" said the busting boss briskly.

"Where are you going?"

"Please, sir," said one, "we're taking this 'ere plank to the sawmill!"

"Plank! What plank?" snapped the boss. "I don't see any plank!"

The man looked down at his hand, and over his shoulder, and then turned blandly to his mate.

"Why, bless me, Bill," he exclaimed, "if we ain't been and forgot the plank!"

Automatic Profit.

"I have often wondered," remarked Greenleigh, as he dropped a penny in the slot, "where the profit of these machines——"

He grasped the handle.

"Where the profit on these machines——"

He gave it a shake.

"I have often wondered, I say, where the profit——"

Another shake.

"Where the profit comes in. Where the—— Why, the thing's out of order! It won't work!"

"Ah!" grinned an interested porter. "Now do you begin to see where the profit comes in?"

Looking Forward.

"'Allo, Bill! You do look pale and thin, Bill! Wot's wrong, Bill? Been ill, Bill?"

Thus cried one jovial frequenter of the gutter to one he had not seen for three weeks.

Bill passed a horny hand across his weary brow.

"No," he answered; "I ain't been ill—it's work—work from ten in the morning till ten at night, and only one hour's rest! Think of it, mate—jest think of it!"

"Scotty!" replied Bill's mate. "And where are yer working? 'Ow long 'ave yer been there?"

"I ain't been there yet," retorted Bill, with a groan; "I begin ter-morrer!"

Gave It to Uncle.

"Doctor," said the young man with the fur coat, and the jingling pockets, "I've come to thank you for your medicine!"

"So it helped you, did it?" replied the doctor, smiling.

"I am so glad!"

The young man nodded.

"It helped me wonderfully," he said.

"And how many bottles did you find it necessary to take?" inquired the medico.

"Oh, I didn't take any of it!" replied young Fur Coat.

"But I induced my uncle to take one bottle, and I'm his sole heir!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 185.

DEEP SEA GOLD!

A Wonderful New Story of Amazing Adventure.
By REGINALD WRAY.

Last Thursday's Opening Instalment Explained Briefly.

Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde, chums at Wellsea College, are having a before-breakfast dip in the sea, when long, flexible steel arms, like the tentacles of some huge octopus, appear suddenly and mysteriously from the depths of the sea, and, seizing upon the chums, swiftly drag them down beneath the waves. Dick and Jack think their last moments have come as they are rushed down into the dark depths, when suddenly a trapdoor opens to receive them, and closes after them with a snap. Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde are in the power of Captain Flame, the Lord of the Undersea World, which he rules from his wonderful submarine motor-car, the Octopus. This amazing vehicle is Captain Flame's own invention, and enables him and his crew, which consists entirely of boys whom he has captured, just as he captured the chums of Wellsea College, to traverse the bed of the ocean as easily and rapidly as an ordinary motor-car travels over dry land.

The prospect of amazing adventures beneath the waves soon reconcile Dick and Jack to their novel position, and when they learn that the Octopus is bound for the Pacific Ocean, where the overdue yacht belonging to Dick's millionaire father was last seen, the chums become quite willing to serve under Captain Flame. While they are being instructed in their new duties on board the mysterious car by Mopsa, a diminutive Chinese boy, the Octopus collides with a huge whale, which, after knocking the submarine car over on its side, finally comes to rest right on top of its steel clad foe. Ordering Dick Dauntless to follow him, Captain Flame announces his intention of going out to see how matters stand. (Now read the second instalment of this story of breathless adventure beneath the waves.)

Alone on the Ocean Bed.

Awaiting no second order, Dick Dauntless clambered through the opening and followed Captain Flame along the corridor.

Presently they stopped beneath a door marked "Water Dock."

It was the same by which the two boys had entered the submarine caravan.

Then it was on a level with the ground, now it lay lengthways immediately above their heads.

Grasping Dick beneath the arms, Captain Flame raised him towards the door.

"Throw it back, enter, then help me up!" he ordered.

Dick obeyed, and a few minutes later found himself by Captain Flame's side. On the floor, hurled by the overturning of the Octopus, lay several indiarubber suits, each surmounted by a strangely-shaped helmet.

"This should fit you. Get into it!" ordered Captain Flame.

Dick took the strangely-shaped garment from the inventor, and found it consisted of rubber trousers and jacket in one, with an opening at the shoulders through which to enter.

Following Captain Flame's every action, he arrayed himself in one of these strangely-shaped diving-dresses, and soon found himself encased from head to foot in indiarubber. Folding the front flap over his shoulders, he drew the back one with the helmet attached over his head.

The whole formed the strangest diving suit Dick Dauntless had ever seen.

The rubber fitted close to his frame, the helmet was so light that after a little while, he scarcely knew he had it on.

Dick found that he could breathe as freely as though in the open air. Yet no clanging of an air-pump fell upon his ears—indeed, had such machine been present, there was no tube through which the air could have been conveyed to his helmet.

The only difference of which the boy was sensible was a sharp, not unpleasant odour, which seemed to come from two pads—one encircling his neck, the other his head.

Glancing through the glass mask which covered his face, Dick Dauntless saw that Captain Flame was similarly arrayed, and noticed that on either side of his head were

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circular discs, like to the receiver of a gramophone, though about half the size.

"Ready, Dick?" asked Captain Flame, and the boy was surprised to find that he could hear as plainly as though his head was not enclosed in an air-tight helmet.

"Yes, sir. But is my helmet on right? I can hear and breathe quite freely.

"You have to thank Mr. Richards for the breathing," laughed Captain Flame. "It is due to the acid with which the pads within your helmet are sprinkled. It purifies your breath and renews the oxygen, so that you can breathe it over and over again. But this is no time for scientific explanations. We have to find out what has happened to the Octopus first."

As he spoke, Captain Flame removed two belts, to which was attached a short, serviceable cutlass, balanced on the opposite side with a fireman's tomahawk, from the floor.

"Put it on, my lad," he said, handing Dick one. "We may not need them, but there's never any telling what may happen at the bottom of the-sea. It's as well to be prepared for all emergencies."

Dick obeyed, little realising what good service the sword and tomahawk would do him ere he returned to the Octopus.

It was no slight task to clamber from the dressing-room into the Octopus's water dock, which now lay immediately above their heads.

But at length the feat was accomplished, the door was closed, and the water admitted into the dock through a score of huge water-cocks. When the compartment would hold no more, Captain Flame touched a lever, a sliding-panel moved aside, and Dick Dauntless stood for the first time erect amidst the still waters at the bottom of the sea.

At first he was conscious of an unpleasant cramped feeling, as though in the grasp of some mighty press; but he soon got accustomed to this. Indeed, so strange and startling was everything around him that there is no telling how long he would have stood feasting his eyes upon the wonders displayed on every side, had not Captain Flame placed a hand on his shoulder and laid the other on a huge rounding mass looming high above their heads.

"It's worse than I expected, my lads," said Captain Flame, after a few minutes' silence. "The whale attacked the submarine-car with such fury that it knocked its brains out against her iron sides."

"Then it's dead, sir?" replied Dick.

Captain Flame nodded.

"Yes, and could find no better place to lie down and die except immediately over the Octopus. Come, let us see what chance there is of moving its huge body aside."

As he spoke, Captain Flame jumped off the side of the Octopus.

Though the distance was considerable, Dick Dauntless followed without a moment's hesitation.

To his surprise, he found himself falling slowly. He had forgotten that the density of the water would prevent his descending at sufficient speed to hurt himself, no matter from what height he fell.

It was a strange experience, but one to which Dick Dauntless was soon to grow accustomed, this moving, unhampered by life-line or air-tube, over the bottom of the sea.

At first the beating of his heart quickened now and again as some huge fish, hideous reptile, or enormous shell-protected creature, would swim past, stop to gaze at the two men, then make as though about to attack them.

But he soon found that the creatures of the sea were for the most part as much afraid of men as the animals on dry land, and he soon came to regard even the gaping jaws of an enormous dogfish without a tremor.

It is true he was compelled to draw his sword to protect himself against the attack of one of these shark-like creatures; but at the first touch of the cold steel the fish swam swiftly away, followed by a countless swarm of its comrades eager to devour their wounded companion.

To Dick Dauntless's alarm, they found the Octopus entirely hidden from view by the huge whale.

It was a wonder that, strongly made though she was, she had not been crushed like an egg-shell beneath that overwhelming weight.

Such, indeed, would have been her fate, but for the fact that the whale's enormous head and fluked tail rested upon the rocky walls of the narrow gorge through which the car had been moving.

For some minutes Captain Flame stood with folded arms regarding the enormous animal, then turned to Dick and said:

"Our only chance is to dig the Octopus out. Remain here. I will summon the whole crew to work with pick-axes and spades," ordered Captain Flame.

The next moment he had gone, leaving Dick alone amidst the swarming dangers of the deep at the bottom of the sea.

A Strange Steed.

Left alone in the depths of the ocean, Dick Dauntless could not quite repress a feeling of nervousness as he gazed around upon the dim forms gliding by on every side.

Immediately behind him arose a forest of seaweed, the large, writhing fronds waving in the water like the boughs of a tree in the wind.

Again and again he glanced fearfully into this weedy forest. It was teeming with life, and once he could have sworn he saw a pair of huge, saucer-shaped, lifeless eyes gazing at him from among the weeds.

At length he could stand it no longer. Eager for movement and occupation, he clambered up the shell-studded rock on which the whale's huge tail rested.

One of the flukes was turned sideways, and after a moment's hesitation Dick clambered on to it, then walked idly along the enormous creature's back.

The whale was thickly encrusted with shellfish of all descriptions, while here and there hung countless whiplike creatures, their mouths buried deeply into the flesh of their huge victim.

Presently he was astounded to see something that looked like a flagstaff sticking out from the centre of the whale's broad back.

Quickening his steps, he hastened towards it, and was even more puzzled to find that it was of wood, and that from its summit hung a dozen feet of rope attached to an iron ring.

The truth flashed upon him.

It was a harpoon which some North Sea whaler had plunged into the monster's back without striking a vital part.

He pushed against it; it yielded to his weight. Eager to carry the weapon back to the Octopus as a trophy, he grasped the shaft in both hands, and pulled it upward with all his might.

It yielded just sufficiently to induce him to persevere, and he commenced working it rapidly backwards and forwards.

Suddenly he clung to the harpoon with a tighter grip, for a shudder had passed through the huge body on which he stood. Then the whole enormous bulk reeled from side to side, there was a wild scurry in the water around the tail, the mass of flesh quivered beneath his feet, and the next moment he was clinging to the harpoon for dear life, as he was being borne through the water at the speed of an express train.

Dick Dauntless's first impulse was to let go his hold and slide off that moving mountain of flesh.

But a glance over his shoulder showed him the enormous flukes which were thrusting the whale through the water, and, realising that the slightest touch from those enormous living propellers would send him a mangled mass of humanity to the bottom, he determined to remain where he was.

Suddenly he felt the pressure of water around growing less, and a moment later involuntarily closed his eyes.

A brilliant white light surrounded him on every side. At first he was at a loss to account for the phenomenon. Then, with a wild, almost unbearable thrill of joy, he recognised the fact that the whale had risen to the surface, and the sunlight sea surrounded him on every side.

Cautiously Dick Dauntless stood erect to gaze around him. Sea, sea everywhere! Not so much as a cloud of smoke on the horizon from a passing steamer gave promise of possible rescue.

The boy gave himself up for lost.

Even if a ship hove in sight it was unlikely that the whale would allow it to approach near enough for him to be seen.

He knew that Captain Flame's wondrous diving apparatus would save him from drowning. But what of that? Better so quick and painless a death, than to wander lost amidst the rocks and weed-forests of the trackless ocean-bed.

Evidently the whale had not quite shaken off the effects of its collision with the Octopus, for it moved sluggishly through the water, until at last its movements ceased altogether, and it rolled slowly to the motion of the waves.

Twining his arm round the harpoon, Dick sank down on the monster's rough skin, and began groping about his neck, with the intention of removing his helmet and enjoying a few deep breaths of the pure sea-air.

Fortunately for him, the fastenings were too complicated to be mastered at a single attempt, but his groping fingers touched a small brass button that protruded from the forehead.

This he turned aimlessly backwards and forwards.

Immediately a portion of the glass that protected his face slid aside, and he could have shouted with joy when he felt the cool sea-breeze fanning his heated brow.

Then the thought struck him—what if the whale dived?

He was reassured by finding that the glass slid easily back, being held tightly in place by a strong spring.

After moving the shutter backwards and forwards until he had thoroughly mastered its secret, Dick Dauntless threw it open; then, with one arm flung round the harpoon, leant his chin on his hand, and, elbow on knee, gazed reflectively towards where the sun was sinking to rest.

Thus seated, he dozed off.

Suddenly he awoke, to find that he was being borne through the darkness by the swiftly-moving whale.

Realising that, had the monster dived whilst he slept his helmet would have been filled with water ere he could have closed it, Dick slid the glass shutter back in place.

As he did so his hand encountered a second small brass knob. Wondering for what this might be intended, Dick hesitated a few moments, then turned it from right to left.

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the only direction in which it would go. The result was startling.

From a slight protuberance above his head proceeded a small, but intense, ray of light, which shed a silvery path over the waves for several yards before him.

This further proof of the inventor's thoroughness and skill filled Dick Dauntless with admiration. Surely never before had so perfect and ingeniously contrived a diving apparatus been invented.

Unable to tell how long the light would last, Dick Dauntless switched it off, and, resuming his former position near the harpoon-shaft, awaited what might next betide.

It was well he was prepared for all emergencies. Suddenly he felt the head of his strange steed lowered, and had barely time to close his helmet, ere he was drawn beneath the water once more.

Fortunately the whale contented itself with moving at slower speed, and Dick experienced no difficulty in maintaining his position on its broad back. As the hours dragged slowly away an intense weariness crept over his tired frame. He knew he might easily have slid from off his enormous steed, and dropped gently to the bottom of the sea, but he clung tightly to the harpoon-shaft, overwhelmed with terror at the thought of finding himself hopelessly lost on that waste below.

A faint hope had arisen in his heart that the whale might carry him within sight of land, when he could slide into the water, and, following the upward trend of the bottom, walk ashore.

Presently he felt the whale rising. A few minutes later he could see the stars shining brightly overhead. Cautiously he rose to his feet. A loud shout of joy burst from his lips.

The whale had come to the surface between two lines of swiftly-moving ships, from the masthead of which shone variously-coloured lanterns, while the lights from the portholes made it seem as though he had come to the surface in a moving, brilliantly-lighted street.

Realising that none but naval ships could keep such perfect distance, and move with such machinelike precision, Dick uttered a loud hail, then, eager to show his position to men whom he thought would surely hasten to his rescue, he turned on the small, but powerful, searchlight that surmounted his helmet.

A pandemonium of sound burst from the vessels. Hoarse, mutual orders were hurled in a foreign language from the bridge, bugles blared, drums beat "To arms."

In a moment the regular double lines were broken as the ships swerved aside like frightened birds. A dozen searchlights were thrown upon the whale, then a shot rang out, and a shell from a quick-firer passed within a few feet of Dick's head.

"Don't shoot!" yelled Dick at the top of his voice.

But his cry was drowned in the roar of cannon, the spiteful crackling of machine-guns, and the sharp report of rifles, as the panic-stricken sailors poured a wild and ill-directed fire at what they had evidently taken to be a hostile submarine.

For some fifteen seconds Dick stood, the centre of a perfect avalanche of shot and shell, then the whale dived, and it was with a feeling of intense relief Dick found himself carried beneath the surface once more.

Dick's Fight for Life!

His light was still shining brightly, and by its beams, Dick Dauntless found the water streaked with blood issuing from where a quick-firer's shell had torn a gaping wound in the whale's side.

Maddened with pain, the huge animal dashed at a tremendous speed through the waves. It was only by laying flat upon its back, his arms clasped round the harpoon, that Dick managed to retain his precarious position.

For some ten minutes this mad rush through the water continued.

Suddenly the maddened brute raised its head until its huge body was almost perpendicular; then it shot upwards, like some enormous projectile hurled from the mouth of a gigantic gun.

Swiftly the pressure of water around the clinging boy lessened, and a minute later he was being carried swiftly through the air as the pain-maddened whale shot from out the sea like a hooked salmon.

For an appreciable space of time it remained poised in mid-air, then plunged back on to the waves with a splash which roared like thunder in Dick's ears.

Down, down, down it sank, dragging the bewildered, shaken, and half-fainting boy with it.

Right to the bottom it sped, then up, until within a fathom of the surface, when it commenced darting hither and thither,

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its huge body trembling and throbbing in the fearful agony which convulsed its huge frame.

Presently the whale quieted down, and Dick, feeling as though he had been subjected to an unmerciful pummelling, gazed about him.

The sea above, below, to right and left, before and behind, seemed a solid mass of fish of all descriptions, as they hovered round the stricken monster, waiting to feast upon its body when the last expiring sparks of life were gone.

Probably already they would have closed upon their prey, but were kept at a respectful distance by the flashing beams of Dick's searchlight.

Suddenly Dauntless saw the surrounding fish scatter in all directions, then shuddered as two long writhing forms glided into the circle cast by his searchlight.

So ominous was the stealthy approach of these snakelike creatures that Dick Dauntless was unable to take his eyes from their writhing forms.

At first he took them to be huge water snakes; then, as he noted their gaping mouths set with swordlike teeth, he recognised them as the whale's deadliest enemy, the thresher-sharks.

Another, and another, of the voracious creatures swam within the circle of light, then Dick Dauntless felt the mountain of flesh on which he stood, quiver with fear, ere, with a jerk, the huge creature hurled itself through the water.

The whale had recognised a foe against which its mighty strength was useless.

Blood running from its rounded sides, the whale shot upwards to swim at almost incredible speed along the surface. Two huge streams of water spouted like fountains from its breathing-holes as it found its way through the water. The smaller fry were left far behind, but the thresher-sharks had no difficulty in keeping up with the whale, their cold, evil-looking eyes fixed with fearful intensity upon their prey.

Suddenly the foremost shark shot ahead, then, flinging itself out of the water, fell with fearful force across the whale's head, its long, writhing tail curling like a whip-lanner about the huge form.

Then the others darted forward, and repeated the tactics of their leader.

The air was filled with the fearful thud of their falling bodies, whilst the splashing of the tortured whale sounded in Dick's ears like the roaring of an enormous waterfall.

Each time the thresher-sharks renewed the attack, Dick felt the huge mass of flesh beneath his feet quivering beneath the deadly blow.

Suddenly he started back with a cry of horror. One of the sharks had fallen almost at his feet. Its huge, evil-looking head was within twelve inches of where he stood.

With a cry of horror the boy sprang back. Instinctively he drew his sword, and as the shark wriggled towards him, lunged at it with all his strength.

He felt the blade pierce, then it glanced off the huge frontal bone. Losing his balance, Dick Dauntless sprawled over the writhing body. With a vicious snap, the shark's teeth met within half an inch of his leg.

The next moment he felt himself hurled through the air, and, whirling over and over as he fell, he was plunged into the sea.

Down he went, whirling round and round as he sought to gain an upright position in the water.

Suddenly a snapping sound, like the clicking of a mighty lock, pierced his ears. The next moment he saw the descending form of his enemy glide past.

Again it attempted to seize him, again it missed its mark by the hundredth part of an inch.

Swiftly the thresher-shark wheeled round, its small eyes fixed with fiendish intensity upon the boy.

But by this time Dick had regained a perpendicular position in the water.

Then commenced a strange fight beneath the waves—man against fish—boy against thresher-shark.

The vigour of its assault checked by fear of Dick's searchlight, the shark shot forward; but, striking out with both legs and his left arm, Dick not only managed to avoid his blood-thirsty foe's charge, but succeeded in plunging his sword to the hilt in its body.

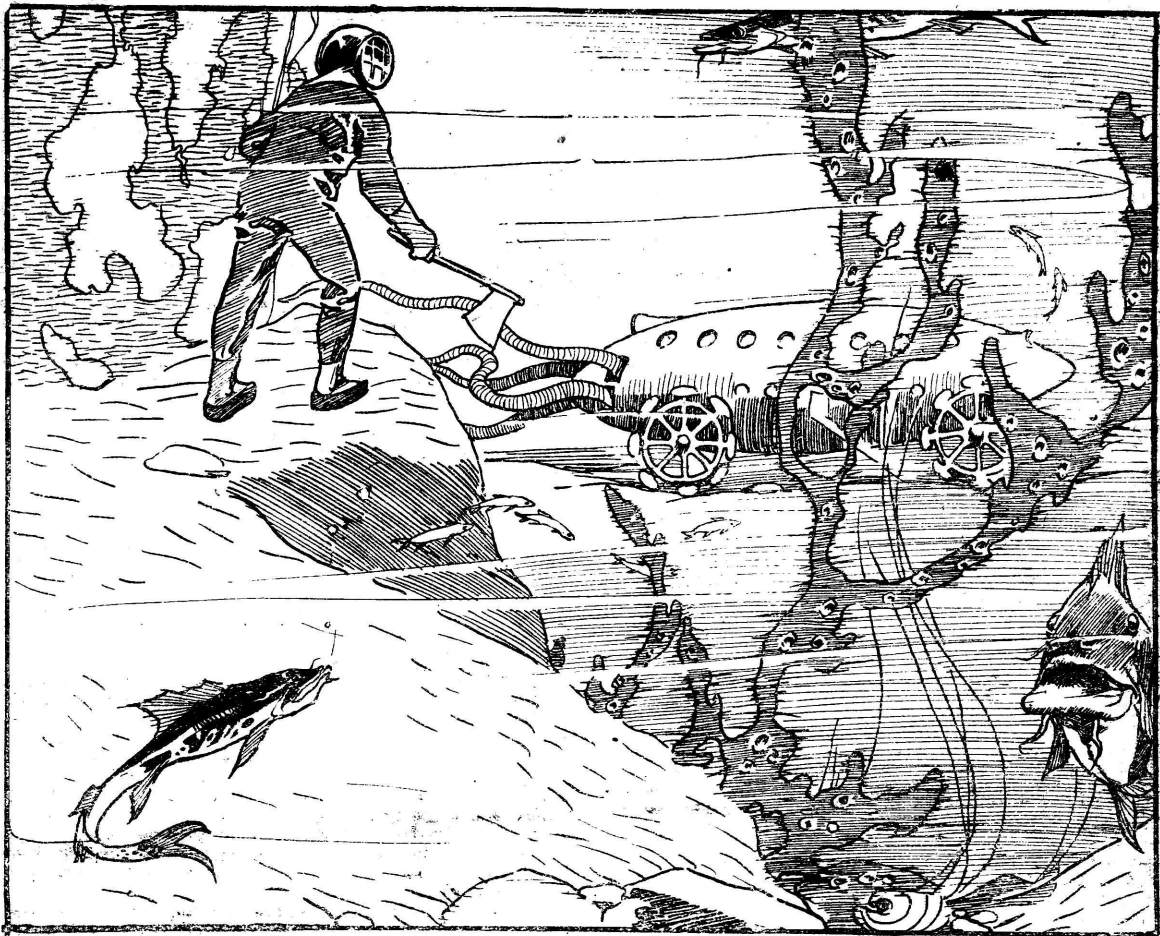
With a convulsive movement that almost snatched the blade from the boy's hand, the shark twisted itself free, leaving Dick for the moment master of the field.

Down he sank, glancing fearfully in the direction in which the monster had fled.

A sigh of relief escaped his lips when he stood at last on the rocky bed of the ocean.

But the next moment his relief was swamped with dismay as he saw his late opponent, snapping its huge jaws with baffled rage, stealthily drawing its thirty feet of flesh and sinew towards him.

Planting his feet firmly apart, Dick awaited the onslaught. A cry of dismay escaped his lips.



As Dick Dauntless reached the brow of a steep hill, on which the weed forest terminated, he saw, dim and indistinct in the distance, the slow-moving form of Captain Flame's wondrous construction. As fire is quenched by water, so Dick's hopes were extinguished as he saw the motor-car drawing each moment further and further away. In vain he shouted! (See page 26.)

His left ankle had been seized in a vicelike grip. Looking down, he found, to his horror, that the claw of a huge crab had closed over his leg.

As though conscious that its foe could not escape, the thrasher-shark came to a halt just out of reach of Dick's gleaming blade.

There it lay, horrible, repulsive, opening and shutting its fearful mouth, as though gloating over its anticipated meal.

In vain Dick strove to drag his ankle free from the crab's remorseless grip.

Hampered as he was, there could be no doubt as to what the issue of the fight would be.

Paralysed with terror, Dick watched the long, thin body trailing out beyond reach of his searchlight's furthest beams; he saw the mighty muscles—probably stronger than those possessed by any other inhabitant of the sea—contracting beneath its dull grey skin.

A scarce-formed prayer escaped his lips.

Tightening his grasp on his sword, he bravely awaited the end.

As though bent upon prolonging its victim's agony to the utmost, the shark remained for nearly half a minute poised for the spring; then a sharp pang of despair shot through Dick's heart as he saw it rise from the ground.

Even as he did so, Dick's prayer was answered.

A long, tapering arm shot from beneath what Dick had taken to be a mass of seaweed close at hand, and ere the shark could escape, a cablelike tentacle, armed with a double row of saucerlike suckers, closed around its writhing body.

Vain was the shark's enormous strength.

It had met the only enemy it feared.

Soon another feeler shot out and joined the first, then another, and another, until at length its struggles ceased.

Fascinated with a horror that for the moment robbed him of all other sensations, Dick saw the weeds gradually turn into a huge, rounded body, in the centre of which appeared a large, horned parrotlike beak, set between two enormous saucer eyes.

He saw the octopus's cruel beak plunged into the shark's hide, he heard the bones crunched; then, awakening, as it were, from the terror-maddened trance that paralysed his frame, he drew his axe, and aimed a frenzied blow at the huge claw which held his ankle prisoner.

Fortune guided his aim.

The keen edge of the axe, alighting between the joints of the crab's armour, cut deep into the flesh.

With a hissing cry, the crab released its hold, and, springing forward, Dick Dauntless ran with panic-stricken haste over the rocky seabed.

On he dashed, stumbling over outcropping rocks, scrambling through patches of clinging seaweed. Endowed with more than ordinary strength by the horror which surged through his whole frame, he burst headlong through every obstacle.

On he dashed, running, running, running, whither he cared not, so long as he placed as long a distance as possible between himself and that awful beaklike mouth, and the fearful dead eyes which haunted him in his sleep for many a long day.

Gradually he slowed down; then, looking wildly around him, saw a small cave half hidden beneath a curtain of waving seaweed immediately before him.

It might be the lair of some marine monster more terrible than any he had yet encountered; but it offered shelter from the terrors that surrounded him. Dropping on hands and knees, he crept through the narrow mouth, and, throwing himself down on the soft sand with which the cave was carpeted, fell into the deep slumber of utter exhaustion.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S!"

A New Tale of Tom Merry & Co., Jack Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The Perils of the Sea.

The bottom of the sea was brightened by the reflected light of the sun when Dick Dauntless awoke and crawled hopelessly from the cave that had sheltered him.

But with his awakening, new horrors crowded around him.

Barely had he surveyed the strange and wondrous scene, which, under other circumstances, would have been a source of keen delight to him, ere a slivering, creeping sound caused him to turn round, and he saw a huge, grotesquely-horrible creature, like nothing so much as a caterpillar with a body as big round as that of a full-grown ox, creeping towards him.

Here was a foe against which his puny sword would avail nothing.

Turning, he strode along a chasm between two rocky walls.

A few hundred yards' headlong flight with the caterpillar close on his heels, and the chasm narrowed, until at length he could scarcely thrust his way between the rocky sides.

But Dick cared little for that, for a glance over his shoulder had shown him the horror from which he had so narrowly escaped, standing, baffled, at the entrance to the gorge.

Presently the path widened once more, and Dick saw, spread out before him, a forest of enormous seaweed borne on stems in some cases as big round as the largest terrestrial trees, its wide fronds floating high above his head.

For a moment he hesitated.

What new horror might not that gloomy forest contain?

But retreat was unthinkable. It would be but to throw himself into the power of the loathsome, caterpillar-like creature from which he had but just escaped.

There was nothing for it but to risk what the forest might contain.

Sword in hand, Dick Dauntless strode into the deepening shadows cast by the extended branches of the seaweed trees.

He was sick with horror, faint through lack of food, and his brain was oppressed with the certainty that unless he was rescued, or could reach land, he would but have escaped the terrors through which he had passed to meet a slow, lingering death by starvation.

Yet determined not to give in whilst he had strength to struggle against fate, Dick Dauntless penetrated deeper into the forest.

Rescue!

The very word seemed mockery.

What help could reach him in those untrodden depths?

As though to answer to the thought, a long-sustained, mournful, groaning cry reverberated through the trees.

He started forward, the blood coursing swiftly through his veins, his flickering hopes bursting into renewed life.

For a moment his thoughts flew back to the dormitory at the college.

Before his mind's eye arose the long, double line of beds, with Jack Orde and himself sitting up listening to that call which had drawn them to the sea.

He knew it now as the Octopus's cry.

Again the mournful summons rang out, so close at hand that, with a responding shout, Dick forced his way through an undergrowth of weeds.

Presently he reached the brow of a steep hill, on which the weed forest terminated, and saw, dim and indistinct in the distance, the slow-moving form of Captain Flame's wondrous construction.

As fire is quenched by water, so Dick's hopes were extinguished as he saw the vessel drawing each moment further and further away.

In vain he shouted.

Those within the Octopus heard him not, and, all unconscious that the one they sought was so near, continued on their way.

For the first time Dick Dauntless gave way to despair.

Flinging himself down on the shell-strewn ocean bed, he burst into a flood of hot, scalding tears.

Why try to prolong an existence which was already forfeited?

His friends had already passed the weed-forest. It was unlikely that they would seek him there again.

A fearful temptation assailed the sorely-tried boy.

He had but to slide back the glass which kept the water from his face, and all his trials, all his terrors would be over.

Slowly he raised his hand to his head.

Almost unconsciously his hand rested upon the brass knob which worked the slide.

Suddenly his moving fingers were arrested.

Someone had touched him lightly on the shoulder.

With a wild sob of intense delight he turned.

Then the cry of joy died away in a moan of terror.

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The Last of the Venebia.

Both Bob and Ralph were puzzling about the whole occurrence. The man who had stabbed Tom was undoubtedly the Arab; yet it seemed absurd to suppose he had followed the young men to South America for the sole purpose of vengeance. Bob Harding was the man he had marked down; there was no doubt on that point. Neither of the three knew the Arab's character well enough to understand. Hali! Ahmed was a revengeful scoundrel; and although he had left Egypt because he was in danger of being arrested for murder, he had followed the comrades for the express purpose of dealing with Bob.

He had learnt their destination at Cairo, and, being ignorant, had not realised the extent of their journey. But with stubborn tenacity he had followed them right to Tecsaguay. He had plenty of money—stolen money—to pay his expenses, and it mattered little to him what part of the world he went to.

Thirty seconds after Bob had spoken the motor-boat reached the quay, and the civil engineer leapt to the shore. Ralph remaining in the boat with the intention of helping Tom to leave the boat. Bob had scarcely secured the painter, however, when both he and Bob were startled by a shattering roar from their rear.

They turned abruptly, and were just in time to see a brilliant flash of red flame shoot upwards, apparently, out of the water. For a second the whole outline of the Venebia could be seen, her funnels, bridge, and upper works being conspicuous by their absence. The next second all was darkness, and the echo of the roar reverberated loudly across the water. The silence then seemed trebly as intense as before.

"She's gone," exclaimed Ralph, in a subdued voice. "By Jove, Bob, it was soon over, eh?"

"I was sure it would be," replied the other. "With all that— Look!"

The heavens had suddenly parted asunder, as a brilliant lightning flash blazed out, and for a moment the two could see the outline of the battleship, as it heeled over at the last gasp. That one glimpse made them think—made them realise the extent of what had just been accomplished.

Had they not known the character of the ship—the massacres it had committed, and the wanton destruction it would have been responsible for—they would have felt a pang of sorrow at seeing the monster, in one second, dive to eternity. But there was nothing in their hearts but gladness to see the last of it. The wounding of their comrade had steeled their hearts to some extent, and now that the work was over, there was nothing to do but make themselves scarce.

The helpless figure of poor Tom was gently lifted out of the launch, and transferred with great care into the tonneau of the motor-car. He was conscious now, having been awakened by the roar of the explosion.

"Is it all over?" he whispered faintly.

"Yes, Tom," replied Bob gently, "the Venebia's lying at the bottom of the bay by this time. Hark, you can hear the wash against the quay!"

Large waves had commenced breaking against the stone-work, and they sounded noisy after the silence which had prevailed beforehand. Tom tried to grin.

"Good egg!" he murmured. "I knew you'd bring it off properly. We're going to start right away, now, I suppose?"

"Yes, Tom. We think it best to make straight for Rio. Provided the motor goes all right, we ought to do the journey in three or four hours. You can get proper medical attention there, if you can last out till then. Do you think you can?"

"I shall be all right, old chap. The pain's not quite so bad now; but I'm feeling beastly thirsty."

In a moment Bob had produced a flask and gave his friend a good pull of brandy. It seemed to put new life into him almost immediately, but it was very evident he was suffering greatly.

The rain still held off, although the thunder was now becoming louder and more continuous. Bob had a pretty good notion as to which way to drive, and headed the car straight for the centre of the town. There he would join the main road, and set out for the Brazilian capital.

The narrow street leading upwards from the quay was dark and deserted, the two brilliant acetylene lights showing the road before them distinctly. They had been forced to illuminate these owing to the sudden darkness which had come over the sky. Bob and Ralph sat in the two front seats, both of them feeling pleased with their success, and elated at the thought of leaving the Republic for ever. Their high spirits, however, were greatly dampened when their thoughts reverted continuously to the still form so close behind them.

"Looks as if we're going to get clear of the town without meeting anyone," remarked Ralph, as they turned into the main street. "I expect the skunks are rushing back now; that explosion wouldn't make them any the slower, either!"

"I suppose not," returned the civil engineer, bending down for a second, as he slipped his high speed in. "Jove! but this car can move—Hallo!"

He uttered the last word as they swept round a gradual bend in the roadway. Expecting to see a deserted street before them they were taken aback to behold, not two hundred yards distant, a whole multitude of soldiers and civilians. They were rushing along the street, jabbering and shouting excitedly. Some of them carried torches, and they paused irresolutely as they saw the oncoming car.

The chums had failed to hear them because of the loud hum of the motor, and they were somewhat startled to find their path blocked so effectively. Ralph bent closer to Bob as the latter bent over the steering wheel.

"Rush them!" he cried. "We shall be through before they know it!"

Bob nodded, and crouched lower behind the steering column.

Suddenly a muttered exclamation escaped his lips. They were almost upon the crowd of Tecsaguayans, and, right in the middle of the road, stood Halil Ahmed, his right arm roughly bound up to the elbow. The brilliant light from the headlamps had revealed his figure, and it could be seen he was gesticulating wildly, and pointing to the oncoming car.

"Great Scott!" muttered Ralph excitedly. "He's telling the brutes what we've done! It looks as if we're going to have a stiff time of it—"

Ralph broke off as Bob suddenly jammed the brakes on. He was forced to do this because the people were standing in the middle of the road, and it was impossible to dash through them without risking damage to the car. He did not stop, however, but continued onwards at about half his former speed.

"Stop!" cried a pompous-looking officer in Spanish. "Unless you do so immediately we shall not hesitate to fire!"

"Let her rip, Bob!" shouted the Army officer, standing upright, and drawing his revolver. "If we don't get through now it's all up!"

"It's a ten to one chance we get clear!"

"That's better than no chance at all," replied Ralph, flourishing his revolver. "Now, then," he continued, in the best Spanish he could muster, "clear the path there—the revolver's fully loaded, and I'll shoot down the first man—"

Crack—crack—crack!

Three sharp reports rang out. They had emanated from the firearms of three soldiers on the outskirts of the crowd, and Ralph bit his lip, as he felt a pain like the scar of a red-hot iron dart across his arm. The car was still moving slowly, for the soldiers refused to clear the roadway.

"It will mean death if you continue," began the officer, who took care that he stood behind three or four of his subordinates.

"Be hanged to you!" cried Ralph furiously. "Now then Bob, let her go for all she's worth. They'll jolly soon clear the path when they see we mean it!"

As he spoke he pulled the trigger of his revolver, and the bullet sped true to its mark. One of the men immediately in front grabbed his left wrist with a howl of agony, and for a second his companions were a little confused.

"Fire on them!" roared the officer. "On no account—"

Ralph turned like lightning, and the next second the Tecsaguayan officer cursed in fury, for a bullet from Ralph's revolver had run clean through his shoulder. A moment later a dozen rifles were levelled at the two figures in the car.

They seemed indistinct, for the night was pitchy dark, and those in front of the car could see nothing of the enemy

owing to the brilliant lights. Those behind had but an imperfect view. Nevertheless, it seemed as though escape was absolutely hopeless.

Then, at the critical moment, the whole earth shook with the reverberating roar of a mighty thunderclap, which had been preceded a second before by a blinding flash of lightning. The sudden interruption caused the men to pause for a minute, and in that minute the rain commenced to fall. But it could hardly be called rain, for it descended as though the very clouds above them had burst asunder. It was one blinding sheet, and Bob and Ralph gasped as they felt themselves pressed down by the force of the down-pour. It was a true tropical storm, and it had burst at the precise moment.

Ralph placed his ears close to Bob's.

"Now then," he roared. "They can't do anything in this."

The civil engineer set his teeth firmly, and jammed his clutch in once again. The large car jerked forward convulsively, then rapidly gathered speed. Before it a whole crowd of people were standing, half-dazed by the brilliant light and the soaking rain. Of these, however, Bob took no notice; it was no time for half measures, and he realised that if they were to escape it must be now or never.

The Tecsaguayans scattered like chaff as the motor bore down upon them, and for a second it looked as though the chums were to escape without another shot being fired. Then the enemy realised what was happening, and awoke to the fact that they were being cheated of their prey.

The car now had passed clean through the crowd, leaving one or two behind it bruised and battered. The crowd were shouting excitedly, and in the terrific downpour the outline of the motor could be faintly seen. It was travelling at a good speed now, and with a deafening crackle, a score of rifles sent their deadly missiles on their way after the fast-disappearing automobile.

Another volley rang out, and the chums thanked Providence that the marksmen were very inferior. Bob had all his work cut out to control the car, and wondered how long it would be before a turn in the road revealed itself.

"I'm going to have a last pot-shot," cried Ralph suddenly.

"No," exclaimed Bob, "don't! You might get potted yourself!"

"Rats!"

The Army man was in his element, and he turned round and levelled his revolver. They were nearly out of range by now, however. Four times he pulled the trigger, and as the last report rang out a dozen points of flame showed themselves in the darkness as the enemy made a last desperate attempt to stop their enemy.

As luck would have it, they succeeded in their object at the final moment. Ralph was in the act of tipping the spent cartridges from his revolver, when he suddenly uttered a cry of pain.

For a second he swayed unsteadily, then toppled headlong from the car to the ground! Bob looked up as he heard the cry, and was just in time to jamb the brakes on as hard as they would go when his comrade disappeared over the side.

He hit the ground with a thud and lay perfectly still.

Bob Harding jumped out of the car and bent over the still form of his chum, upon whose forehead a terrible wound could be seen.

"Ralph—Ralph, speak to me! Good heavens, he's unconscious, and those devils behind—"

Bob's face was haggard and deathly pale, and the car was standing close by, pulsating softly. Behind, coming closer every second, were the Tecsaguayan soldiers. They were shouting triumphantly, for they thought they had disabled the motor.

The rain was still descending in bucketfuls, and the ground was a mass of deep puddles. The engineer was desperate now—this last tragic happening had completely unerved him. Yet he understood that unless he moved immediately he himself would share the same fate as his two companions.

So he grasped Ralph's form and carried him to the car. Without ceremony he bundled him in. It was a matter of life and death for all of them, so he could not afford to be gentle. Then, as the Tecsaguayans commenced firing again, he restarted the automobile.

Again the storm helped him, for at that moment another blinding flash of lightning rent the sky asunder, and a sudden hubbub behind told him that more than one soldier had been struck. That was all he could distinguish, for close following the flash came the roll of the thunder.

"Safe!"

Bob gasped out the word after he had been rushing through the night for a matter of ten minutes. He looked behind him, and saw nothing but the blackness. Elvasge had been left behind, and he was now on the open main road to Rio de Janeiro.

(To be concluded next week.)

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S!"

OUR NEW WEEKLY FEATURE—

**Tom Merry & Co. Going Strong Next Week.**

The grand, complete school tale in store for all GEM readers next Thursday is called

"THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S,"

wherein it is related how the ancient rivalry between School House and New House is left in abeyance while a grand conspiracy is formed against the common enemy which, for the nonce, is none other than the Sixth Form at St. Jim's. There is lots of fun and excitement in

"THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S,"**"Deep Sea Gold."**

The next item on our programme for next Thursday is, of course, a good long instalment of our rousing serial,

"DEEP SEA GOLD."

This original story has aroused an extraordinary amount of interest and enthusiasm among GEM readers in every corner of the British Isles, and I am glad to be able to assure my chums that their interest in Reginald Wray's masterpiece will not be allowed to wane for a moment—in fact, the thrilling developments in next Thursday's long instalment will prove nothing short of amazing.

There will be a run on next week's GEM Library, too, so please don't forget to

Order In Advance.**From an Old Reader.**

Below is printed a brief note, but one calculated to rejoice the heart of any editor, and I heartily thank the sender of it for his loyalty. As for his suggestion, I will with pleasure add it to the long list of such suggestions which I have promised to bear in mind:

"Dear Editor,—I wonder how many of your readers can say that they have read every one of the 229 GEMS that have been published. Considering the brightness, healthiness, and cleanliness of your paper, these should number a good few. I am very pleased to say that I should number among them, and am likely to go on purchasing the GEM for a good few years yet. I would suggest, however, that the famous detective, Ferrers Locke, be introduced into your future tales a little oftener.—Yours faithfully,

"East Ham.
"K. W. H."

I wonder how many of my readers can claim a record similar to K. W. H.'s?

Back Numbers Wanted.

In case any of my readers may be willing to oblige him, I publish below a short note from a Gemite, who signs himself H. E. F.:

"293, High Road, Ilford.
"Dear Editor,—Just a few lines, asking you if you know of any Gemite who wishes to dispose of a complete set of the halfpenny edition of the GEM? I have read all the penny ones, and would like to get a set of halfpenny GEMS, as they afford such jolly good reading.

"Wishing you and your paper every success,—I remain, yours truly,
H. E. FRENCH."

Many thanks for your good wishes, H. E. F. I will leave it to your fellow-readers to supply your requirements.

A Careful Reader.

Here is another item from my postbag which speaks for itself:

"Dear Editor,—I consider the new feature—'This Week's Chat'—very interesting, especially the short articles. The GEM should be read by all British boys and girls.

"As I am now off for my holidays, I shall take jolly good care to see that my GEM is posted to me every week by my newsagents.—Yours truly,

"A GEMITE."

This Week's Article.**HOW TO RUN A FOOTBALL CLUB SUCCESSFULLY.**

As the football season proper opens within a week or two, enthusiasts desiring to form a club must set to work at once.

Likely members will have been approached before now, and we will take it that the club-to-be can absolutely rely upon a membership of at least twenty-five active subscribers.

A general meeting must be called, and the

committee and officers elected.

There should be a secretary, a treasurer, a captain and vice-captain, and three other members to help with the work at committee meetings.

Finance, of course, will be the first subject under discussion, and the meeting must decide upon the rate of subscription for playing members and for honorary members.

The expenditure during the first season will naturally be a heavy one, as goalposts, balls, and flags will have to be purchased. The rent of the pitch is also a heavy consideration.

If the club is a country one, and not in a big town, the rent of the ground should not be an expensive item. In towns a large number of clubs take advantage of the public recreation grounds, and if the members of the club-to-be decide to do this they must approach the town clerk for full particulars. In most cases there is a

small fee required

even for pitches in public recreation grounds.

It will be found that quite a handsome sum of money is required to run a club successfully, and members must make every effort they can to enlist the sympathy of their friends.

Each member should ask his father to become a vice-president to the club, and for this privilege the parent should be "dubbed" for a subscription.

A prominent public man in the locality should be invited to become the president of the club, and if he is a wealthy man—and a generous one!—he will, no doubt, come down "handsome-like."

As long as every member takes

an active interest

in the affairs of the club the secretary and treasurer will not be obliged to worry their heads off because of lack of funds.

The secretary must now write to all the local football clubs and arrange a list of fixtures. If the club boasts of a good membership two elevens can be run. When the first team is playing away the second team can entertain visitors on their own ground—and vice versa.

Club colours must be chosen, and every player should make a great effort to turn out at each match in uniform colours.

Nothing looks worse

or gives a club a more unenviable reputation than when its players "turn out" arrayed in a variety of outfits.

Next Thursday I will explain in my second article how the football-pitch should be marked out, and how the essential rules of the game must be observed.

THE EDITOR.

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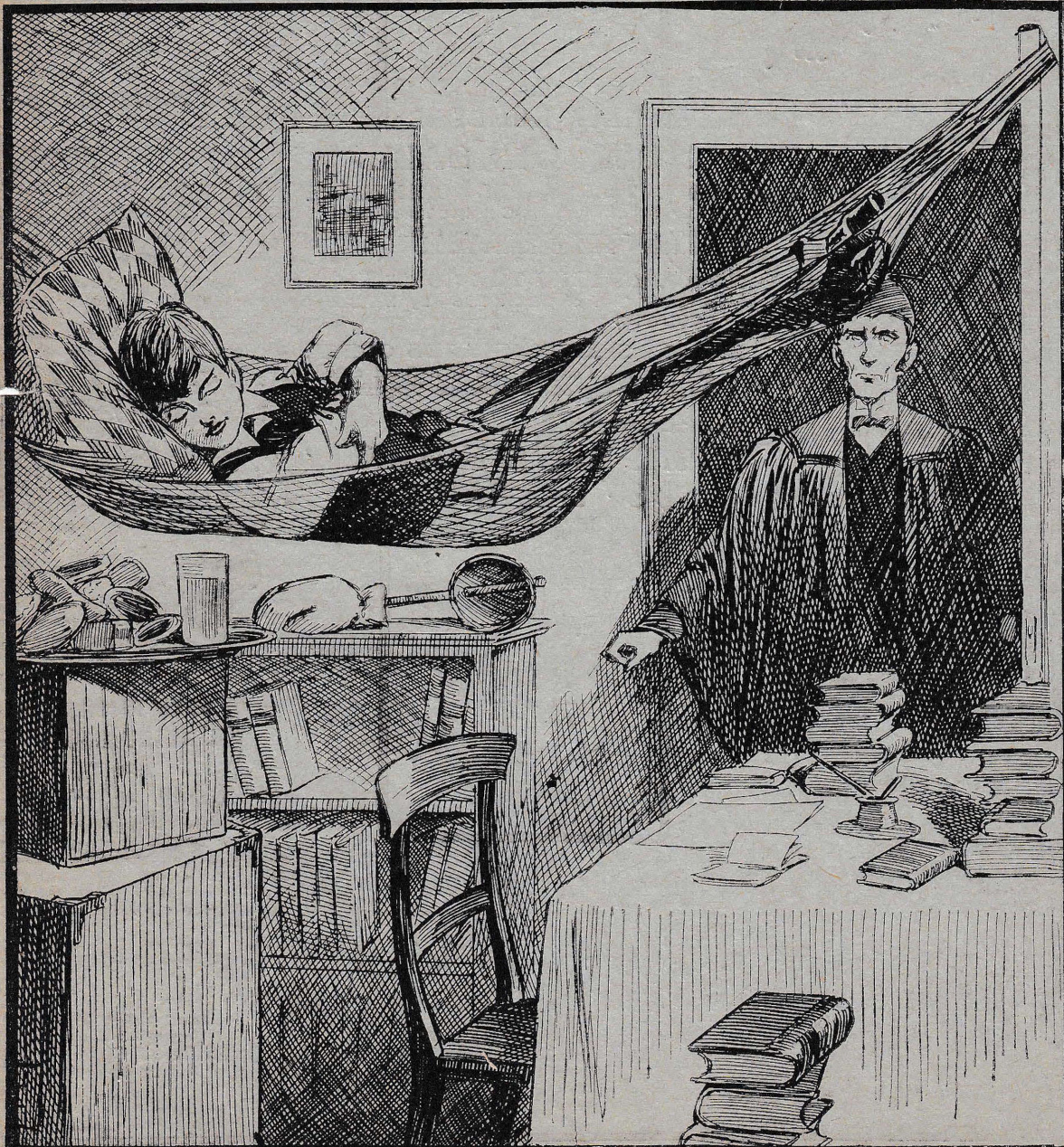
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