

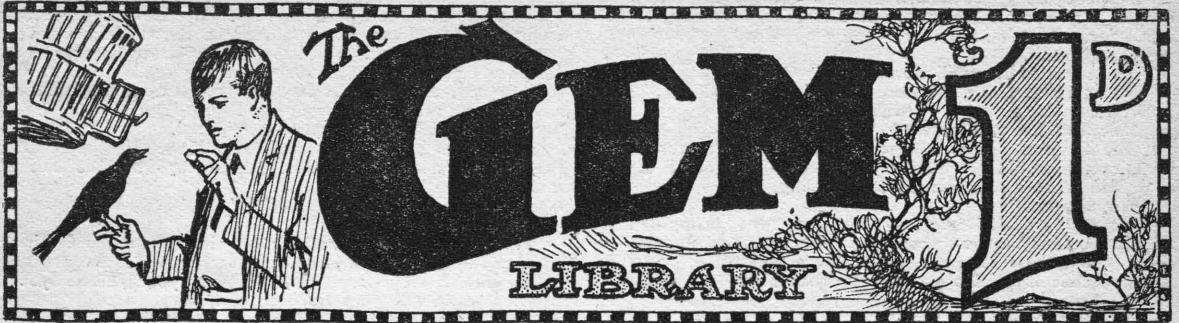
Next
Thursday:

"TOM MERRY & CO.'S MUSIC-HALL!"

A Grand Tale of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Every

Thursday.



Complete Stories for All and Every Story a Gem.



THE SCHOOLBOY NIHILIST!

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

: : By : :

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

The Expected Stranger!

"My hat! What a rotten day!"
"Yaas, watah!"
"Rotten isn't the word!" said Jack Blake discontentedly. "It's a swindle! I think we ought to have another half-holiday when the fog clears off to-morrow."
Tom Merry laughed.

The juniors were standing at the hall window in the School House at St. Jim's, looking out into the quadrangle. It was a half-holiday at the old school. But it was not likely to be much of a holiday to the St. Jim's fellows. The quadrangle was wrapped in a thick white mist, through which the gaunt trunks of the old elms loomed up in a ghostly way. Mist had found its way into the School House, in spite of closed windows and doors, and floated in the passages in little clouds and threads.

From the window the juniors could not see more than a dozen feet into the quadrangle. The nearest elms loomed up like spectres. The more distant trees and the school walls and the New House had disappeared from view.

During the morning the juniors, coughing and sniffing over lessons in the class-room, had hoped that the mist would clear off in time for footer in the afternoon. But it did not. It grew thicker and thicker, and it could not very well become any worse, unless it assumed the consistency of pea-soup.

No wonder Tom Merry & Co. growled as they looked out. "No blessed footer this afternoon," Tom Merry remarked. "It's beastly! No good even raiding the New House fellows in this mist! I don't know that I could get across the quad."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cheerfully. "If you fellows want to waid the New House I'll undahtake to guide you!"

"Yes, you'd guide us into the wall or into the stables," sniffed Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

Blake snorted.

He was very cross. It was bad enough to have mist in the Form-room, making them cough over lessons, and making the Form-masters snappish in temper. But to have a half-holiday "mucked up," that was really too "thick," as Blake described it, and it certainly showed that there was something wrong somewhere.

The mist had rolled up from the river the previous evening, after long rain. The weather was not cold. It was rather warm and muggy. Now that the mist was there, it looked like remaining. In the passages of the School House the lights were burning at half-past two in the afternoon, and each light was surrounded by a yellow halo. In the mist clinging to the window-pane, Monty Lowther was drawing impossible soldiers with his finger-nail. The chums of the School House were in danger of getting bored, a state they were generally far too healthy to get into. But when fellows were likely to be shut up for a whole afternoon in the house, what was there to do but to get bored?

"By the way," Tom Merry remarked presently, "this will be rather rough on the new chap."

Blake growled.

"Blow the new chap!"

"Certainly, if you like. But this will be rather rough on him, all the same. It will be a beastly walk from the station."

"He can take the hack."

"Worse still. It would only crawl in a mist like this. He would have an hour of it. I'd rather walk, if it were I."

"Well, I expect he's used to weather like this," said Monty Lowther. "Didn't somebody say the new chap was a Russian?"

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"Yes, I believe so."

"I expect they get it thicker than this in Russia," said Blake. "Blessed if I know what a Russian is coming to St. Jim's for. What's his name?"

"Ivan Patoff."

"You seem to know all about him."

"No; I think that's the sum total of my knowledge," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Levison told me."

"How did Levison know?"

"Oh, Levison knows everything. I shouldn't wonder if he knows how old the new chap is, and the colour of his eyes, and what his father did for a living."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "It is remarkable how that chap Levison finds out things. He ought to be a blessed detective or a policeman, or something of that sort. Do you know what Form the Wussian chap is comin' into?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; but I hear that he's a junior."

"I suppose he speaks English?" said Manners.

"I suppose so," said Tom Merry. "Russian would be rather thick, wouldn't it? I don't think even the Head can speak Russian. But, I say, it's a bit thick, isn't it, a new chap trying to find his way in the fog to the school. I've got an idea."

"Anything to break the monotony," grunted Blake.

"What's the idea?"

"Suppose we go down to the village and take some bicycle lanterns with us, and guide him here."

"Oh, rats! This fog is enough to choke a chap."

"Yaas, wathah; and it spoils one's clothes, too."

"Well, I think it's a good idea," said Tom Merry. "We can muffle ourselves up, you know. If the kid starts walking from the station, he may lose himself on the road. There are a good many turnings in the lane, and he won't be able to see the finger-posts in the fog. It would be rotten for him to wander out into Rylcombe Wood or, perhaps, on to Wayland Moor, and get lost."

"Bai Jove! Yaas."

"It would be a good deed, and you know how strong we are on good deeds."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And it would fill up this beastly, rotten, unspeakable afternoon."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

"Only there's one thing you've forgotten," said Blake.

"What's that?"

"We sha'n't get permission to go out. Kildare has warned us all that we're not to go out of gates to-day because of the fog."

"Bai Jove!"

"We'll ask permission," said Tom Merry. "Mr. Railton is sure to let us go when he knows that we're going to do a good deed."

"Good! It will be a change for us to out-Eric Eric," grinned Blake. "I shall fancy that I am a hero in 'Bit by Bit.' Come on!"

"I suppose I had better come with you," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "I should be sorry if you got lost."

And the juniors made their way to Mr. Railton's study. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, had his light burning, and it made his window look like a black square against the fog. There was a telephone in the Housemaster's study, and he was standing with the receiver in his hand, as the juniors knocked, and came in.

"Sorry, sir—" began Blake.

"It is all right," said the Housemaster. "What do you want? I am waiting for my call to be answered."

"If you please, sir—"

"P'waps you had better leave it to me, Blake. I think I shall be able to explain to Mr. Railton wathah better than you can. Ow! What silly ass twamped on my foot?"

"Shut up!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"If you please, sir," went on Tom Merry, "we hear that there is a new chap coming to St. Jim's this afternoon."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Quite correct, Merry. A Russian boy, named Ivan Patoff. He is expected at Rylcombe by the half-past two train."

Tom Merry's face fell.

"Oh! Then he will be there by now, sir?"

"In a few minutes," said Mr. Railton, with a glance at the clock. "Unless the train is delayed by the fog, as it will probably be."

"We thought of taking lanterns, sir, and going in a party to meet him," Tom Merry explained. "It would help us get through the afternoon—I mean, it would be a good deed."

Mr. Railton smiled.

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"But was a good thought, Merry. But I think you had better keep indoor in this mist. It is not good for you."

"We shouldn't lose our way, sir. We know every inch of Rylcombe Lane, and we would take a bicycle lantern each."

"Quite so, Merry. But it will not be necessary. I am telephoning to the stationmaster at Rylcombe now to look for the boy, and see that he takes the station cab, and does not attempt to walk through the fog."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry, disappointed.

Mr. Railton held up his hand for silence. He listened, and the juniors stood quiet. Mr. Railton spoke back into the receiver.

"But is there no other vehicle?"

Inaudible reply.

"Very well! Will you look for the boy, and ask him to wait at the station until someone arrives from the school to guide him here. Very well! Thank you! Good-bye!"

Mr. Railton hung up the receiver.

"Your suggestion comes just at the right time, as it happens, my boys," the Housemaster said, turning to the juniors, with a smile. "The stationmaster says that the driver of the station cab has gone home, on account of the fog, and there will be no vehicle at the station to-day. The new boy will have to walk, and, therefore, it becomes necessary to send someone to meet him. I should have sent a prefect—"

Mr. Railton paused.

"Bettah leave it to us, sir," said D'Arcy.

"Well, if you really wish to go you may," said Mr. Railton. "If you take lanterns, and keep together there is no reason why you should not go. You must promise me to go directly to the station and back."

"Certainly, sir!"

"Very well, you may go. The stationmaster says that the train is delayed by the fog, and so you may arrive by the time it gets in. In any case, he will ask the Russian lad to wait at the station until someone comes from the school."

"I suppose the kid—ahem—I mean the new boy speaks English, sir?" Blake asked.

"Oh, yes! His mother is English, and resides in England. His father was a Russian, but is dead now. While we are upon the subject, I may add that I should like you boys to show some kindness to this lad, who is a stranger in our midst, unacquainted with English customs, and will probably feel very lonely and homesick at first, so far from his native country."

"Yaas, wathah, sir," said D'Arcy. "We'll stand by the chap like anythin', sir."

"Certainly, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"Thank you! Now you had better hurry off!"

And the juniors left the Housemaster's study.

CHAPTER 2.

Too Late!

TOM MERRY & CO. did not take long to make their preparations. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—were going, and so were Blake and D'Arcy. Digby and Herries, of the Fourth, were asked, but they preferred the chess-table before the fire in Study No. 6. The five juniors muffled themselves up in thick coats and scarves, with caps pulled down over their ears, and put on their thickest boots. The roads round St. Jim's were heavy and slushy with late rains. Each of the fellows took a bicycle lantern, and saw that it was well filled, and in good order. The mist was so thick that it would have been impossible to keep a straight course along the road without a light.

The party had gathered in the hall to start, when Levison of the Fourth came up. Levison eyed them curiously.

"Going out?" he asked.

"No!" said Blake solemnly. "We've dressed up like this to walk up and down the passages. The lights are to show up the beauties of St. Jim's as seen from the interior of the School House."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison scowled.

"Well, I hope you'll get lost," he said charitably. "It would be a blessing for the school. I thought the fellows had been ordered to keep inside the house."

"We're going to meet the new chap," Tom Merry explained.

"The Russian!"

"Yes. We are Ericking, you see," Blake explained. "We are going to do a good deed."

"Oh, rats! I'm curious to see that fellow Patoff, all the same," said Levison. "I wonder—"

"What do you wonder?" asked Tom Merry, struck by the peculiar intonation in the voice of the cad of the Fourth.

"There was a Patoff in the papers some time back," Levison remarked.

Blake's lip curled.



Levison's eyes gleamed as he heard a strange foreign voice speaking in the gloom on the other side of the tree. Then came a hoarse murmur in English. "So you've hidden the dynamite under the loose plank in the floor of Study 6, Patoff?" The listener felt his face and hands go clammy with fear! (See Chapter 10.)

"Yes, you read the papers, don't you—police reports and criminal cases, and so on?" he exclaimed. "Blessed if I can understand your taste!"

"I suppose I can do as I choose," said Levison, with a sneer. "Anyway, I know there was a case of a Nihilist explosion in St. Petersburg not so very long ago, and a Russian named Patoff was killed in it."

"Then that can't be this Patoff!" said Arthur Augustus sagely. "This Patoff is quite alive, deah boy."

"You ass!"

"Weally, Levison—"

"I dare say Patoff is a common name in Russia," said Levison. "All the same, it may have been some relation. We don't know who this chap's father was."

"His father's dead," said Tom Merry sharply.

"Might have been the same man, then," said Levison. "I think the Head ought to look into the chap's antecedents before he lets him come here—"

"You'd better go and tell the Head so, then!" said Tom Merry sharply. "Come on, you fellows."

"I'll come with you if you like—"

"Thanks! We don't like!"

Levison gritted his teeth, and watched the chums of the School House as they went out. There was a very dark look upon the thin, hard face of the cad of the Fourth.

Levison was a peculiar fellow in some respects. He was certainly clever, and he was remarkably keen in his judgments; but he was of an over-suspicious nature, and, as Blake had said, he was really too keen. He prided himself upon being able to read people's motives, but the motives he read were always bad ones; good motives he never understood, and never believed in. If anyone showed him friendliness, he suspected an artifice; and, needless to say, that made friendship impossible for him.

In the most confidential moments he would bring out some sarcastic or cynical remark that would put the other fellows' backs up at once. Even when Levison was right in his disparaging opinions, nobody admired his keenness very much. Fellows did not appreciate having their little faults and foibles exposed in a merciless way; nor did they, as a rule, care to see the faults of their friends too keenly. And Levison was really too keen. More than once his suspicious nature had led him to suspect too much, and had caused

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the discovery of mare's-nests, and covered himself with confusion.

Levison was not the kind of fellow to pull well with Tom Merry & Co. They were civil to him when he left them alone, but they never stood upon much ceremony with him. If they had asked him cordially to join in their excursion, he would have suspected immediately that they had some underlying motive in doing so. It was not worth while to waste too much courtesy upon such a fellow, Blake considered; and even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, whose graceful manners out-Grandisoned Grandison, sometimes forgot his natural politeness when he was dealing with the cad of the Fourth.

"Groo!" gasped Blake, as he descended the steps of the School House. "Groo-o-o-o-oh! Talk about pea-soup!"

"Bai Jove! It is wathah thick, you know."

"Soup!" said Tom Merry. "Can't be helped, though. Breathe through your noses—"

"I've only got one," replied Blake

"Ass! And keep your mouth covered up. And come on!"

"Pewwaps I had bettah lead the way—"

"Perhaps you had better dry up!" said Monty Lowther. "Keep to the path, and—"

"Bettah take a short cut to the gates," said Arthur Augustus. "We've got no time to waste. The twain will be gettin' in at the station."

"Short cuts are likely to turn out long cuts in the fog," said Manners wisely. "We'll stick to the path."

"Oh, wats! Follow me!"

And Arthur Augustus plunged into the fog.

"Come back!" yelled Blake.

"Wats!"

"After him!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The silly ass will get lost in the quad., and delay us an hour if we let him."

The juniors broke into a run. D'Arcy broke into a run, too, keeping a good lead, his lantern gleaming through the yellow mist.

"Come on, deah boys!" he shouted. "Here we are!"

Something dark and square loomed up before the juniors, but it was not the old stone arch of the gateway of St. Jim's. It was the outline of a house, and windows could be seen with lights gleaming out into the mist.

"It's the New House!" gasped Tom Merry, staring up at a lighted window. "There's the window of Figgins's study—there's Figgy's shadow on it."

"Yes, rather. Gussy, you ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus halted in dismay. His short cut had led the juniors to the New House, instead of to the school gates. The swell of St. Jim's turned.

"Nevah mind!" he exclaimed. "It's all wight. Follow me!"

Blake caught him by the arm just in time.

"Stop, you ass—"

"Welease me, deah boy!"

"You're going to follow us this time," said Blake grimly. "Take his other arm, Tom Merry. Don't let the ass get away."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on!"

And the juniors, at a more moderate speed, picked their way to the gates, and emerged into the road. There the way was clearly marked by high hedges on each side, upon which the lantern light gleamed as the juniors flashed the rays to and fro.

"Buck up, now!" said Tom Merry cheerily.

And the juniors tramped off through the blinding mist towards the village. Lighted on their way as they were, they could not go so quickly as usual, and twenty minutes or more had elapsed before they saw the first house of Rylcombe.

"Here we are, at last!" said Blake, coughing. "And here's the giddy station."

The air was clearer in the village. The juniors reached the railway-station, and made their way at once to the stationmaster's office. There was a large schoolboy's trunk in the vestibule, labelled for Rylcombe and St. Jim's, but no sign of its owner. But it was a proof that the train had come in, and that Ivan Patoff had arrived.

"He's here," said Tom Merry. "I hope he's waited for us."

"He was instwucted to do so," said D'Arcy. "We shall find him here all wight."

But the stationmaster had a different tale to tell. He shook his head when Tom Merry asked him where the new arrival was.

"He's not here," he replied.

"But the train's come in?" asked Blake.

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"THE SCHOOLBOY MINSTRELS!"

"Yes; ten minutes ago."

"You had Mr. Railton's message on the 'phone—"

"Yes; and I told the boy, but he wouldn't wait. He seemed to be mighty anxious to get off," the stationmaster explained. "He left his box here, to be sent on to the school, as the hack wasn't running, and walked out. I explained to him that he would get lost in the mist, but he wouldn't take any notice. I hope he'll get to the school all right."

Tom Merry gave a low whistle.

"Then he's lost already!"

"Bai Jove, yaas! If he had been goin' along the lane, we should have passed him."

"You might not have known him, especially in the mist," said the stationmaster.

"But nobody at all passed us," said Tom Merry.

"Well, I'm sorry. I did my best to stop him going, but he simply would go," said the stationmaster. "I rung Mr. Railton up at the school to tell him the boy had started."

"That was after we left, of course," said Tom Merry.

"Well, it can't be helped. Thank you, sir."

The juniors returned to the station doorway, and looked out into the misty street. There was no one to be seen in the mist. The new boy had arrived, and he had started for St. Jim's. Tom Merry & Co. had not passed him in the lane. What had become of him?

CHAPTER 3.

The Mystery of the Russians.

THE juniors were silent and anxious.

That the Russian lad was lost seemed certain. And Mr. Railton had told them that they were to go directly to the station and back. Under the circumstances, they could hardly venture to make a search for the boy. Besides, if they made a search, what chance would there be of finding him? If he had not taken the right road, he might have arrived anywhere. There was no telling, or even guessing, where he might be. In the mist, he would not be able to find his way again, once he had lost it.

"Well, we're done!" said Tom Merry at last.

"Quite done!" said Monty Lowther. "The fellow's an ass! Why couldn't he stay in the station till we came, when he had Railton's orders to stick here?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as wotten bad form of him to go off like this, and I shall certainly tell him so."

"I hope he won't get into trouble," said Tom Merry.

"Well, it's no good our staying here. We'd better get off."

And the juniors left the station, and tramped down the misty street. They were in an annoyed frame of mind. There was no reason, that they could see, why Ivan Patoff should not have remained at the station until they arrived. It was not exactly the right thing, on his part, to start by himself, when he had been told that there were fellows coming from St. Jim's to meet him and take him to the school.

"I shall ask the boundah for an explanation," said Arthur Augustus, in a very severe tone.

The juniors left the village behind, and plunged into the thicker mist of the lane. In the hope of catching sight of the lost boy, they kept their eyes well about them. They had reached the cross-roads when Tom Merry suddenly halted.

"Hark!" he exclaimed.

There was a sound of coughing in the fog. Dimly, through the mist, two figures loomed up, standing by the sign-board on the grass plot in the centre of the cross-roads.

Two men were trying to read the directions there, and trying in vain. They were speaking, but their speech was

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strange to the ears of the St. Jim's juniors. Not a single word was intelligible to Tom Merry & Co.

"My hat!" Blake ejaculated in a low voice. "They're talking Russian!"

"Bai Jove!"

There was no doubt about it. The men were certainly talking in a foreign tongue, and the juniors knew enough of French and German to know that it was neither of those languages; and it could not be Dutch, or they would have recognised the similarity to German. It was not of the softness of Spanish or Italian.

"It's Russian," said Blake. "They must be friends of young Patoff—come down with him, most likely. There aren't any Russians living round here."

"They must have come with Patoff, surely," said Monty Lowther. "But it's queer that the stationmaster didn't mention that the kid had friends with him."

"Jolly queer!"

The two men at the signpost had caught sight of the juniors. They came towards the boys quickly. Tom Merry & Co. could hardly see their faces, they were wrapped up so closely against the cold. One of them was a tall and powerful fellow, with very broad shoulders; the other slim and lithe. Both were evidently foreigners. The tall man made a sign to the boys, and spoke in English in a queer, broken way. The other man was silent, as if he did not know the language.

"We are strangers here," the foreigner said. "You tell us the way?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"We look for road to school," the foreigner explained. "A school which is, perhaps, here, which calls itself St. James's School."

"It's our school," said Tom Merry. "We belong to St. Jim's. May I ask if you are friends of Ivan Patoff's, sir?"

The man started.

"Ah! You know Ivan Patoff? Yes, I am a—a friend of him—a great friend—and it is him I seek to find. We miss him in the mist, isn't it?"

"I suppose you came down with him?" said Blake.

The foreigner nodded.

"Yes," he said, with a peculiar gleam in his eyes. "In the steam train with Ivan Patoff. That is how."

"We've just been to the station to meet him," Tom Merry explained, "but he left before we got there. He seems to have missed the road, as we didn't pass him coming from the school. And you have lost him, too?"

"Yes, yes," said the Russian. "We lose him because of the mist. He disappear in the road, and we look, and no find."

The slightly-built man spoke in his own tongue, and the tall man listened, and turned to the boys again.

"You know not where is Ivan Patoff?"

"We haven't an idea, sir."

"Perhaps it is that to the school he has already come?"

"He might have got there; I don't think it likely. But if you're friends of his, we can show you the way to the school," said Tom Merry. "You can see the Head about it."

The two Russians spoke together in their own tongue. It sounded strange enough to the ears of the juniors. They could not make out the meaning of a single one of the strange, rapidly-uttered sentences.

Blake stamped his feet to keep them warm. Arthur Augustus took off his eyeglass and polished the mist off it while he waited. The two men seemed to be at a loss. Round the group the mist thickened, hiding the hedges from their sight, and the signpost, with the clump of trees round it, and the drenched grass. The tall Russian turned to Tom Merry again at last.

"You have tell me that Patoff no pass you as you come from school?"

"That is so, sir."

"Then he could not have gone that way, I think."

"I suppose not."

"Then it useless is to go us to the school with you," said the Russian, speaking the unaccustomed language slowly and with difficulty. "We look in other place. I thank you for what you tell me, young sir."

"Not at all."

"You point out directions to us, isn't it, before you go?" added the Russian.

"With pleasure."

Tom Merry indicated the bearings of the four roads. The Russian thanked him again, and then the two men disappeared in the mist towards the village. They evidently hoped to find the boy they sought in that direction.

"Queer!" said Monty Lowther.

"Blessed if I quite catch on to all this!" said Tom Merry. "Well, come on! This blessed fog is getting into my chest."

The juniors tramped on past the signpost in the middle of the cross-roads. As they passed it there was a rustle in the thick, low bushes that surrounded it, and a boyish figure stepped forth into view. The juniors halted, staring at it in blank astonishment. The stranger was a boy of about Blake's own age, with a dark and handsome face, and very bright and intelligent dark eyes. That he was a foreigner could be seen at a glance, though he was dressed in ordinary English clothes, and the juniors could see the top of an Eton collar peeping from his overcoat. He made a hurried sign to the juniors.

"You belong to St. Jim's?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "Did you hear us speaking to those chaps?"

"Yes, yes."

"Bai Jove! You were hidden here all the time?" Arthur Augustus exclaimed, in amazement.

The lad nodded.

"Yes, yes. I—"

"You are Ivan Patoff, I suppose?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes; that is my name."

"Then why on earth didn't you show yourself when your friends were asking for you?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"They are not my friends," said the lad, speaking in perfect English, though with a trace of a foreign accent. "They are my enemies. I did not wish to see them. I heard you say that you belonged to the school I am going to. Will you take me there?"

"That's what we came out for," said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

"I thank you!" said the lad, as he joined the juniors, after an anxious glance down the road. "You are very kind. I heard what you said—you came specially down to the station to meet me and guide me to the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I thank you very much! I am sorry that I could not wait; but, you understand, those men came down in the same train, and I wished to elude them," Ivan Patoff explained hurriedly.

"Then they were lying to us?" Manners exclaimed.

Ivan nodded.

"Yes, yes; they were lying."

Tom Merry whistled.

"My hat! Do you mean to say that they want to do you any harm, Patoff?"

"I cannot say. But I did not wish to see them. You understand, they are friends of my father, who is dead, and I wish to speak to them no more. It is my mother's wish also. That is why I did not wait at the station. You understand, I saw them step from the train, and I left the station at once. I am glad that it was foggy. But that is all."

The juniors were silent from astonishment. The Russian lad was also silent. It was not till they were nearly at St. Jim's that Tom Merry spoke again.

"I suppose you hid in the bushes to keep away from them, Patoff?"

"Yes, yes."

"What would they have done if they had seen you?"

"I cannot say."

"Here's St. Jim's," said Manners.

The juniors entered the school. Tom Merry & Co. piloted the Russian lad across the misty quadrangle and into the School House, and Tom Merry pointed out Mr. Railton's study to him. The Russian lad laid a hand upon his arm.

"You will not talk about this?" he said, in a low voice. "If you are kind, you will keep silent. I do not wish the matter to be talked about."

"All serene!" said Tom Merry. "But you will have to explain to Mr. Railton. He's our Housemaster, you know, and he gave instructions for you to stay at the station."

"Yes, yes; I understand."

"There's his study."

"Thank you!"

The Russian boy walked away to the Housemaster's study. Tom Merry and his comrades looked at one another.

"By Jove," said Tom Merry at last, "the new kid's arrived, and he's brought a giddy mystery with him apparently! I wonder what it all means."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said very thoughtfully:

"Yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 4.

Levison Knows Something.

"I 'VE been thinkin', deah boys—"

"Not really, Gussy!" exclaimed Blake, looking at his chum with an expression of great astonishment.

Digby, who was making toast in Study No. 6, and Herries, who was buttering the toast as fast as Digby made it, chuckled together.

"Weally, Blake—"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 209.

Blake shook his head seriously. "Don't begin these things too suddenly, Gussy. Better lend a hand setting the table. Where's the salt-cellar?"

"Pwaw don't be an ass, Blake! I have been thinkin' that undah the circs.—"

"We shall want some pepper, too."

"That undah the circs. it would be only decent to ask the new chap into the studay to tea. It's a wotten day for him to awrive at St. Jim's, and he must have a wotten bad opinjon of the Bwitish climate, but we might give him a good impressjon of Bwitish hospitality. What do you think?"

"Good idea!" said Blake cheerily. "He's a mysterious sort of beggar, but he looks decent enough. Let's have him, if he'll come."

"He is hardly likely to wefuse my invitation, I suppose?" said the swell of St. Jim's, with considerable dignity.

"Not if you put on your fascinating smile," agreed Blake.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Go and waylay him outside Railton's den, and bring him along," said Digby. "I dare say he's hungry, after his journey. I know I am, and I haven't been on a journey. It's rather early for tea, but it's dark enough for supper."

"Yaas, wathah! I—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remark was interrupted. The study door was pushed open, and Levison, of the Fourth, looked in. He had his coat on, and his cap in his hand, and his boots were splashed with mud. There was a peculiar expression upon Levison's face.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "Have you been out?"

Levison nodded.

"Yes; I came after you," he explained. "I had made up my mind to go to the station, you see, and as you didn't want my company, I came after."

"We didn't see you," said Blake shortly. He was a little worried by the information. The juniors had promised Ivan Patoff to say nothing about the meeting with the two Russians, and it occurred to Blake that Levison probably knew already.

"No; I lost you in the mist, too," said Levison coolly.

"I didn't see the new kid, either."

"It's queeah we didn't pass you in the lane," said D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the cad of the Fourth. "Did you keep out of sight on purpose?"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Never mind what I did," he replied. "I hear that you chaps brought the Russian kid in. What do you think of him?"

"He seems to be very decent."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison smiled sarcastically.

"And what do you think of his friends?" he asked.

Jack Blake started.

"His friends!" he echoed.

"Yes," said Levison coolly. "Or his enemies, if you prefer the term. I don't know which they are, but they seemed mighty keen on finding the Russian chap."

"What are you talking about? Have you been watchin' us?"

"Perhaps."

"You uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy. "Why didn't you show yourself, then?"

"Have you been talking to the men?" asked Blake.

"Yes. I met them after you had left them, and they asked me if I had seen the Russian kid on the road."

"And you told them—"

"That I hadn't. What did they want to find him for?"

"Blessed if I know," said Blake shortly. "It's no business of mine, or of yours, either. I don't see that it matters to you, Levison."

"It may matter to us, if we've got a giddy Nihilist in the school."

"What!"

"Don't talk wot, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "A kid of fourteen or fifteen could not be a Nihilist. You are fed up on those wotten newspaper reports."

"I know what I know," said Levison. "I've been thinkin' out where I heard the name of Patoff before. I know now. It was the name of a Russian Nihilist who was killed in an explosion in St. Petersburg two years ago. He tried to blow up the Police Bureau, and was blown to bits with his own stuff. It was reported that he was the inventor of a new and very powerful explosive, and that the secret of making it died with him. I shouldn't wonder if he was a relation of this Patoff merchant."

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats, deah boy! I wegard you as an uttah ass!"

"You've read those blessed newspapers till they've got into your head, Levison," said Blake. "I think you're a silly fathead!"

"Well, we shall see what we shall see," said Levison coolly. "I'm going to ask him if his father was Paul Patoff, who was killed in St. Petersburg."

Blake's brow darkened.

"Don't ask him anything of the sort!" he said sharply. "Let the chap alone! If his father's dead, it's very likely a tender subject with him, and he won't want to jaw about it. Let the kid alone."

"I suppose I can do as I like?" said Levison, with a sneer.

There was a step at the door.

"Please excuse me!" said a soft, musical voice. The Russian junior looked into the room. "This is Study No. 6, I think?"

"That's it," said Blake. "D'Arcy was just coming to look for you. Will you have tea with us, kid? I suppose you are hungry?"

"Yes; I am hungry. You are very kind. Mr. Railton told me I was to ask Blake to show me my study. I am to share No. 8 with Reilly and Hancock—I think they are the names," said the Russian boy. "Mr. Railton said you would show me to the dining-hall for my tea."

"So I will!" said Blake cheerily. "Does that mean that you are coming into the Fourth Form? I suppose it does." Ivan nodded.

"Yes, I am put into the Fourth Form," he said.

"You shall see the dining-hall at supper-time," said Blake.

"You're going to have tea with us. By the way, I'm Blake. That long-legged chap is Herries—"

"Look here, Blake—"

"That's Digby, and the other is the one and only."

"Weally, Blake—"

The Russian junior smiled.

"And this, also, is a friend of yours?" he asked, with a graceful foreign bow to Levison, who was staring at him.

"Ahem!" said Blake. "He's in the Fourth, that's all. That's Levison. Good-bye, Levison!"

"I'm not going yet," said Levison coolly. "I'm going to speak to Patoff first."

Blake frowned.

"You're going to do nothing of the sort!" he exclaimed sharply. "Get out!"

"Rats! Look here, Patoff—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake.

"Was your father—" went on Levison, unheeding.

The next moment the cad of the Fourth broke off, with a gasping ejaculation. Digby and D'Arcy had seized him at the same moment, and he was bumped heavily upon the floor of the study.

The Russian junior looked on in astonishment. He was new to the ways of English boys, and decidedly new to the ways of the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Ow!" roared Levison. "Leggo! Yow!"

"Get out, then!"

"Yow! I won't till— Ow!"

"Chuck him out!" said Blake.

Herries lent a hand, and the three juniors jerked the struggling and gasping cad of the Fourth to the door. He was sent whirling through, with arms and legs flying, into the passage, and there was a roar. Three juniors had just reached the study door, and they were turning into the doorway when Levison came flying out.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Sorry, you Shell chaps! Ha, ha, ha! Sorry, Lowther! Sorry, Manners! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" shouted Tom Merry, staggering. "What the dickens—"

"Sowwy, deah boy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We were just showin' Levison out, that's all, you know!"

Weally sowwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison was sprawling on the floor of the passage. Manners had fallen upon him, and had risen to a sitting posture on Levison's chest, and seemed in no hurry to move. Levison gasped under the weight of the Shell fellow.

"Ow—ow, gerroff!" he gasped, painfully.

"You'd better cut, Levison," said Blake. "If you show your nose in this study again, you will get it punched hard! Buzz off!"

And Manners having risen to his feet, Levison thought he had better go. He did not feel quite equal to pursuing the argument any further just then.

Tom Merry came into the study, nodding cheerfully to the Russian junior, and dusted down his clothes.

"We were just coming to tea," he remarked. "I hear you are in funds, and it has never been said that the Terrible Three failed to turn up to tea when fellows were in funds. Can we help you?"

Blake laughed.

"Yes; you can get the jam out. We've got a new pot—a three-pounder. One of you buzz off and borrow a soap-dish."

"Good egg!"

And the Terrible Three lent a hand cheerfully in the preparations for tea. Ivan Patoff watched them with wonder and interest in his dark eyes. Tea in a junior study at school was a new and strange experience for Ivan Patoff, and he was beginning to think that he would be very happy at St. Jim's. Certainly, if all the fellows there were like these, there was no reason why he should not be very happy.

But the Russian schoolboy was to find that all the juniors at St. Jim's were not exactly like Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 5.

Tea in Blake's Study.

TEA in Blake's study, when the chums of No. 6 were in funds, was always a cheerful meal. Blake let down the curtains, to shut out the dim, misty quadrangle and the sleety rain that was now falling. In the study, the fire burned brightly, and the gaslight was reflected upon the gleaming crockery, and it revealed a very imposing spread. It was not often that a junior tea-table could boast a rabbit-pie, a beefsteak pudding, fried potatoes, a mountain of toast, and jam-tarts and cake galore. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had recently received a fiver from his noble governor, and he was spending it royally.

Ivan Patoff was given the place of honour, within easy distance of the fire, and the other fellows sat down round the table where they could. There was not ample room in the study for eight fellows, but the juniors were accustomed to close quarters, and at all events it was cosy.

The Russian lad had seemed grave and thoughtful to the juniors upon their first meeting with him, but he brightened up now very much, and talked freely enough, and was very cheerful. His English was wonderfully good, a fact that was accounted for by his having an English mother. He spoke of his mother freely enough, but his father he did not mention, excepting to refer to the fact that he had lived in Russia when his father was alive. His reticence on that point made the thought cross Blake's mind that there might be something in what Levison had suggested; but he dismissed the thought from his mind. He reflected that, at all events, it was no business of his.

"Lived in England long?" Tom Merry asked.

Ivan shook his head.

"I have but lately come from Russia," he said. "My mother wished me to have an English education, and to be brought up like an Englishman. But after my father's death there were many things to do before we could leave Russia. It was two years ago, but we have only lately arrived in England."

"Two years ago?" said Blake involuntarily.

"Yes." The boy's face clouded for a moment. "I like England very much. I was very glad to be sent to this school. I hope we shall be good friends."

"I'm sure we shall!" said Blake, quite taken by the frank manner of the Russian lad. "I was wondering whether you spoke English—"

"Our friend speaks it wippingly! Much bettah than I could speak Wussian, I am sure!" said Arthur Augustus sagely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Can you speak any Russian at all?" roared Monty Lowther.

"Certainly not! I have nevah twied."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah! A fellow nevah knows what he can do till he twies. I know somethin' of Wussian customs, howevah," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "You are in the habit of dwinkin' vodka, I pwesume, my dear chap?"

Ivan chuckled.

"Vodka is an intoxicating liquor," he replied. "I don't drink it any more than you drink whisky. We drink a great deal of tea in Russia."

"Bai Jove! Yaas; I've wead that somewah. Put the kettle on, Blake!"

"What do you want the kettle put on for?" demanded Blake.

"Pway don't be an ass! Put it on the fire, Dig. Our friend would like some more tea."

"Don't trouble," said Ivan cheerfully. "I've had five or six cups."

"But you shall have some made specially, in the most perfect possible mannah, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "I will make it myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't the faintest ideah what you fellows are

laughin' at! You will see that English tea is simply wippin', deah boy, when it's pwopahly made. You can't judge by what you've just had. Blake made that."

"Look here—" began Blake wrathfully.

D'Arcy waved his hand.

"Pway don't argue, Blake, deah boy! Put the kettle on!"

Blake rose from the table, with a grin. That meant to everybody in the study, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, that a jape was coming. But the swell of St. Jim's was talking to the new boy, and did not notice it. Blake jammed the kettle down into the fire. He also placed the teapot to warm, with the handle nicely exposed to the blaze of the fire.

By the time Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was ready to make the tea the teapot would be ready for him.

"Of course, I twist I am not the kind of fellow to put myself forward in any way," Arthur Augustus explained; "but when it comes to makin' tea, I am the chap to do it, you see. Makin' tea is a wathah difficult bizney—to make it weally pwopahly, and it wequires a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Certainly!" agreed Blake. "You shall make it."

"Vewy well, deah boy. Blake will not always admit the facts of the case, but I am glad to see that he is in a more reasonable fwame of mind than usual to-night."

"You'd better let me make it, though," said Blake.

"Wats, deah boy!"

"Very well. don't blame me if it's a failure."

"My dear chap, it won't be a failure! I—"

"Kettle's boiling!" sad Herries.

"Vewy good!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose from the tea-table. He took the tea-caddy down off the mantelpiece.

"Spoonful for each chap, and an extwa one for luck," he said wisely. "That's the wule in the case. But there are ways of doin' these things."

The juniors all looked round to watch him.

"Go it, Gussy!" said Blake encouragingly.

"Pile it, old man!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus stooped down and picked up the teapot.

The next moment a terrific yell rang through the study.

"Yaroop!"

Crash!

The teapot fell into the fender, and was smashed into a hundred pieces, and the swell of St. Jim's, with his fingers jammed into his mouth, dashed across the study.

"Ow—ow—ow! Yow! Oh!"

The juniors roared.

"Yow! Yaro-o-op! Gwo-o-o-o-oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Weally, you chaps— Yow! I've burnt my fingahs! Yawo-o-op! Oh! Yah! I wegard this as simply howwid! Yawoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwo-o-o-o-o! Wo-o-oh—wo-o-oh!"

Arthur Augustus ceased his wild dance, and stood sucking his fingers. The juniors were still yelling. The fragments of the teapot were scattered in the grate, and the teacaddy had fallen to the floor, upsetting half its contents.

Jack Blake, almost weeping with laughter, gathered up the teapot, with what was left in it.

"My hat!" he gasped. "You ought to be on the stage, Gussy! If you could do that in a music-hall you would bring down the house! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can see nothin' whatevah to laugh at! The handle of the teapot was hot!"

"Go hon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It wasn't hot enough to hurt you," said Blake. "I took care not to put it near enough to the fire for that."

"Well, no; I am not weally hurt, but I was thwown into a feahful flutter. Bai Jove! Do you mean to say that you did that on purpose, Blake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottah—"

The juniors shrieked with laughter. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs and advanced upon Blake in a very warlike way. His eye was gleaming behind his monocle.

"Put up your hands, you wottah! I'm goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'—"

"Is this the way Gussy always entertains his guests?" asked Monty Lowther, in a tone of mild and gentle inquiry.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus paused. He had forgotten that the new boy was a guest in Study No. 6—laughing as much as the others, as a matter of fact. D'Arcy turned towards the Russian, and Ivan tried to become grave.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 209.

"Pway accept my apologies, deah boy!" said D'Arcy gracefully. "Blake, I will thrash you another time."

"Thanks!" murmured Blake. "I breathe again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't be an ass! I shall have to get another teapot f'rom somewhere," said the swell of St. Jim's. "It's no good thinkin' of evan usin' that one again."

"Well, I should say not!" grinned Tom Merry. "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put that giddy teapot together again, I fancy!"

"Go and get a teapot out of Tom Merry's study," said Blake.

"Vewy well, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus hurried out of the study. Jack Blake crossed to the cupboard, and opened it, and took out a teapot from behind a pile of various goods. He warmed it at the fire, and proceeded to make tea, and placed it by the grate to draw.

"You've got a teapot, you ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry. Blake nodded.

"Oh, yes; but a little run won't do Gussy any harm," he explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy returned to the study with a teapot in his hand, to find Blake pouring out the tea he had made. The swell of St. Jim's halted in the doorway, staring at Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Come in!" said Blake affably. "Shall I pour out another cup of tea for you, Gussy?"

"You uttah ass! You had a teapot all the time!"

"Oh, yes! Certainly!"

"You f'wightful duffah! Then why did you let me go to Tom Mewwy's studay to fetch a nothah?" shrieked D'Arcy.

"I was thinking of doing you good, Gussy. You are such an awful slackah, you know. A little run along the passage to fetch the teapot——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"And then another little run to take it back——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wufuse to take it back!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, setting down the teapot. "I wegard you as an uttah ass!"

"You can regard me in any character you choose to assume," replied Blake affably.

It took Arthur Augustus D'Arcy some time to realise the full force of Blake's remark. He thought it over while the juniors went on talking over the fresh tea. Ivan Patoff was telling a story of his voyage to England, when the swell of St. Jim's suddenly started up to his feet. Blake's full meaning had dawned upon him at last, and he exclaimed:

"You silly ass!"

Patoff stared at D'Arcy, growing very red in the face. As he was the person speaking at the time, he naturally took the remark to himself.

"You f'wightful ass!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "You silly chump!"

"What have I done?" asked Ivan.

"You? Nothin', deah boy!"

"Then why are you calling me names?"

"Weally, deah boy, I was doin' nothin' of the sort!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "My wemarks were addressed to that othah ass—I mean to that ass, Blake."

Ivan laughed.

"Oh, I see!"

"Blake inferred by his idiotic wemark that I was an ass!"

"I inferred it from your own idiotic remarks," Blake explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You f'wightful ass——"

"Order!" exclaimed Tom Merry, rapping on the table.

"I protest against Gussy taking up all the limelight in this way!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Hear, hear!"

"I pwotest——"

"It's all right if you dry up," said Blake.

Words failed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He could only sit and breathe hard through his nose, while the talk ran cheerily on. But by the time tea was finished, the swell of the School House's good-humour had returned.

"We ought to entertain the new fellow, you know, on his first evenin' at St. Jim's, you fellows," he remarked, in a thoughtful way.

"What's the idea?" asked Tom Merry.

"I don't mind singin' a tenah solo——"

"By Jove, I've got some negatives to print!" exclaimed Manners, and he departed from the study.

"You uttah ass!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "How can you pwint photos at night? Where are you going, Lowthah?"

"Ahem! I'm going to tell Manners that—that he can't

print photos at night, of course!" said Lowther, quitting Study No. 6.

"Weally, Lowthah—— Where are you going, Tom Mewwy?"

"I'm going to tell Manners that he'd better let his negatives alone," said Tom Merry, as he followed the chums of the Shell."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and glanced round at the Fourth-Formers who remained in the study. They were all grinning.

"Those Shell wottahs don't appweciate music," Arthur Augustus remarked. "I am quite willin' to sing a tenah solo, Blake, and——"

"I think we ought to take the new chap down to the common-room and introduce him to the fellows generally," said Blake hastily.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Good idea!" said Digby.

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed Herries, with emphasis. "And then I'll take him round to the kennels to show him my bulldog."

"Weally, Hewwies! Aftah the solo——"

"Supposing it were fatal, though?" demanded Blake.

And without waiting for an answer to that question, he linked arms with Ivan Patoff and walked him out of the study. Digby and Herries followed, chuckling; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a snort of disgust, followed more slowly. And the voice of the amateur tenor of St. Jim's was not heard raised that evening within the walls of Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 6.

The Son of the Nihilist.

LEIVISON was in the junior common-room. Early as it was, most of the juniors were gathered there. In the quadrangle the mist was thicker and thicker, and it was penetrating into the passages, and in the common-room itself there was a dimness in the atmosphere. The fellows snuffed as they talked. Leivison was in the common-room with his study-mate, Percy Mellish, talking in a low voice, with his eyes upon the door. Leivison knew that the new boy would come down sooner or later, and then his chance would come.

Ivan Patoff was a stranger to the cad of the Fourth, but Leivison's feelings were already bitter towards him. The fact that Study No. 6 had taken him up was quite enough to make Leivison dislike him.

And Leivison, on this occasion, as on others, disguised his bitter feeling, even to himself, under the name of duty. If the new boy had some shady secret, it was only right that he should be shown up. That was what Leivison said to himself, and it seemed to him an adequate excuse for spying and meddling.

"Here they are!" muttered Mellish, as a cheery group of juniors came in at the door.

Leivison nodded.

"That's the Russian with them!" he said.

Melish regarded the new junior critically.

"Good-looking chap enough!" he said.

Leivison shrugged his shoulders.

"Blow his looks!" he replied. "My belief is that he's some connection of a gang of Nihilists, or perhaps Anarchists, and I think he ought to be shown up!"

"That's rather thick, you know!"

"I don't see it! He may be hiding from the police, and may have run off to England to be safe from them."

"But a mere kid——"

"Things are different in Russia. I've read of a boy of ten throwing a bomb at the police."

"Ye-es; but that was in a newspaper."

"Oh, rats! Anyway, we'll see. If he has anything to say for himself, I suppose he can say it," said Leivison tartly.

"Certainly! It will be fun to rag him, too! A Russian kid isn't likely to know the ropes at an English school, and we may dig up a lot of fun," said Mellish amiably.

Blake and his companions crossed towards the big grate, near which the Terrible Three were seated round a table, playing chess. Tom Merry and Manners were playing, and Lowther sat beside them, giving advice alternately to each player—advice that was received with the most heartless ingratitude by both.

"Hallo! Mate in a hundred and forty-four?" asked Blake genially, as he came up.

Tom Merry laughed.

"No. I think I have Manners fixed in five."

Manners sniffed.

"That's queer," he said.

"How is it queer?"

"Because I've got you mate in four."

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"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "This is an interesting game! I've never seen both sides mate before!"

"Better leave your rook alone and move your knight, Manners," said Monty Lowther, with the air of a Steinitz, a Morphy, and a Blackburne rolled into one.

"Rats!" said Manners.

Ivan Patoff watched the game, and smiled a little, imperceptibly. The game was not exposing the greatest art on either side. Indeed, Blake accused the Shell fellows of playing draughts with the chessmen.

"You play chess?" asked Tom Merry, with a glance at Patoff, while he was waiting for Manners to move.

The Russian junior nodded.

"You can give me a tip if you like, kid," said Manners, graciously, not thinking in the least that Patoff would be able to put him up to anything.

"But will that be fair to Merry?" said Patoff.

Tom Merry grinned.

"I don't mind," he said. "If you can stop my checkmate, you're welcome to do it."

"Then I should suggest the rook to queen's fourth," said Patoff.

Manners stared.

"That will leave my bish. uncovered, kid!"

"But Merry cannot take the bishop without exposing his king, and if you move the rook as I say, you effect mate in two."

Manners examined the board carefully.

"My hat!" he said. "That's quite so! There you are! Now you can wriggle as you like, Thomas, but I've got you!"

Tom Merry glanced over the board and smiled.

"So you have!" he agreed. "You can play, Patoff, and no mistake!"

"Yaas, wathah! Do you know, you fellows, I couldn't have done that, weally!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a thoughtful way.

"Go hon!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I want to speak to you, Patoff," said Levison, coming forward.

The Russian lad looked at him. He detected the latent hostility in Levison's tone, and imperceptibly stiffened up.

"Certainly!" he said.

"Your name is Patoff, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me what your father's name was?"

The juniors looked on from all sides now. There was a thin, spiteful sound in Levison's voice that hinted of trouble to come.

The Russian lad's brown cheek was tinged with red.

"I do not see why I should be questioned," he said.

"Wathah not, deah boy."

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Tom Merry, rising from the chess-table. "If you are thinking of worrying the new kid with some more of your caddishness, Levison, you'd better shut up!"

"Yes, rather!" said Blake, his eyes gleaming dangerously. Levison sneered.

"If Patoff is ashamed of his father's name, he needn't answer, of course!" he said.

The Russian's eyes flashed.

"My father's name was Paul Patoff," he said.

"I thought so. He lived in St. Petersburg?"

"Certainly!"

"And was killed on the eighteenth of March, the year before last?"

There was a murmur in the common-room.

Ivan's cheek paled a little.

"I do not see how you can know," he exclaimed, with a quick breath.

"I read the newspapers, you see, and I've got a good memory," said Levison. "You don't deny it, do you?"

"No."

"Then your father was Paul Patoff, the Nihilist?"

There was a sharp exclamation from all the juniors present.

"The Nihilist!"

"Great Scott!"

Every eye was turned upon Ivan Patoff.

He did not speak.

With a pale face and burning eyes, he stood facing Levison, whose hand was raised as if in accusation.

There was a long pause.

CHAPTER 7.

Hard Hit.

"Nihilist—eh?" said Crooke, of the Shell. "My hat! We're coming to something at St. Jim's, I must say! My hat!"

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I should take it as a personal favah if

you will not make any caddish wemarks, Cwooke!" said D'Arcy.

"He hasn't answered yet," said Levison, with his cold, greenish eyes fixed upon the Russian junior. "Let him deny it if he can!"

"He needn't deny it!" said Blake. "It's no business of yours! Even if what you say is true—and I don't suppose it is—"

"Let Patoff say whether it is true or not!"

"Better speak up, kid!" said Kangaroo, of the Shell.

Ivan raised his head proudly.

"I did not expect this to be known here," he said. "I did not expect to find a spy in this school who knew all about my private affairs. But I have no intention of speaking falsely. My father was Paul Patoff, and he was killed by the explosion of a bomb in St. Petersburg two years ago."

"Was he a Nihilist?"

A dozen voices asked the question.

"Yes," said Ivan.

"Phew!"

"My hat!"

"A giddy Nihilist!"

The fellows were crowding round, craning their necks to look at Ivan Patoff. The son of a Nihilist had a wonderful interest in their eyes. Few of them had any clear idea as to what a Nihilist might be. The word was associated in their minds with the Russian Secret Police, exiles to Siberia, and bomb-throwing. There was something romantic and almost thrilling in the mere word.

"My father was a member of a Reform Society," said Ivan. "They were broken up by the police, and there was trouble."

"And your pater tried to blow up the Police Bureau?" said Levison.

"What he did, or tried to do, I do not know. He was not likely to explain to a boy of thirteen or less," said Ivan.

"After the trouble, my mother brought me to England. That is all. But a Nihilist in Russia is not like a revolutionary in England. Here you have freedom—a freedom that seems wonderful and almost unbelievable to me, a Russian. But in Russia we have despotism, and all the best men in the country are against it. Many brave and noble men have joined the Nihilists. My father was one of them. I do not judge his acts, and I will not allow them to be judged by anyone else."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"I don't see that it's any business of ours or of Levison's," said Tom Merry, with a scornful look at the cad of the Fourth. "Only a worm like Levison would have dragged up a thing like this against a new chap. We can see for ourselves that Patoff is decent, and that's enough."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison sneered.

"How do you know he's dropped the old game?" he asked. "How do you know that he isn't hiding from the Russian police at this moment, and that he may not have bombs hidden in his trunks?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wathah; wats!"

Ivan burst into a laugh.

"You are welcome to search my box for bombs, if you like," he exclaimed. "I will undertake to eat all that you shall find."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know that that man Patoff was said in the papers to be the inventor of a new explosive," said Levison. "I don't believe the secret would die with him, as they said in the report. More likely his son knows it."

"I do know it!" said Ivan calmly.

"Bai Jove!"

"At all events, I have it written down; but I have never read it," said Ivan. "Whether the secret will ever be made known, I cannot say."

"Till you grow up and begin blowing policemen up, too!" suggested Mellish.

"I shall never do that."

"And you are not hiding here from the police?" asked Levison.

"Certainly not!"

"That's to be proved yet!"

"What do you mean?" asked the Russian junior sharply.

"I mean that I don't take your word for it, that's all!" said Levison, with a sneer.

Ivan's eyes flashed.

"You are a cad!" he exclaimed.

"You see, he knows you as well as you know him, Levison," said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison's face flushed. He was half a head taller than the Russian boy, and he was not disposed to be talked to in public by him in this way.

"Don't give me any of your lip, you blessed Anarchist!"

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ne exclaimed angrily. "I've a jolly good mind to begin by licking you into shape, anyway!"

"Let him alone, you cad!" said Blake. "If you are spoiling for a fight, I'll go into the gym. with you!"

"Yaas, wathah; and I'm quite weady to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"I do not need protection," said Ivan quietly. "Levison has said that he will not take my word. That is my reply."

He stepped forward, and his open palm rang on Levison's cheek.

Smack!

The cad of the Fourth started back with a cry.

"Oh!"

"Bwavo, deah boy!"

Levison, his brow darkening with rage, fairly leaped at the Russian lad. Ivan Patoff put up his fists at once. From his attitude, it was easy to see that he knew something about the British art of boxing.

Crash, crash!

His right and left came into Levison's face, and the Fourth-Former's left eye closed, and his nose streamed red. He staggered back in pain and amazement.

"You may come on," said Ivan quietly.

"Oh! Ow!"

"Go it, Levison!" shouted the juniors. "Pile in! You ought to be able to lick a giddy Nihilist, you know!"

"Mind he hasn't a bomb in his pocket!" grinned Digby. "He might go off with a pop when you punch him, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ivan Patoff joined in the laugh. But Levison did not feel inclined to laugh. He rubbed his closed eye dazedly, and mopped at his nose with his handkerchief.

"Pile in!" said Monty Lowther encouragingly. "You're not finished yet. You've got another eye, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And two ears!" said Blake. "Go it! You can stand a lot of damage yet!"

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I'll make that Russian cad sorry for this!" he said; and he turned away.

The encounter had been very brief, but the cad of the Fourth had evidently had enough.

Several distinct hisses followed Levison as he went. Nobody approved of his unprovoked attack upon the Russian junior, and his way in taking his defeat was not likely to commend itself to the juniors of St. Jim's.

Levison heard the hisses, and he scowled darkly as he left the common-room. He glanced back from the door, and saw the Russian lad surrounded by the juniors. Levison's insinuations had evidently effected nothing towards making the new boy unpopular. Levison ground his teeth. He had one more card to play.

CHAPTER 8.

Levison Does His Duty!

↑ AP!

Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, raised his head, and his pen ceased to travel over the paper. He glanced towards the door.

"Come in!"

Levison, of the Fourth, entered the Head's study.

There was a slight hesitation perceptible in Levison's manner, and the Head of St. Jim's, who had known boys for twenty-five years, knew at a glance that the junior had come to the study upon an errand he was not wholly proud of.

Dr. Holmes's brow darkened a little.

He had never encouraged, or even allowed, sneaking in the school, and if ever a boy's manner had betrayed the intention to sneak, Ernest Levison's did at that moment.

"Levison! Well?"

The Head's voice was somewhat sharp.

"May I speak to you for a few minutes, sir?"

"Certainly, if you have anything to say!"

"I feel it my duty to speak, sir," said Levison. "If the other fellows knew that I had come here, I fear that they might regard my conduct as what they call sneaking. But I feel it to be my duty—"

Dr. Holmes raised his hand before the cad of the Fourth could get any further.

"Stay, Levison!"

"Yes, sir!" said Levison, pausing.

"If you are about to tell tales of any of your schoolfellows, you may save your breath," said Dr. Holmes. "I cannot listen to anything of the sort!"

"It is not that, sir—"

"If it is something, as you say, that your schoolfellows could regard as sneaking, you may depend upon it that it is sneaking!" said the Head, very plainly. "You must not

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"THE SCHOOLBOY MINSTRELS!"

attempt to deceive yourself, Levison, by placing the desire to tell tales under the guise of a sense of duty."

Levison flushed crimson. The Head read his motives much more plainly and easily, perhaps, than he read them himself.

"It—it is not that, sir!" stammered Levison. He made a surreptitious dab at his nose, which would persist in oozing red. "I feel it my duty—"

"Very well, if you are sure that you feel it your duty, I will listen to you, and then judge for myself," said Dr. Holmes.

"There is a new boy in the school, sir—"

"You refer to Ivan Patoff?"

"Yes, sir. As you must know, he is a Russian, and I have discovered that he is the son of a Nihilist who was killed in a bomb outrage in St. Petersburg two years ago."

Levison paused, and looked at the Head, expecting to see him surprised and startled. But Dr. Holmes's expression did not change, save for a slight wrinkle coming into his brows, which showed that he was displeased.

"How did you find this out, Levison?"

"I remember reading the case in the papers, sir, and I remembered the name. I have put it plainly to Patoff, and he cannot deny it."

The Head frowned.

"I have heard before, Levison, of your taste for reading criminal reports in newspapers. You know perfectly well that the boys are forbidden to do so, and if you are guilty of this offence again, I shall punish you."

Levison bit his lip.

"Very well, sir. But Patoff—"

"This news, which is such news to you, is nothing of the sort to me!" said the Head. "I was quite aware of it!"

Levison started in amazement.

"You knew that Patoff was a Nihilist, sir!" he exclaimed.

"I knew that he was the son of a Nihilist," said the Head—"at all events, the son of a man who was mixed up in some revolutionary movement. His mother is English, and after the death of her husband, wished to live in England, in order to keep her son away from his father's old associates. For that reason, the boy is to be brought up at an English school. I make you this explanation, Levison, not because it is any concern of yours, but because you have spied into the matter, and it is, therefore, better that it should be made clear, as I have no doubt you will chatter on the subject to the other boys."

Levison set his teeth. Truly, the way of a sneak at St. Jim's was not easy.

"The boy bears an excellent character," the Head resumed. "His father was an eminent man of science before he formed the unfortunate association which led to his death. In Russia matters are not the same as in England, and men of revolutionary principles are not to be judged the same way. You have done wrong to stir up this matter, Levison, and you had better say no more about it. You have been fighting, I think, to judge by the appearance of your face.

"Yes, sir," said Levison, flushing.

"With whom?"

"Patoff."

Dr. Holmes's lip curled.

"Was that the reason you came to tell me this, from a sense of duty?" he exclaimed. "You must be careful, Levison, not to be hypocritical. It is a fault to which, I believe, you are very prone."

"But, sir—"

"You may go."

"I thought it my duty to speak to you on the subject, sir," said Levison. "Especially as I know that Patoff is still in connection with his old associates."

The Head started.

"What do you mean, Levison?" he exclaimed sharply.

"If you will listen to me, sir—"

"If you know anything, say it at once!"

Levison, feeling his case grow stronger as he proceeded, detailed the curious incident of the two Russians in Rycombe Lane. Dr. Holmes listened with deep attention.

"Is that all, Levison?" he asked, when the cad of the Fourth had finished.

"Yes, sir," said Levison, a little disappointed. "It shows that Patoff has not dropped his connection with Russians, as you supposed, and I don't think, sir, he's a safe chap to have at the school."

"That is for me to decide, not for you, Levison," said the Head icily.

"I beg your pardon, sir. But—"

"Your own account shows that Patoff was not in connection with these men, but was actually trying to avoid them!" said the Head.

"Well, yes, sir. But—"

"Neither have you any proof that they were not perfectly respectable men," said the Head. "It appears to me,

Levison, that you have taken an unreasonable dislike to the new boy, and are willing to go any length to injure him."

"Oh, sir!"

"There is such a thing, Levison, as unconscious hypocrisy and spite, disguised under the name of duty," said the Head. "You must be very careful. You may go now, and pray do not let me hear any more of this nonsense!"

"But, sir—"

"You may go."

"I think—"

"If you say another word, Levison, I shall cane you!"

The cad of the Fourth, with his face crimson with rage and mortification, left the study. His attempt against Patoff in that direction had failed, and failed utterly. Levison stamped his foot with rage in the passage, and, as if to add the finishing touch to his bad luck, the Terrible Three came by at the same moment. They stopped at the sight of Levison. It was easy to see that he had just emerged from the Head's study.

"My only hat!" said Monty Lowther, guessing the truth at once. "He's been to the Head sneaking about the Russian chap!"

"The cad!"

"He doesn't look as if he's had a very flattering reception," grinned Manners.

Levison gritted his teeth, and scowled savagely at the chums of the Shell.

"Yes, I've been to the Head," he said defiantly. "It was my duty to tell him that a dangerous character had been admitted to the school."

"Dangerous to your nose, at all events, to judge by appearances," grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And what is the Head going to do?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothing."

"You might have expected that, you ass!" said the Shell fellow scornfully. "The Head never listens to sneaks."

"It wasn't sneaking. It's a fellow's duty to speak out when the school is in danger of becoming the haunt of criminals."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As for that Russian cad, I know perfectly well that he's just as much of a Nihilist as his father was, and he's humbugged the Head," said Levison. "He's hiding here from the Russian police, I'm sure of that."

"What rot!"

"I'm going to find out the facts," said Levison, through his teeth. "I'll show him up, and, at the same time, show the fellows that I was right all along."

"Go ahead!" said Monty Lowther, with a yawn. "I think you're an ass!"

"A frabjous ass!" said Manners.

"We shall see," said Levison savagely. And he turned away. The Terrible Three looked at one another with smiling faces.

"Levison's got it bad," said Lowther. "He's simply determined to discover Nihilism in poor old Patoff. The kid seems to me harmless enough. But the more harmless he looks, the more deep and deadly Levison will think he is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Levison would make a good detective in a novel, but he's no good for real life," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I suppose he will watch Patoff, and spy on him, till he discovers a mare's nest of some sort, and make himself look a silly ass."

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Let's help him!" he exclaimed.

"What!"

"When a chap is working at anything, it's only decent to lend a hand. Eric would do it any day, and I don't see why we shouldn't go Ericking."

"You ass! What are you driving at?"

"Levison is looking for a Nihilist plot. I don't see why we shouldn't provide one, that's all," said Monty Lowther coolly.

And Tom Merry and Manners gave a yell of laughter. The suggestion was far too good not to be acted upon.

CHAPTER 9.

Monty Lowther Sees a Chance.

IVAN PATOFF attracted a good deal of attention in St. Jim's that evening. New boys were numerous enough in the big school, especially at the beginning of the term. But Ivan was something a little unusual in the line of new boys. He was a Russian, and although French and German boys sometimes came to St. Jim's, nobody remembered having a Russian there before. He spoke perfect English; but he could speak also a mysterious language of which even the Head did not understand a word, and that alone would have invested him with a

peculiar interest. Fellows collected round him, and asked him to speak in Russian, and listened with perplexed faces when he did so, and Ivan took it all with perfect good-humour, and did not show any resentment at little jokes being made about his language. The discovery Levison had made about him gave him a new interest in the eyes of the juniors. The story told by Levison grew in repetition, and during the evening Figgins & Co. came over from the New House to see the fellow whose father had blown up the Czar. That was how the story had reached the New House. And Figgins seemed quite disappointed at finding that the new boy was quite harmless and good-tempered, and had no dynamite on his person or in his box.

"You're a blessed fraud!" said Figgins. "But I suppose you belong to a secret society, don't you?"

Ivan smilingly denied the soft impeachment.

"But you know how to make bombs?" Kerr suggested.

"I haven't the faintest idea how to do it."

"But you have belonged to mysterious societies?" urged Fatty Wynn. "Shows where you gave a password as you went in, and spies and traitors were condemned to death?"

"Not at all."

"Haven't you ever seen the Nihilists execute a traitor, even?" asked Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha! No, I don't believe they do so."

Figgins grinned.

"We've come over here through that blessed fog for nothing," he said. "I'm going back!"

And Figgins & Co. departed.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked into the common-room a little later.

"Bedtime!" he said.

"Right-ho!" said Jack Blake, rising with a yawn. "Shall I translate to the new chap, Kildare?"

Kildare looked at him.

"What do you mean, Blake? Patoff speaks English, surely?"

"Still, I can put it to him in Russian."

"Bai Jove! Blake, I nevah knew that you could speak Wussian!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in astonishment.

"The things you don't know, Gussy, would fill whole dictionaries and libraries."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Time to go to bedski," said Blake, addressing Ivan. "Buck up-off! This is where you get on a move-avitch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, you ass!"

"Shut-upski," said Blake. "Buzzoffavitch!"

Kildare laughed.

"What do you think of my Russianoff?" asked Blake, speaking to Ivan. "Is it goodski?"

Ivan laughed merrily.

"It is very funny, at all events," he said.

"Well, it's something to be funnyski," said Blake. "Good-nightski, you Shell chaps! I'm going to bedavitch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors went up to their dormitories.

Levison bathed his eye and his nose before he turned in. He did not speak to the Russian junior, but he gave him a glance that meant mischief. Whether from a sense of duty or not, there was no doubt that Levison meant to make things troublesome for the boy from the far-off North if he could.

Ivan Patoff looked out of the high window of the dormitory before he went to bed. Jack Blake caught a troubled look upon his face, and wondered if he was thinking of the two strange men who had tried to waylay him in the misty lane.

The mist was still thick in the quadrangle, and little clouds of it floated in the dormitory. The fog had evidently come to stay.

"No more footer till this rotten mist goes," growled Blake, as he kicked his boots off. "Do you play footballski, Patoff?"

"No," said Ivan, laughing. "I should like to learn, though."

"I'll give you some tips if we ever get any more decent weather. Good-nightavitch!"

"Good-night!"

And the Fourth Form went to sleep.

Levison was the last to slumber. For a long time he lay awake, thinking, and his thoughts were not pleasant or charitable. He was thinking of the various means of entrapping the Russian junior and exposing him in his true character, for the cad of the Fourth had quite made up his mind that Ivan's true character would not bear investigation. Levison was far too keen and deep, in fact, to be able to see what less acute fellows could see at a glance, that the Russian lad was simple and frank by nature, and not in the least likely to have any guilty secrets.

Levison's damaged eye was very dark and discoloured in

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the morning, and his first proceeding was to bathe it very carefully. Ivan Patoff looked at him when he rose from his bed, and seemed undecided. A grey, misty morning glimmered in the quadrangle. The sun was trying to penetrate the mist, but without much success.

"Rotten morning!" said Blake, as he rose at the clang of the rising-bell.

"Yaas, wathah! I must weally apologise for our weathah, Patoff, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, it isn't always like this."

Ivan laughed.

"No," he said; "I trust not."

He crossed over to Levison.

"I am sorry for what occurred last night, Levison," he said quietly. "I am sorry your eye is hurt. I am willing to be friends if you are."

Levison looked at him with a bitter expression.

"I dare say!" he assented. "Only, you see, you can't take me in that way. I know you better than the other fellows do, and I'm going to see that you're shown up."

"I do not understand you," said Ivan, perplexed.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I'm not going to be friends with you," he said. "I suppose you can understand that."

Ivan's dark cheek coloured.

"Yes, I can understand that," he said. "I shall not speak to you again, Levison."

"Levison, you are an uttah wottah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "For two pins I would give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Levison did not reply.

The Terrible Three were already down when the Fourth Form came downstairs. They met Levison at the foot of the staircase with questions.

"Found any bombs?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Any explosions during the night?" Manners wanted to know.

Levison gritted his teeth.

"You can be as funny as you like," he said. "I know what I know."

"Not a large amount, is it?" said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison walked away scowling.

During morning school Monty Lowther's face wore, on occasions, a quiet grin. His chums knew that he was thinking of a little scheme for the benefit of Levison. Mr. Linton, the Form-master, found him somewhat absent-minded at lessons, and favoured him with fifty lines. But Lowther did not mind.

When the Shell were dismissed, Lowther linked arms with Tom Merry and Manners in the passage, as they walked away, and chuckled.

"I've got it!" he said.

"Got what?"

"The scheme."

"Good!"

And the humorist of the Shell proceeded to whisper the details he had thought of in the Form-room. Tom Merry and Manners chuckled joyously.

The Terrible Three kept their eyes upon Levison. The latter had evidently not given up his schemes for unmasking the Russian lad. In a quiet way—but which was quite evident to the watchful chums of the Shell—Levison was watching Patoff. When the Russian junior went out into the quad, alone, Levison strolled after him. Both of them were swallowed up in the mist, and the Terrible Three, who were looking out of the hall window in the School House, chuckled.

"He's shadowing the Russian kid," Manners murmured.

"My hat! The silly ass thinks he's going to meet those chaps, you know, and conspire," said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I saw him looking over the letter-rack this morning," said Lowther. "Patoff had a letter, and I really thought Levison was going to take it. I think he would, only he looked around and saw my eye on him."

Tom Merry frowned.

"If the worm spies into Patoff's letters there will be trouble!" he exclaimed. "That sort of thing can't be allowed. I believe it was something of that sort that Levison had to leave his last school for; you remember he used to be at Greyfriars."

"He may get the order of the boot here, too," said Manners. "I can't say I should be sorry. Fancy watching a fellow about like that!"

Monty Lowther uttered an exclamation.

"Now's our chance!"

"What do you mean?"

"This mist just suits us. We can get Levison on our rack instead of on Patoff's, and we can give him something to discover, and Patoff can't. This is where we go Ericking."

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Manners can bump into Levison in the quad., and shift aim off Patoff's track, and then you and I can talk Russian—"

"Russian?"

"Certainly," said Lowther coolly. "And let Levison hear us."

"But—but I can't talk Russian."

"Neither can I, but we're going to. Levison doesn't know it any more than we do, so it will be good enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!"

"Right-ho!"

And the Terrible Three hurried out into the misty quadrangle.

CHAPTER 10.

The Conspirators.

LEVISON paused in the quadrangle.

The amateur detective of St. Jim's had made up his mind that he would not let Patoff go out of his sight if he could help it, and he was inclined to see something suspicious in everything that the Russian junior did. In Levison's fertile imagination, Ivan Patoff was a hidden Nihilist, and the two Russians in the lane were conspirators who were somehow in collusion with him. The boy's pretence of avoiding them had been for the sake of deceiving the St. Jim's fellows. Or perhaps they were hidden police-spies, on the track of the schoolboy Nihilist. On reflection, Levison thought that quite likely. In that case, the schoolboy Nihilist might have some plot for blowing them to pieces. To find out the exact facts, and bring the Russian junior to his merited fate, required careful detective work—mean spying and watching, as the other fellows would have called it—but Levison had a way of imposing upon himself, even, by giving things better-sounding names.

It fitted in with his theories precisely for the Russian lad to go out into the mist. What an opportunity for carrying out his nefarious plans, whatever they were! Either to meet fellow-conspirators, or to take some steps for a murderous outrage; for Levison's imagination went quite as far as that, in his thoughts of the Russian boy. The thick mist in the quad., too, gave Levison an opportunity of shadowing the Russian junior without being seen.

But it brought a difficulty also. He lost sight of the junior in the mist, and was not at all certain in which direction to look for him.

He paused and listened.

Footsteps!

A form loomed up in the mist, and Levison caught his breath. He had found his prey again, but the next moment he uttered an exclamation of annoyance. It was not Ivan Patoff, but Manners of the Shell.

Manners did not seem to see the cad of the Fourth. Perhaps it was the mist, or perhaps Manners did not want to see him. At all events, the Shell fellow walked right into Levison, and knocked him backwards.

"You ass!" shouted Levison furiously. "Where are you going?"

Manners stopped.

"Hallo! Is that you, Levison?"

"You clumsy ass—"

"Well, you shouldn't get in a fellow's way," said Manners. And he went on towards the New House.

Levison stood alone in the mist, gritting his teeth. The encounter with Manners had destroyed his last chance of shadowing Patoff. Where was the Russian boy now? The spy of the School House listened intently. He was alone in a sea of mist; School House and New House were hidden from sight. Round him the big elms rose in spectral dimness through the shadows.

"Hang him!" muttered Levison, between his teeth. "Hang him! He may be gone to meet those Russians, or— Ah!"

Through the dimness came the sound of a voice.

"Czernavitchski! Norroff kook ske razzzzaff!"

Levison started violently.

It was evidently a foreign tongue, and its peculiar intonation showed plainly enough that it was Russian. Levison did not, of course, know a word of Russian, but he had heard Ivan Patoff speaking in that language in the common-room the previous evening, and he knew what it sounded like. Besides, what other foreign tongue was likely to be spoken in the precincts of St. Jim's? If it had been French or German he would, of course, have known it at once.

The Fourth-Former's eyes gleamed.

"I've got him!"

He stepped cautiously, noiselessly, in the direction of the sound. A big trunk loomed up before him in the mist, and his outstretched hands touched it. Again through the mist came that strange foreign voice.

"Rittavicki nosoff gatskiloskowski!"

"Yes, yes; I understand, Patoff!" The reply was in English.

There was one word in that sentence which made Levison start; and that was the name of the Russian junior. It was evident that he was on the right track. Patoff was there, speaking unfortunately in Russian—but that circumstance alone was suspicious. Why should he speak in Russian, when he was evidently speaking to someone whose tongue was English, unless it was the habitual caution of a conspirator that caused him to do so? Levison saw triumph ahead. He drew closer to the big elm, on the other side of which the two whispering voices were audible.

In spite of himself, he had had some doubts. But his doubts vanished now, as he crouched behind the elm and listened. He was on the track of a conspiracy, and with fast-beating heart he listened, hoping that from what was said in English he would be able to learn what was intended. The English voice was strangely husky, as if the speaker had a cold—not at all surprising in such weather.

"Czernakowski etcho yama manoff!"

There was the Russian voice again.

"But is it well hidden?"

"Yoosogow jam koff!"

"Good!"

Levison listened eagerly. The Russian, Ivan Patoff, was undoubtedly one of the fellows who were whispering on the other side of the elm.

Some words in English reached Levison, but the main bulk of the conversation seemed to be in Russian. Levison's pulses beat fast.

There was a conspiracy. He had no further doubt about it.

Suddenly he heard the word dynamite. A cold shiver ran down Levison's back. He edged further round the elm, so as not to miss a word. Russian or not, he would perhaps be able to pick up the meaning. As though in answer to his thoughts, he heard a line of English that startled him. He almost sprang back as he heard it.

"And you have put the dynamite in its place, Ivan?"

inquired a voice, scarcely above a whisper.

"Ske, ske!" was the reply. "Czernoviteitch atcha, atcha.

Poufk!"

"Ha, ha!"

Levison trembled at the sound of the diabolical chuckle.

"Lucky I watched the rotters!" he murmured.

"Povka slozitch Plevna—Plevna movski," came the voice again. "Riga Irkutsk toboff rimsky petroff pola pola pola.

No Seex roomavitch—"

"What!" came the other voice, in a fearful whisper.

"You've hidden the dynamite under the loose plank in the floor of Study No. 6!"

"Ske, ske! Ha, ha! Poufk! Poufk!"

Levison felt his face and hands go clammy with fear.

"I hope you haven't brought any of the stuff with you."

"Ske, ske!"

"You must be careful, Patoff!"

Levison's knees knocked together. He knew enough of dynamite to know that if the fellow dropped ever such a

little on the stones, they would all three be blown to bits.

He was on the point of dashing away when the voice was

audible again.

"Nonsky, nonsky!"

"Good!" replied the other. "Then nothing can save them!"

Levison gasped. But he was afraid to move. He could not rid his mind of the thought that the Russian conspirator

might have some dynamite in his pocket after all. If he

heard Levison run he would be sure to hurl some dynamite

after him, after the manner of desperate people like

Nihilists.

"When do you think the thing will go off?"

"Achtsky! Achtsky! Poufka! Onska, onska—"

"Two hours' time? Good!"

Levison did not wait for more. It was more than his

nerves could stand. Though the fellows on the other side

of the elm were going on with some diabolical details of

what would ensue after the explosion, he crept quickly away.

But he was heard.

"What's that?" said a voice.

Levison tried to shout "Help!" but the word refused to

come.

"Owkowski! Jam-jam kook—"

"Arglatsky kum—"

Levison ran for his life.

CHAPTER 11.

In Deadly Peril.

THE door of Study No. 6 was flung violently open.

Levison rushed in, his eyes wild with excitement.

Jack Blake jumped up, pen in hand, scattering blots all over his paper and that of D'Arcy and Digby.

"You silly asses—"

"Weally, Levison—"

"Chuck him out—"

"Better get out yourselves as soon as you can!" exclaimed

Levison breathlessly.

"What the dickens are you talking about, you fathead?"

began Blake.

"You'll be blown to pieces—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you it's true!" cried Levison agitatedly. "There's

dynamite hidden here—"

"You uttah lunatic, Levison!"

"You can call me what names you like, D'Arcy," said

Levison. "But I tell you you've only a few minutes to live

if you stay here—"

"So have you!" said Digby, getting up, with his spoiled

imposition in his hand. "You're not coming here to spoil

my work for nothing—"

"Yaas, wathah—"

"I tell you—"

"Bump the cad!" cried Digby.

And before Levison could escape Arthur Augustus and

Digby secured him.

"Now, you rotter," said Blake, "explain, or it'll be worse

for you—"

"I tell you there's dynamite buried in this room!" burst

out Levison. "I've heard two fellows plotting it—"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Too thin, Levison!" grinned Blake. "You're going

through it for mucking up our work—"

"Wathah! You've uttally wuined my impot, Levison;

and you can't expect us to listen to stuff like that, deah boy.

I was doin' lines for Blake, and now—"

"They're no use!" said Blake. "Collar him!"

Levison was lifted from his feet. In another instant he

would have been severely bumped.

But before the chums of Study No. 6 could bump him he

gave a yell of fright that made them pause.

"It may go off at any moment!" he yelled. "Stop it, you

idiots! I tell you it's true—"

"Bai Jove—"

"Ass!" snapped Blake. "You don't believe it, do you?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Pull up the loose plank and see, then!" said Levison.

"Good egg!" said Blake. "We can bump the cad in any

case. Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake and Arthur Augustus went down on their knees in

the corner of the study and pulled up the loose plank. There

were certainly marks on it that pointed to its having been

taken up recently. Levison trembled. The two juniors could

plainly see that the boards had been recently moved, and in

their excitement they dragged up a number of them.

"Bai Jove!"

"My only hat!"

"You don't mean to say there is anything there, you kids?"

asked Digby.

"Of course there is!" said Levison. "Let me go! You

fellows can stay if you like. I value my skin—"

"Wats, deah boy!"

"Well, tell us what it is you've found, you asses!" said

Digby. "Don't stand looking like a pair of stuffed owls at

a hole in the floor—"

"Weally, Dig, there's a box here!" said Arthur Augustus,

adjusting his monocle.

"And it's labelled 'Dynamite,' Dig!" said Blake.

"Come away!" cried Levison.

"Dynamite!" Blake read out the label, impressed, in

spite of himself.

"Weally, deah boys, it might be sewious!" said D'Arcy.

"It would be howwible if it was dynamite and it went off!"

"It is dynamite!" shouted Levison. "I heard Patoff say

distinctly that he had placed the thing there—"

"Weally, Levison, you are speakin' of a fwient of mine,

you know—"

"Oh, rats! He's a Nihilist murderer!"

Arthur Augustus forgot all about dynamite and everything

else at once. His friend had been insulted. He pushed back

his cuffs, when Blake stopped him.

"Ass! Never mind him. We must see what's in this box,

anyway!"

"Look here, I'm going!" began Levison.

"Rats! Stay where you are!"

"I tell you—"

ANSWERS

NEXT
THURSDAY:

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"Rats!" said Blake. "Come on, Gussy, let's lift the thing on to the table!"

Arthur Augustus seemed to have his doubts about the matter.

"It would be howwible to be blown up, Blake——"

"Now then, don't funk!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Lemme go! Blake's sure to drop the thing—and then it's all up with us!" shouted Levison.

Digby was between him and the door.

"You'll stay here!" said Digby grimly.

"Leave it to me, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "As a fellow of tact and judgment, I think I had bettah lift the box on to the table, Blake——"

"All serene! Chuck talking, anyway, and let's get on with the washing!"

Arthur Augustus stooped carefully and lifted the box. The others watched him silently.

D'Arcy found it extremely trying to maintain his customary calm. Levison was perspiring with fear. Blake and Digby did not look exactly at ease.

"Be careful, for mercy's sake!" murmured Levison.

As he spoke D'Arcy stumbled on the loose board, and the box slipped from his hands.

Crash!

Levison yelled and plunged wildly for the door. Blake and Digby threw themselves into different corners of the room. Arthur Augustus gasped.

But there was no explosion. The box lay on the floor where it had dropped. Levison, unable to stop himself, had gone head over heels into the passage outside. He was picking himself up when the Terrible Three came down the Fourth Form passage.

"Hallo!" cried Tom Merry cheerfully. "What's the matter?"

"Lemme go!" shouted Levison. "Dynamite! Murder! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha! He's been chucked out of Study No. 6!" chuckled Lowther.

"Let me pass!" yelled Levison. "I tell you——"

"Not much!" said Lowther, taking him by the collar. "Come in with us!"

"They've got dynamite in there!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Come in, my son, and lend a hand, then!" grinned Tom Merry. "If there's going to be a blow-up, you can take your whack!"

"Let me go!"

But Levison had to go in; the Terrible Three held him fast.

"Good egg!" said Blake, as he saw Tom Merry & Co. dragging him in. "Don't let him go!"

"Great Scott! What's up!" exclaimed Lowther. "Anybody killed?"

"There will be yet!" howled Levison. "I heard Patoff say there was dynamite in that box——"

"Ha, ha, ha! A giddy jape!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, surveying the box through his monocle. "It is a jape. I shall thwash Levison for havin' the audacity to slandah my fwiend Patoff," he continued, raising the lid of the box. "Bai Jove! A bwown papah parcel——"

"Take care!" panted Levison. "You'll kill us all before you've done!"

Inside the brown-paper parcel was a pasteboard card with an inscription on it.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Shell fellows.

Levison stared blankly at the card. It bore the inscription of a single word:

"Sold!"

CHAPTER 12.

A Cry for Help!

SOLD!
Levison's struggles in the grasp of the Terrible Three suddenly ceased. He gazed at the card Blake had taken from the box. His eyes seemed to be starting from his head. For a moment it seemed to him that he was the victim of a dream.

What did it mean? Tom Merry and Manners teased the cad of the Fourth.

They could not hold him any longer; they were doubled up with laughter. Their wild yells rang through the study.

Jack Blake stared at the card. Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and took it off and polished it and jammed it in again. He seemed to be unable to believe what his monocle revealed to him.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated, for the sixth or seventh time. "Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the chums of the Shell.

"Sold!" said Blake. "Sold! My hat!"

"It's a trick!" said Levison hoarsely. "It's a rotten trick! That Russian cad has changed the box somehow; he hid a box of dynamite here, under the loose board."

"You uttah ass!"

"I heard him say so!" yelled Levison.

"Wats!"

"Yes, rats!" said Blake. "This box must have been shoved here before morning classes, all ready for this jape. Lots of fellows knew about the loose board in the study here. It's a jape on you, Levison, you ass!"

"It's a trick! I tell you I heard them talking. Patoff was speaking in Russian, and the other fellow in English, and——"

"You don't know Russian."

"I know the sound of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Monty Lowther. "Was it anything like this: 'Cernakoff moskowski norroff kook ske razzaff'?"

Levison started.

And well he might. For Monty Lowther's voice, as he spoke in that peculiar Russian, was exactly the voice Levison had heard behind the elm.

The cad of the Fourth turned quite pale.

He was beginning to understand now. His eyes gleamed with a greenish light as they turned upon the Terrible Three.

"It was——was you!" he panted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You——you!"

"Bai Jove!"

The Terrible Three seemed to be on the verge of hysterics. Manners flung himself into the armchair, and Tom Merry clung to the door. Monty Lowther leaned against the wall and shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha! Moskowski cerny-cerny! Poufk! Poufk! Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison's face was livid.

"It was you——you!" he gasped, hardly able to believe his senses yet. "You——you were talking there——taking me in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I wegard that as wathah funnay, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "My only hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was wathah a cheek, usin' our studay without our permish; but, undah the circs I will ovahlook that! I trust this will be a lesson to you, Levison, not to play the giddy ox any more."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison turned to the door. His face had flushed crimson now; he realised what an utter ass he looked. But he was not to get away quickly. There were Shell fellows crowded outside. The Terrible Three had evidently dropped a hint to the Form, and a crowd of fellows had come to see the fun.

"Bravo, Levison!" roared Kangaroo. "Good old Sherlock Holmes!"

"Have you found the dynamite?" yelled Bernard Glyn.

"Sold!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison, with a furious face, pushed his way through the crowd of juniors. He only wanted to get away, to hide his confusion in his own study. A yell of laughter followed him as he retreated; and within five minutes the whole House knew what had happened, and was laughing, too. Even Toby, the School House page, was seen to chuckle; and Taggles, the porter, wore a grim kind of grin. Levison, if he had done nothing else, had added considerably to the gaiety of the School House that day.

In his own study, with the door locked, Levison remained alone, his face white, his teeth set, his eyes gleaming.

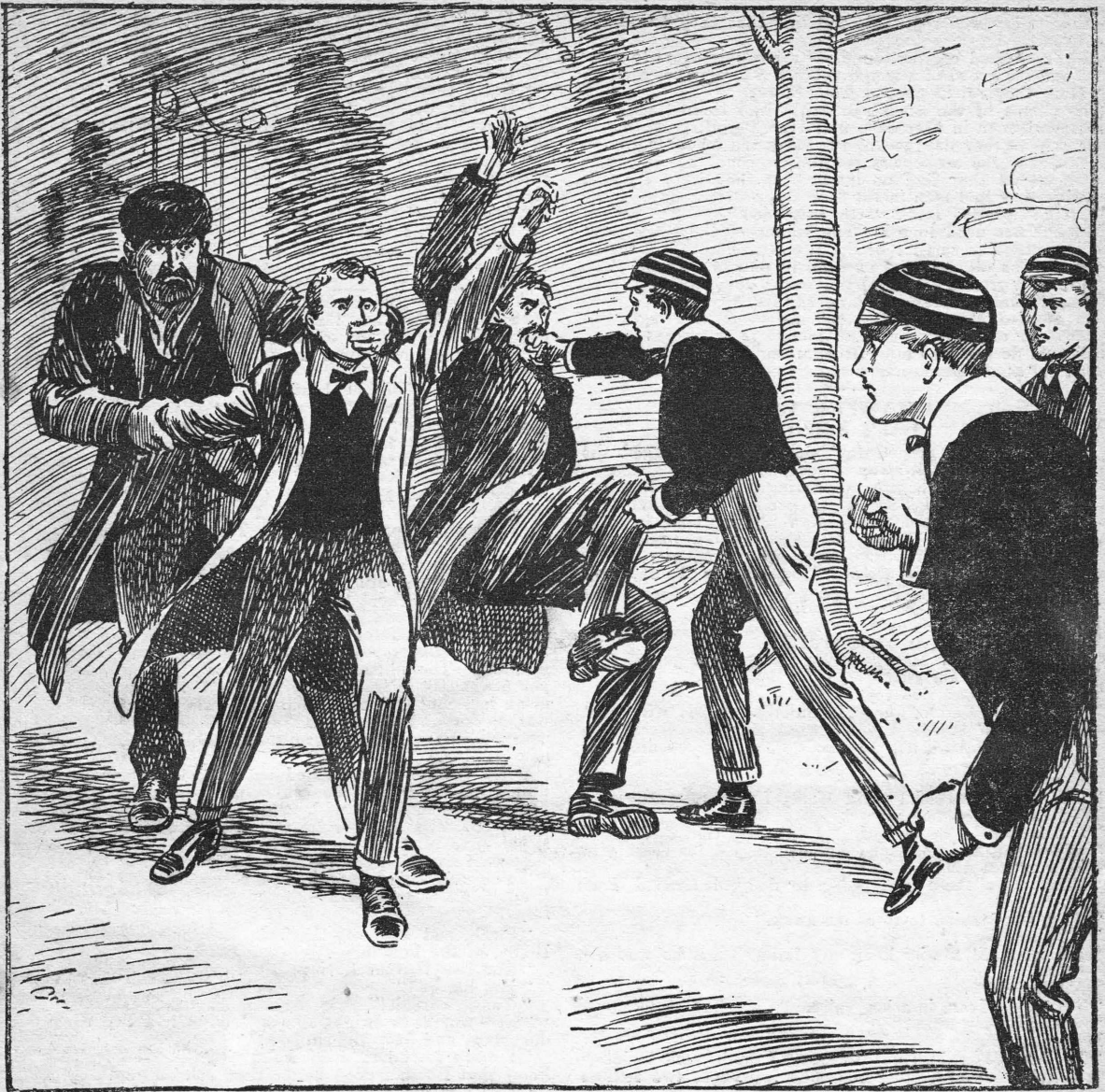
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"Help!" gasped Ivan, struggling in the grasp of one of his burly assailant. "Oh, help me!" The Russian junior did not need to ask, Tom Merry & Co. were already rushing to his rescue, hitting out. (See Chapter 12.)

He had tried to injure the Russian junior. He had imagined that he had found out a plot which should cover the new-comer with shame and himself with credit, and he had been punished as he deserved.

But Levison had no intention of giving up the task he had set himself. He was more savagely and spitefully determined to bring the Russian junior to ruin if he could. Unless he could prove something now against the Russian boy, he would remain the laughing-stock of the School House. In spite of the defeat which had covered him with utter confusion, the cad of the Fourth was already laying new plans.

In Study No. 6 and the Fourth Form passage the juniors roared with laughter, till Kildare came up with a cane to inquire what the matter was.

But as soon as the hysterical juniors explained, the captain of St. Jim's roared himself, and went down with the story to set the Sixth Form passage in a roar.

"Patoff ought to hear the joke," Tom Merry remarked, when the Terrible Three went downstairs at last. "Where is he? Anybody know?"

"He doesn't seem to be in the house," said Manners.

"He went out into the quad., when Levison followed him, you remember," said Monty Lowther. "I don't think he's been in since."

Tom Merry whistled.

"My hat! It's quite easy for a chap to lose his way in this giddy mist, even inside the school walls!" he exclaimed. "We had better look for him!"

He gazed out from the doorway of the School House into the sea of white mist.

Nothing was to be seen, save the spectral forms of the big elm-trees nearest at hand.

Suddenly from the mist there came an echoing sound, so dulled and echoed in the mist that it was hard to tell whence it proceeded.

"Help!"

The cry was faint and far, but it was unmistakable. Tom Merry started.

"That was Patoff's voice!" he exclaimed.

"My hat! Where is he?"

"Help!"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, breathlessly. "It must be those Russian chaps again! They've got him! He may have gone to see them—"

"Help!"

The cry was fainter.

The Terrible Three waited for no more. They dashed down the steps of the School House and into the mist.

Again the cry was repeated, and this time they found the direction.

As they rushed on, the sounds of a struggle came to their ears, and the growl of a rough voice in a foreign tongue.

"Here they are!" gasped Tom Merry.

The chums of the Shell ran fairly into three struggling forms—two men in overcoats, and Ivan Patoff struggling in their grip as they dragged him towards the school wall. In the mist and the excitement the juniors could not recognise the men, but they had no doubt that they were the two Russians they had seen in the lane the previous day.

"Help!" gasped Ivan. "Oh, help me!"

He did not need to ask. The chums of the Shell were hitting out. The smaller of the two Russians rolled on the ground. The other let go of Ivan to defend himself. The man on the ground slid his hand into a side-pocket.

"Run!" gasped Ivan. "Danger! Run!"

He grasped at the juniors and drew them away. But if the man on the ground had meant to draw a weapon, he did not do so. The other Russian shouted to him, and in a moment the two men had disappeared into the mist.

CHAPTER 13.

Ivan's Secret.

IVAN PATOFF gasped for breath as he dragged the chums of the Shell away in the mist.

They went with him, wondering. The two Russians had disappeared, and Tom Merry had no doubt that they were already over the school wall. The whole incident amazed the Terrible Three; but the Russian junior was so agitated that they forebore from questioning him. They had almost reached the School House, when Tom Merry called a halt.

"Hold on, Patoff!" he exclaimed abruptly.

Ivan stopped, and panted.

"They are gone!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "We've let them get away."

"I am glad—I am glad!"

Tom Merry's face was very serious.

"Look here, Patoff," he said quietly. "This will want explaining, you know. I don't want to poke myself into your private affairs, after Levison's style, but you must see for yourself that—that—"

"It won't do!" said Manners.

"It's rather too thick!" said Monty Lowther.

Ivan had turned pale.

"I understand," he replied. "I am sorry that this should have occurred, and very much obliged to you for coming to my help as you did."

"What were those men going to do?" demanded Tom Merry.

"They were trying to force me away."

"Who are they?"

"Russians. Men who knew my father when he was a—"

"Nihilist?"

"Yes," said Ivan, in a low voice.

"What do they want?"

Ivan was silent.

"Look here!" said Tom Merry. "I don't want to interfere, but this is altogether too thick! Those two fellows wanted to kidnap you?"

"Ye-es."

"Then they ought to be arrested!"

"Oh, no—oh, no!"

"Why not?" demanded the Terrible Three together.

Ivan flushed.

"Because—because— You do not understand!"

"No, I'm blessed if I do!" said Tom Merry tartly. "If they're ruffians and kidnapers, they ought to be taken up by the police!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I—I went to meet them of my own accord," said Ivan slowly, his face still painfully flushed. "I had a letter from Czernavieff—from one of them—this morning. He wrote to me that he would see me, and—and I went out to meet them. But I did not go far from the gate, and when I refused what they asked, they attempted to seize me, and I ran in; but in the mist they thought they might succeed, and they followed me—"

"But—but they must be frightful ruffians, to try anything of the sort!" exclaimed Tom Merry aghast. "I'm blessed if I can understand why you don't want to hand them over to the police!"

The Russian junior shook his head.

"I—I cannot!" he exclaimed. "Do me a favour, and do not speak about this in the school. No one else has seen what happened, owing to the fog."

"But—but—"

"Suppose they try it again?" exclaimed Manners.

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"I shall take care to keep within the school walls until I am sure that they have left the neighbourhood."

"They might raid the school to get at you."

"It is not likely."

"But if they do—"

"If they do, my friend, I shall agree to take harsh measures," said the Russian lad. "But—but do me this favour. I do not want them punished."

"I'm blessed if I understand," said Tom Merry. "But I suppose we can't interfere if you don't want us to. It's all right."

"All serene," said Manners and Lowther.

"Thank you so much!"

And Ivan Patoff ran off into the House, leaving the Terrible Three in a state of great amazement.

"I'm blessed if I half like this!" said Tom Merry. "It looks to me as if those chaps are Nihilists, and old friends of Patoff's pater, and they want to get him back into the gang. That's the only explanation I can think of."

"But what use would a schoolboy be to them?" said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Blessed if I know!" he replied. "It's a giddy mystery! It's pretty clear, though, that Levison is off-side all the time! Patoff is trying to keep away from these fellows—not to get mixed up in the business, as Levison supposes."

"Yes, that's pretty clear."

"I think the Head ought to be told that Patoff's in danger from the rotters; but I suppose we must keep it dark, as we've promised," said Tom Merry uneasily. "I don't like the bizney at all."

And Lowther and Manners agreed with him.

They saw the Russian junior again when the fellows went into the School House to dinner. Ivan was his usual calm and quiet self, and he showed no trace remaining of the exciting encounter in the mist.

Most of the fellows at the Fourth Form table were grinning. The discovery of the spoof dynamite in Study No. 6 was still in their thoughts, and Levison was subjected to an incessant stream of badinage. The cad of the Fourth was sullen and silent. Ivan Patoff heard the story in whispers at the Fourth Form dinner-table, and he could not help smiling.

When the juniors streamed out of the dining-room after dinner Levison was the centre of a crowd of humorous juniors, who inquired, with great solicitude, after his detective work, and whether he had discovered any more conspiracies to blow up the School House.

Levison regarded them with a bitter sneer.

"You can snigger now, you fatheads!" he exclaimed. "You'll all snigger in a different way when you know the facts!"

"Faith, and what are the facts, Levison, darling?" asked Reilly, of the Fourth.

"The fact is, that Levison is an ass!" said Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard you as a frightful ass, Levison! Pway wing off, deah boy, and drop the subject!"

"I don't intend to drop the subject!" said Levison. "I know that Russian chap better than you do, and I'm going to show him up in his true colours!"

"Rats!"

"Fathead!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and regarded the cad of the Fourth with a very severe expression.

"Levison, I wegard you as a wottah! I have already informed you that I wegard the Wassian kid as a fiwend. I wufuse to allow you to make any insinuations against him."

"Oh, rats!"

"If I hear you make any furthah dispaawaging remarks about Patoff, Levison, I shall have no wresource but to give you a fearful thwashin'!" said the swell of St. Jim's impressively.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Levison.

"Weally, you wottah—"

Levison walked away scowling. He was still looking very sullen when the bell rang for afternoon classes, and the boys went into the Form-room. Figgins & Co., of the New House, grinned cheerfully at Levison as they came in, and Figgins tapped him on the shoulder.

"Look under your desk when you sit down, Levison," he whispered mysteriously.

Levison stared at him.

"What do you mean, Figgins?"

"Dynamite!"

"What!"

"Take care!"

"Do you mean to say that there's dynamite under my desk, Figgins?" demanded Levison, incredulously.

"No; but there might be, you know. You never can tell."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison scowled and went to his place. He was not likely to be rid of the chipping on the subject of his valuable discovery for some time to come. Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form-master, came into the room, and the chuckling died away, and the amateur detective of St. Jim's had a little peace.

As it happened, the geography lesson that afternoon dealt with Russia, and the juniors did not let the opportunity pass of a little fun at Levison's expense. Kerr was asked to name one of the principal products of Russia, and he replied cheerfully:

"Nihilists, sir."

And there was a chuckle in the class.

"My dear Kerr," said Mr. Lathom mildly, "what an extraordinary answer! Nihilists are not a product, neither are they exported to England!"

"Some fellows think they are, sir," said Kerr.

And the Fourth chuckled again, and Levison's face was crimson with rage. In spite of his conviction that he was upon the right track, and that he would yet catch the Russian junior napping, Levison was perhaps beginning to wish that he had not started in business as an amateur detective.

CHAPTER 14.

The Mysterious Russian!

LEVISON sat alone in his study.

He had finished his preparation. Lumley-Lumley and Mellish, who shared the study with him, had finished theirs, and gone down to the common-room. But Levison did not care to go down. He knew that he would have to face the endless jests on the subject of the discovery of the dynamite in Study No. 6, and he was "quite fed up" on that subject. He was thinking of the curious circumstances which had attended the arrival of the Russian junior at St. Jim's, when there was a tap at his door, and it opened.

"Is dis Master Levison's study?" said a guttural voice.

Levison rose to his feet.

"Yes," he said. "Who are you?"

A peculiar figure came in—a man with a thick, dark beard and whiskers that covered the whole of his face, and a thick overcoat on. He was not much taller than Levison himself, but he looked very bulky in his coat and heavy boots. Only two keen eyes, arched over with thick brows, and a very red nose, could be seen of his face, among the thick whiskers. He entered the study quickly, and closed the door behind him.

"You are Master Levison?"

"Yes," said the junior, a little alarmed; "but—"

"Hist!"

The newcomer locked the door. Levison made a step towards it, but the stranger waved him back.

"Hist!"

"Wh-what!" began the alarmed junior. "Who are you?"

"I am ze agent of ze Russian police!"

Levison staggered back.

"I come here to look for ze Nihilist. I zink zat you give me information?"

"Wh-what?"

"I zink I speak plainly," said the Russian impatiently. "I zink zat you know of ze Nihilist vich is hiding here, don't it?"

"You—you are a Russian detective?" gasped Levison breathlessly.

"I zink I say so."

The cad of the Fourth trembled with excitement.

"Whom are you looking for?" he exclaimed.

"Is zere a boy here of ze name of Ivan Patoff?"

"Yes, yes!"

"You show me vero to find him?"

"Quite easily. Do you want to arrest him?" asked Levison, his eyes gleaming eagerly. Had his chance come at last?

"Zat depend," said the Russian, in a mysterious whisper. "You see, I not have ze proof zat he mix viz ze Nihilists, you see. But if zere was one suspicious circumstance since zat he come here, zat would be enoff."

"Of course there are," said Levison. "Have you seen the Head?"

"Ske, ske—I mean yes, yes!" said the Russian. "He know nozing. But perhaps you can tell me—if ze boy have met any Russians since he come here?"

"He has!" said Levison.

"How many of zem?"

"Two!"

"Hein! Are you sure of zat?"

"Yes, yes. I've seen them."

The police agent started.

"Seen zem?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Yes. I'm willing to swear to it."

"Perhaps you could identify zem?"

"I—I think so. It was rather misty, but—but yes, I think you could depend on me," said Levison. "I'd be willing to do my best."

"You do not like zis Ivan Patoff?"

"I hate him!" said the cad of the Fourth, between his teeth. "I suspected from the first that he was hiding here from the Russian police."

"Ah! You suspect zat?"

"I felt quite sure of it."

"Ach! Zat is vat I wish to discover. You are dangerous to ze safety of ze boy Ivan Patoff," said the Russian, in his guttural tones.

"I mean to be!" said Levison savagely.

"Zat is enough. I call myself police agent to hear you say so," said the Russian. "You may now know who I am. I am ze agent of ze Nihilists!"

"Wh-what!"

"You know ze secret of Ivan Patoff," said the Russian, in a deep voice. "You must die!"

"Look here, I—I was only joking!" gasped Levison. "I—I like that chap Patoff, you know. I—I regard him as my best friend—"

The Russian shook his hairy head.

"Zat come too late," he said sternly.

"I—I assure you—"

"Prepare for ze doom!"

Levison backed away round the table. The Russian had placed his back against the door, and was feeling in his pockets, evidently for a weapon.

"I—I— Help!" shrieked Levison.

"Ze door is locked," said the Russian. "Zere is no help possible for you. I have ze order of ze secret brotherhood to kill ze spy."

"I—I—"

"You have tree minutes to live," said the Nihilist solemnly.

"Help!"

Levison heard footsteps in the passage. He shouted at the top of his voice, and there came a knock at the door.

"Hallo, there!" called out the voice of Tom Merry.

"What's the row?"

"Help! Murder!"

"Why, what's up?"

"It's another of Levison's little jokes," said the voice of Monty Lowther. "He's trying to take us in again."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Help!" yelled Levison. "There's a murderer in here! The villain is threatening to kill me, because I know about Patoff! He's a Nihilist!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" It was Figgins's voice this time.

"Cheese it, Levison! That's too thick, you know."

"Help! Open the door!"

"Can't! It's locked."

"Vun more minute to live!" said the Russian, in a deep, savage whisper, as he pointed to the clock ticking on the mantelpiece.

"Help! Help!"

"Oh, chuck it!" Tom Merry called in through the key-hole. "You don't expect us to swallow that, do you, Levison?"

"I tell you it's true!" shrieked Levison, in a frenzy.

"The villain's just going to attack me! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fools! Break in the door!"

"Wats!"

"Break in the door! Call the Head! Help!"

"Oh, come off!"

"Help! Help!"

The Russian pointed to the clock again with the door-key, which he held in his hand.

"Ze time is come!" he said.

"Oh! Help! Oh!"

"Doesn't he do it well?" came the voice of Jack Blake from the passage. "If Levison wasn't such an awful fabricator, you might think that there really was somebody in the study with him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But we know Levison!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison was perspiring with fear. At that moment he sincerely wished that he had followed the example of the late George Washington, and had never told a lie. But his lies were too numerous for the juniors of St. Jim's to accept his word without proof.

The Russian made a step towards Levison. He was silent, but his very silence was terrible to Levison. It showed a deep deadliness of purpose. Levison backed away round the

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table. The Russian laid the key on the table, and groped in the pockets of his coat. Levison panted.

"Help! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" rang out from the passage.

It was fearful to Levison—on the other side of the locked door the laughing juniors, and in the study himself shut up with a savage, relentless Nihilist.

What would the fellows say when they knew the truth—when they saw his body in the study, a victim to Nihilist vengeance? But it would be too late for him then! He backed away towards the door, his eyes glittering with terror. The Russian followed him round the table, and stumbled.

Levison, with the spring of a tiger, seized the key that lay upon the table, and darted to the door.

"Stop! Stop!" muttered the Russian savagely. "I shoots you in zo back!"

A shriek of terror left Levison's lips. He jammed the key at the keyhole, in his terror missing it, and clattering the metal against the lock. At every moment he expected to hear the crack of a revolver, and to feel the bullet searing his flesh. The key jammed into the lock at last, and Levison turned it, and dragged the door open.

"Here he is!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison, white as chalk, staggered out of the study.

"Help!" he gasped. "He's in there—the Nihilist! Help!"

CHAPTER 15.

Levison Does Not Laugh.

"**B**AI JOVE!"

"Rats!"

There was a sound in the study. Tom Merry & Co. looked in, and there was a general exclamation. The greatcoated, thick-whiskered Russian was looking at them across the table.

"My hat!"

"Faith, and there's somebody there!"

"Look out!" gasped Levison. "He's got a revolver!"

"Bai Jove!"

The crowd of juniors stood staring at the Russian across the table. Figgins and Fatty Wynn were chuckling, and so were Blake, and Tom Merry, and Lowther. But the others looked very serious. It was evident that Levison had not, after all, been shrieking for nothing.

"Who are you?" exclaimed Kangaroo, of the Shell.

"Me no speak English."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Levison, from the passage. "He does speak English. He's a Nihilist, and he told me he was going to kill me because I knew about Patoff."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Ivan Patoff, who was in the crowd.

Levison gave him a venomous look.

"You're found out now," he said between his teeth.

"Nonsense! There is no Nihilist here."

"There's somebody, anyhow, Patoff darling," said Reilly.

Ivan looked into the study. He stared at the whiskered figure in amazement.

"Good heavens! Who are you?"

"Zerynykoff haggis ratz popoff!"

"He's speaking Russian!" shouted Gore.

"Patoff knows him!"

Ivan burst into a laugh.

"What's that row?" It was Kildare's voice, and the captain of St. Jim's, with a frown upon his face, came elbowing his way through the crowd in the Fourth Form passage. "Now then, what ass was that shrieking for help?"

"It was Levison!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Levison! What do you mean by it?" demanded Kildare, fixing his eyes sternly upon the pallid face of the cad of the Fourth.

"I was in danger of my life!" said Levison, recovering his courage a little. "One of Ivan Patoff's friends tried to murder me!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Kildare sharply.

"He's in the study now! He's got a revolver!"

"What!"

"Look for yourself!" snarled Levison.

"Make room there, you kids!" said Kildare.

The juniors made way for the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare strode into the study, and he started with amazement at the sight of the bearded, whiskered Russian.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed.

"Whikky whacky koff and boff sjosky!"

"What!"

"Riminy piminy boffy slosh!"

"What on earth does he mean?" exclaimed Kildare, in amazement. "It must be some lunatic escaped from an asylum!"

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"**THE SCHOOLBOY MINSTRELS!**"

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"He's speaking Russian!" exclaimed Hancock.

"Nonsense! Is that Russian he is speaking, Patoff?" demanded Kildare.

The Russian junior chuckled.

"No, of course not!" he said. "It is a joke, I suppose."

Kildare fixed his eyes upon the stranger.

"Look here, my man, whoever you are, you had better explain yourself!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"Mixey whisky soda dragamanoff!"

Kildare burst into a laugh.

"Is this your Nihilist, Levison?" he asked. "Do you mean to say that you have been scared by a silly practical joke like this?"

Levison caught his breath.

"It wasn't a practical joke!" he screamed. "I tell you he's a Nihilist! He's got a revolver, and he's only pretending now. If I hadn't got the key away from him, I should have been murdered by now!"

"Look here, my man, explain who you are, and how you came here!" Kildare said. "This isn't the place for strangers to play practical jokes in!"

"Notski stranger hereoff notat allski!"

"What!"

"You knowoff me wellski."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

Figgins yelled. Some of the juniors caught on to the meaning of the peculiar Russian words, and yelled with laughter, too. Even Levison began to understand. The Russian language as uttered by the Nihilist in the study bore a suspicious family resemblance to the language of the "conspirators" in the misty quadrangle.

"Do you mean that I know you well?" demanded Kildare.

"Yes-ski."

"Who are you?"

"My nameoff is Kerrski!"

"What!"

Kildare made a stride forward, and caught hold of the thick whiskers and beard, and gave a sharp tug at them.

They came off in his hand.

There was a yell from the juniors.

"Kerr!"

The face of the Scottish junior, with a broad grin upon it, was revealed.

Part of the disguise—the paint on the face, the bushy and darkened eyebrows—remained, but without the beard and moustache and whiskers, Kerr could be recognised.

Kildare stood with the mass of hair in his hand, staring at the New House fellow.

"What on earth—" he began.

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

Levison stood transfixed.

"It's all serene, Kildare!" said Kerr, with a grin. "Only a little joke on Levison, you know. He's got Nihilists on the brain, and we're going to cure him, that's all!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you hound!" muttered Levison, grinding his teeth.

"You—you rotten hound!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway modewate your language, Levison, deah boy! You have been taken in, and you deserve it for bein' a howlin' duffah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare burst into a laugh. He threw the disguise upon the table, and Kerr picked it up, and stowed it away in his pocket.

"You are a young ass!" said the St. Jim's captain. "You shouldn't play tricks of that sort! Levison has been badly frightened—"

"I wasn't frightened!" said Levison savagely. "I was startled—in fact, I wasn't really startled! I suspected all the time that—"

A burst of laughter interrupted the cad of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove! That's wathah thick, you know, Levison, deah boy!"

"I tell you—"

"You must not do it again!" said Kildare. "As for you, Levison, you deserved it all, for playing the fool lately as you have done! You ought to have more sense!"

And Kildare quitted the study.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn marched Kerr off between them, and the rest of the juniors followed, howling with laughter.

Levison stood watching them go with a scowl of hatred. Ivan Patoff paused in the doorway and looked back.

"Why do you not stop this folly, Levison?" he said. "Are you not convinced by this time that there is nothing for you to discover?"

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I'll show you up yet!" he said.

Ivan laughed.

He followed the other juniors from the study, and Levison

was left alone again. The cad of the Fourth clenched his hands as he heard the yells of laughter that proceeded from below.

The joke was too good not to be enjoyed, and up to bed-time that evening, there came gusts of laughter from the junior common-room as the juniors talked of it.

When the Fourth Form went to bed, Levison's appearance in the dormitory was greeted with fresh yells of laughter. Blake advised him to look under his bed for Nihilists, and Digby suggested a careful examination of the soap-dish. Herries asked him if he would like to have Towser brought into the dormitory for the night.

Levison went to bed without a word.

After Kildare had seen lights out, there was much talk and chuckling upon the subject, and Levison listened to it all with a heart burning with malice. Would his chance never come?

After the rest of the fellows were asleep, Levison lay awake thinking of it—thinking of possible means of entrapping the Russian junior, and discovering the guilty secret which he was quite certain Ivan Patoff was hiding from the world.

And as half-past ten rang out from the clock-tower, Levison started in bed, for he had heard a rustle from one of the other beds—the sound of a boy getting up. And he knew, with his quick ears, that the sound came from the bed of the Russian junior.

There was a glimmer of starlight at the window. Watching from his pillow without moving his head, Levison saw the Russian junior quietly dressing himself. Levison's eyes gleamed green like a cat's in the darkness.

The Russian boy left the dormitory. He did not once glance towards Levison's bed, but he made noise enough to attract Levison's attention if he were awake. The door closed behind him, and Levison, the next moment, was out of bed, and dragging on his trousers with desperate haste.

CHAPTER 16.

An Unexpected Catch.

DARKNESS was in the Shell dormitory in the School House, but the heroes of the Shell were not all asleep. Three of them were awake, and, needless to say, they were the Terrible Three. When half-past ten rang out on the dim air of night, the three sat up in bed as if by clockwork.

"Tis now the very mystic time of night," grinned Monty Lowther, "when churchyards yawning."

"Oh, shut up!" said Manners. "You'll wake the dorm."

"Time Patoff was here," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hallo!" came a yawning voice from Harry Noble.

"Who's that jawing?"

"Us, Kangy, my noble son!" replied Monty Lowther.

"Well, go to sleep!"

"Can't! There's a jape on."

Kangaroo sat up in bed.

"What's the jape?" he demanded.

"A little joke upon the festive Levison," replied Lowther cheerfully. "Patoff is coming here, and Levison, of course, will spot him and follow him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake and those cheerful youths are going to rig up a booby trap in the passage ready for Levison as he goes back," grinned Lowther. "Patoff will cut round by the lower passage, and go back the other way. When the festive detective returns to his dormitory, he will walk into a cord across the passage, and bring down a bag of soot from a hook in the ceiling—"

Kangaroo chuckled. The door of the dormitory was heard to open softly.

"I am here," said Ivan's soft voice.

"Come in, my son!" said Tom Merry. "Was Levison awake?"

Ivan laughed quietly.

"Yes. I did not look at him, but I listened for his breathing. He was certainly not asleep, and when I left the dormitory, I heard someone get up, after I had closed the door."

"Levison, of course!" chuckled Kangaroo.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, hurriedly dragging on his clothes. "We've got to get round to the Fourth Form dorm. and see the fun."

"I'm coming, too!" remarked Kangaroo.

The four Shell fellows were dressed in a couple of minutes, and in rubber shoes they stole out of the dormitory. Tom Merry led the way up the passage, and at the end of it they paused to listen. Far down the passage, in the direction of the Fourth Form dormitory, they heard a distinct creak and then a muffled footstep.

"Levison!" whispered Tom Merry. "He's on the track!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!"

The juniors stole down the back stairs, and gained the study passage, and then by the big staircase they gained the dormitory passage again. Tom Merry paused and listened.

"Did you hear that?" he muttered.

"I heard nothing!" said Ivan.

"It sounded to me like a window creaking."

"Levison, of course," said Manners.

"Yes. I suppose so. Examining windows, perhaps, to see if Patoff has gone out."

And the juniors chuckled.

They reached the door of the Fourth Form dormitory, and found it partly open. Digby was standing there, dimly in the gloom. He made a sign of silence.

"All serene?" whispered Tom Merry.

"Yes. Blake's fixing it in the passage."

"Oh, good!"

"Levison went out just after Patoff!" grinned Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!" whispered Digby. "I don't know where Levison is. He may be coming back."

"Right you are!"

The juniors crowded silently into the dormitory. A good many of the Fourth Formers were awake now, and they were crowding round the doorway in nightshirts and pyjamas, softly chuckling. Blake came back into the dormitory, with a grin and a smear of soot on his face.

"All serene!" he said, in a low voice.

"Have you worked it?" whispered Kangaroo.

"Cord across the passage," murmured Blake. "When Levison puts his foot against it it releases the bag of soot from the hook in the ceiling. It comes down right on his napper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet, deah boys! Pway don't make a wow!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We don't want to let the silly ass know that there is a jape on, you know. I wathah think that Levison will be sowwy for himself when the bag of soot comes down. Pevwaps he will give up spyin' on chaps aftah this."

"Ha, ha! Perhaps."

"Listen!" muttered Lowther.

"He's coming!"

"Hark!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy! There's someone in the passage, you know—"

Arthur Augustus put up his hand. There were sounds coming from the passage. The juniors listened intently. They crowded round the door of the dormitory.

"Hist!" said Ivan Patoff. "There's someone coming!"

Jack Blake grinned.

"Levison," he said, "get ready to rush out, kids!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hist!"

The warning came from Ivan Patoff. The footsteps in the passage were coming nearer.

"Quiet!" whispered Blake.

There was a moment's silence. The stealthy footsteps were approaching the door.

Creak!

"Now, listen for the crash—"

Crash!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The passage outside rang with smothered cries and yells.

"Come on, kids!" said Blake.

And swinging the door open he led the way into the passage.

"Hallo, Levison! How d'you like that?" he exclaimed, with a grin. "My hat—"

"Bai Jove—"

"What the deuce?" gasped Tom Merry.

Instead of Levison, the juniors beheld two figures rolling on the passage floor in soot. The dim light from the candle ends showed them to be two men.

They were too much enveloped in soot to know what had happened to them for a moment.

With strange and seemingly strong expressions they struggled to their feet, as Blake came up at a dead stop within two yards of them.

"Come back!" yelled Ivan Patoff. "It's not Levison—"

The juniors involuntarily backed away.

"Burglars!" yelled Blake. "Burglars, by Jove! Quick! Collar them!"

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Raise the alarm!" cried Digby.

"Help! Burglars! Thieves!"

And the juniors piled upon the two gasping and spluttering figures.

"Burglars! Thieves!" yelled Kangaroo. "Help!"

The two men struggled furiously in the grip of the juniors. But the odds were too great. Half the Fourth Form were on

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the spot by this time, and struggling for a chance to get at the two nocturnal intruders.

The two men were dazed and blinded by the soot that had fallen upon them, and they struggled blindly and spasmodically.

"Got 'em all right," grinned Kangaroo. "Hallo, here's Levison! These chaps have got the soot instead of you, Levison."

Levison came panting up the passage

"What—what is it?" he gasped.

"Burglars!"

"My hat!"

"Don't let 'em get up!" yelled Tom Merry. "Help!"

Levison looked on breathlessly, with gleaming eyes.

"Friends of Ivan Patoff's, of course," he said, between his teeth; "that was what he left the dorm. for. I knew it." "You uttah ass—"

"I knew it!" said the cad of the Fourth, between his teeth. "The rotten cad will be shown up now—"

"You fowhtful ass—these wottahs are burglahs—"

"Pile on 'em!"

Doors could be heard opening, and voices calling. Lights flashed on the stairs.

There was no doubt about it. Pinned down by sheer weight of numbers, the two intruders were helpless in the grip of Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 17.

The Secret.

"CAUGHT!" said Tom Merry. "Bai Jove, yaas! Hold the wottahs, Tom Mewwy! I have made myself fowhtfully sooty, but I weally don't mind. It is worth spoilin' even a pair of weally good pyjamas, to capchah a pair of wotten burglahs." "What-ho!"

"They are not burglars!" Ivan Patoff's face was white and strained in the candle-light. "I know these men."

"Bai Jove!"

"They are the two Russians," said Tom Merry quietly. "The two men who were looking for Ivan Patoff in the lane; the two men who seized him in the quad.—"

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther.

Levison broke into a sneering laugh.

"Ivan Patoff's friends!" he said savagely. "Who was right, now? The Russian cad had led burglars into the house—"

"Don't be a fool!" said Blake sharply. "These men came here to do Ivan Patoff an injury."

"Rats!"

"It is true," said Patoff, "I—"

"Look out, here's Mr. Railton!"

The School House-master, half-dressed, came up the passage hurriedly. Kildare and Darrel were with him, and several other Sixth-Formers followed, some with pokers or cricket-stumps in their hands. Mr. Railton gazed at the two blackened and wriggling Russians, helpless in the grip of the juniors, in amazement.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "What does this mean?"

"We've caught 'em, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yes—yes, I see; but—but—"

"It was a jape, sir," explained Tom Merry cautiously. "We had a booby trap rigged up in the passage, sir—for Levison—and these chaps fell into it. And we've captured them. Under the circumstances, sir, I—I hope you will overlook the booby-trap."

"I suppose they must be burglars," said Mr. Railton, in amazement. "This is extraordinary. Kildare, Darrel, North, Rushden, take charge of them, and see that they do not escape. I will send to the police-station at once."

"Yaas, watah!"

Ivan Patoff uttered a cry.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Railton looked at him sharply. He had already heard the captured intruders muttering in Russian, and there was a strange suspicion in his look.

"Well, Patoff?" he said sharply.

"Please, sir, these men are not burglars," said Ivan.

"What! Do you know them?"

"Yes, sir."

"I told you so," muttered Levison vindictively—"I told you so!"

"Silence, Levison!"

"Yes, sir; but I think it ought to be remembered that I pointed out—"

"Silence! Go on, Patoff! Tell me what you know of these men. This is a most extraordinary affair," said the Housemaster. "Go on!"

Ivan drew a deep breath.

"They are Nihilists, sir—members of the society to which my father belonged."

"Didn't I say—" began Levison.

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"THE SCHOOLBOY MINSTRELS!"

is the Title of the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"Silence! Go on, Patoff!"

"My father, sir, invented a new explosive, and when he was killed in the St. Petersburg outrage, it was supposed that the secret died with him. But it did not; he left me a paper upon which it was written, and I kept it. I intended to place it, afterwards, at the disposal of the British War Office—when I have grown up, I mean, for it is a valuable secret. It is worth a large sum of money. But some of the members of the society knew of the existence of the document—and these two agents were sent to England to obtain it from me. They demanded it, and I refused. I would not have any hand in Nihilist matters—my mother made me promise never to have any connection with the movement, and I never wanted to. These men followed me here—they have tried to kidnap me, in order to obtain the paper. That is why they have come here to-night. They mean me no harm, but they are determined to possess the secret. I—I hope you will not send them to prison, sir. They were friends of my father's; they are fanatics, but not criminals."

Mr. Railton's face was very grave.

"But this kind of thing cannot be allowed to recur, Patoff. Another attempt—"

"There will be no other attempt, sir. I can prevent it."

"In what way?"

"By destroying the paper."

"Ah! But a valuable secret—"

"That is no matter. I had already thought of doing so, but now I have made up my mind, and I will destroy it in their presence." The Russian junior drew a leather purse from an inside pocket of his jacket, and extracted from it a small sealed packet. The two Russians exchanged a quick glance. It was evident that the packet was familiar to their eyes. "The paper is here, sir, sealed up as my father left it in his desk. I do not know the secret, I have never looked at the paper. If I destroy this, it is all ended."

"But—"

Ivan made a gesture, and spoke rapidly in Russian. The two men in the grasp of the St. Jim's prefects made a simultaneous effort to break loose; but it was unavailing. Many hands were holding them.

Ivan broke open the packet, and revealed a folded sheet of thick paper, covered with strange words and figures. With his eyes fixed upon the gleaming orbs of the two Nihilists, the Russian junior held the paper in the flame of a candle.

It flared up.

A torrent of angry Russian burst from the Nihilists. But the boy did not falter. He held the paper in the flame till it was consumed, and only a fragment remained in his fingers.

"There!" he said, with a deep breath. "It is finished."

Mr. Railton hesitated.

"But these men—"

"If you release them, sir, they will go—and never return."

For a moment the Housemaster paused. Then he nodded his head.

"Be it so. Tell them, Patoff, that if they are seen near this school again, they will be arrested and sent to prison."

"Yes, sir."

Ivan spoke rapidly to the two prisoners in his own tongue. They listened in sullen silence.

"Now let them go!"

The Nihilists were released. Two blackened and muttering figures disappeared into the misty quadrangle, and passed from the sight of the juniors of St. Jim's—for ever!

Mr. Railton turned to the boys.

"Go back to bed!" he said. "Under the circumstances, I shall overlook this freak of yours, as it has had such fortunate results. Levison, I trust you will see now that your suspicions of your schoolfellow were wicked and unworthy, and I think you should ask his pardon."

Levison's face was livid. Even he could not deny any longer that Ivan had proved the falsity of his suspicions.

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir," he muttered.

"Very good. Let this be a lesson to you not to be suspicious and vindictive. Go back to bed!"

The boys returned to their dormitories. But it was a long time before they slept; far into the night they discussed the strange happening. But Levison did not speak. His house of cards, so to speak, had tumbled down about his ears, and he had nothing more to say.

It was a nine days' wonder at St. Jim's. But the Nihilists were not seen again; they had taken the chance given them of getting safely out of the country. The secret Ivan Patoff had held existed no longer, and the shadow of the past no longer darkened the life of the Schoolboy Nihilist.

THE END.

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PROFESSOR LUDWIG VON HAAGEL—The famous German scientist, also noted for his clumsiness.

MATTHEW REDLAND—The talented inventor of a wonderful airship. He is drowned at the entrance of the ice barrier.

JOSEPH JACKSON or **SHOREDITCH JOSE**—A Cockney member of the crew, whose constant companion is a game bantam named the Smacker.

TEDDY MORGAN—Ship's engineer.

WILLIAM TOOTER—The hairy first mate.

The Foamwitch is on an expedition with the object of exploring the strange land which is believed to lie beyond the barrier of eternal ice near the South Pole. The capture of a

curious creature, with golden wings—half bird, half reptile, inside which is found the shell of the extinct ammonite—works those on board the Foamwitch up to a pitch of highest enthusiasm. As soon as the first land is reached, the construction of the aeronef, Wings of Gold—which has been carried in pieces on the Foamwitch—is proceeded with.

After a period of hard and strenuous work, the aeronef is completed, and the final arrangements are made in its long saloon. The next day sees the commencement of the wonderful voyage of the airship, Wings of Gold, into the Antarctic circle.

On their journey they witness some wonderful sights, and are completely startled by the appearance of a reptile-like bird, which Professor von Haagel classes as a pterodactyle. The professor then goes on to give the crew of the airship a few names of these long-extinct animals.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Professor's Lecture.—Above the Mists.

Professor Von Haagel placed his right forefinger on his left thumb, and spoke with a strong German accent.

"First of all dere was der dreadful ichthyosaurus—"

"Help!" moaned Crooks, staggered by the name. "Help! Why not?"

"Dere was der ichthyosaurus tenuiostris, or der slender-jawed."

"He'll brike his own blessed jaw in 'alf a minute, or I'll chase meself!" muttered Jackson.

"Der plesiosaurus dolichodeirus, or der long-necked," said Von Haagel.

"Winking blackbirds! He'll tie his own neck into knots!" said Tooter.

"Dot was dree," continued the professor. "These are all saurians, or monster lizards, and dere were oders dot vly. Dey were all called pterodactyles, which means dot dey had vinger-like vings, and der vord is Greek. Der pterodactyles—ach, yes, Crooks, you wish to ask ein question—yes?"

Mr. Crooks brought his gleaming eye in line with the professor's face. Mr. Crooks looked wonderfully grave and interested.

"Why not, sir?" he grunted. "I ax was them terry—terry—"

"Pterodactyles—yes?"

"Was them terry-what-is-it's heggs good to heat when 'ard-b'iled? Why not?"

They were all convulsed. Jackson laid his head on Mr. Tooter's shoulder and asked to be kissed before he died. Maurice, choking with laughter, took the cook by one red ear and kicked him out. While they were still chuckling the whistle of the speaking-tube sounded, and Lance answered the call.

"Hallo!"

A gruff voice rumbled up the tube like heavy thunder.

"Why not?" it said. "Heggs is heggs. Heggs is not bacon. Some heggs sings afore they are hatched into birds.

Such heggs is musical, and not fit for cookery. Why not? There is shells on heggs, likewise on crabs. Why not? There is white in heggs, likewise green in Mr. Tooter's eye. Heggs is not like pork. Heggs do not make good pea-soup. Why not? Heggs is—"

Lance did not hear the rest. He seized the coffee-pot and poured what was left of the coffee into the speaking-tube. Then he listened. Weird sounds rose from below, as if someone was tacking down a carpet with a steam-hammer, and using strong language at the same time. It was only Mr. Crooks dancing round the room with a pint of coffee-dregs inside his fur-collar.

"Why not?" grinned Lance. "Methinks I got him in the neck."

"Was it Crooks, old chap?" asked Fordham.

"You bet."

Mr. Tooter and Mr. Jackson winked at each other and giggled joyfully.

"Let me say a soothin' word ter him," said Jackson. "I expect 'is blessed feelin's is 'urt. He is a sensitive chap—not 'alf he ain't! Come on, Bill, and we'll be gentle to the poor cove. I 'ate ter leave him alone. He'll start chasin' hisself."

Von Haagel's lecture had come to an abrupt ending. The fog was growing denser above and below. Morgan went to note the pressure of air in the cylinders, and to test the bearings. It was his turn to rest. Maurice was rather astonished to discover him in the saloon, curled up in an easy-chair, reading one of Von Haagel's volumes, entitled "The World that Was."

"Teddy is a convert, Lance," said Fordham. "He's had a jostling this journey. I told him to go to bed, but he wouldn't budge. He's simply sucking in wisdom!"

"He always was a stubborn lout," said Lance; "but we'd be in a bad fix without him. I wonder how high this fog goes? O-oh! Isn't it brutally cold? Shall I lift her a bit and try to get through?"

Fordham glanced at the colourless disc overhead.

"I don't think it's any good, old chap," he said. "The sun looks like a dirty piece of paper pasted on a dirty ceiling. Shove her up and have a shot at it. You never know your luck."

F-r-r-r-r! The suspensory-screw shrilled at the touch of the lever, and the Wings of Gold rose swiftly. As she rose, the mercury in the thermometer fell until it vanished into the bulb. Maurice peered at the more delicate spirit-thermometer.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 209.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO.'S MUSIC-HALL!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Down with drink!" he laughed. "It's absolutely slumping. Why— Oh, hang the man! That's more of his work!"

"What has he done? What is his latest achievement?"
 "Smashed the thermometer," said Fordham. "It has stuck, and the barometer says we are going up. One of them is not speaking the hall-marked truth. He's the clumsiest, cleverest— My stars!"

A streak of silver was creeping up the tube of the other thermometer. Surely both instruments were not at fault! The barometer indicated a steady upward movement.

"Lance, my son," said Maurice, "this part of creation is a trifle wobbly. We've got into a warm current by climbing upwards. What do you think it is—the temperature, I mean?"

"I can see," said Lance calmly, "and I can ditto feel. Barely freezing, I make it."

"You're a bouncer for taking things coolly, and always were."

"Well, it's hard to take 'em warm in this climate," said Lance. "We're eight hundred feet up, and we'll make it a thousand. I always fancied round numbers, especially on banknotes! I believe we're getting through it."

The sun was brighter and clearer, the mystifying mercury and spirit were still climbing their tubes. Lance unbuttoned his greatcoat. The rime thawed on the glass and deck, and fell in heavy drops from the metal stays. Then they rushed into the brilliant sunshine, the fog below them, like a boiling sea, lapping and wisping under the aeronef's keel.

A great cry of wonder burst from Fordham's lips. Lance dropped his pipe in amaze.

Towering far into the sky were the nameless peaks, their bases hidden in fog, their summits shining like polished silver. One, a volcano, and a pigmy compared with its giant brethren, gushed out a pillar of jet-black smoke. The aeronef sailed over the sea of fog, the water trickling from her. Fordham and Morton were spellbound. The sight was magnificently awesome. The shaggy shoulders were dull brown in hue. They held no snow. Lance stooped for his pipe.

"Well, old chap?" he asked.

Fordham shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't ask me, Lance," he answered. "What's on the other side, and how are we going to get there? She'll never carry us over."

"Then we must find a pass, that's all," said Morton grimly, "for we're going to see what's on the other side."

The Great Deluge, and some Damage—The Pterodactyls—In the Grip of the Tempest—Racing to Doom.

Three more balloons were despatched at sundown. Von Haegel had not spoken a word for hours. He was trying to solve the problem, and explain in a scientific way the origin of the warm current. A thousand feet below lay the frozen wilderness, while the explorers breathed a warm moist air. It had actually rained for some minutes, and a few fleecy clouds flying high above the normal ice regions were drifting northward.

Von Haegel was triumphant, but on scientific matters he never gave an opinion he could not back up. And victory was sweet. He had crushed his two great opponents, Professor Ulmar Penderson, of Christiansend, and Professor Sir Harold Sadfern, of Oxford—crushed them utterly. It was glorious. Von Haegel snorted, puffed, and chuckled. He could eat no dinner. Lance took several photos with a telephoto lens and developed them. Drying the negatives quickly in methylated spirit, he printed off some lantern slides, and when dusk came the lantern was brought into the saloon, and the first highly-magnified picture was thrown on the screen.

The lens had seen and recorded what their eyes had failed to see. The sides of the central peak were not barren. Von Haegel bounded off his chair.

"Trees, trees!" he shouted "Look, dear lads! It is ein regular forest! Oh, suplime, glorios, vunderful! Was I not right? Oh, Lance—oh, Maurice, was I not right?"

"The dickens you were!" said Lance.

The slopes that had looked brown and bare were clothed here and there with verdure. The heat must come from below, from subterranean fires.

"It's raining again, sir," said Teddy Morgan, opening the door; "and, by thunder, it looks like a deluge coming!"

A hissing, clattering sound drowned the last words. With Lance and Maurice at his heels, the engineer dashed for the main deck. He reeled as he reached it, soaked and blinded. Water was falling in sheets from an inky sky. It rose from the plates in a drenching spray. The noise was deafening and the darkness intense. The aeronef quivered and shook in the torrents.

There was a light in the wheelhouse, but it was barely THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 209.

visible. Morgan blundered on, and Maurice and Lance soddened to the skin, splashed after him, ankle deep in water. Clearing his eyes, the engineer looked at the aneroid. It was falling swiftly. He wrenched back the lever and set the screws whirring faster.

"Close the manhole!" he roared. "Or by thunder we'll get swamped!"

Fordham crawled out. The grating had been smashed to atoms. He managed to draw the slide, and in doing so made Crooks and Jackson prisoners. Someone bumped against him. Maurice gripped his arm and dragged him along. Every moment they expected the inch-thick glass of the wheelhouse to give way. All the arc-lamps, though protected by wire, had broken like eggshells. The water streamed off the men and formed a pool. It was not rain; it was the out-pour of a million hoses—a deluge!

And the water was quite warm!

Limp and bedraggled, they huddled in the wheelhouse. Speech was out of the question; the clamour was too terrific. Morgan, his teeth clenched, and drops dripping from his face, never moved his eye from the aneroid.

The Wings of Gold had ceased to descend, but Morgan knew that he had put the limit of power on her. Her screws were tearing round at their utmost speed to counterbalance the tons of water that deluged her decks. Maurice and Lance saw the danger, too. Could the screws bear the strain? The chance was almost like that a man would have who was facing a rifle in an assassin's hand—the flimsy chance of the cartridge misfiring!

A terrible, hideous minute passed—a second—a third.

"She's rising!"

Lance, Fordham, and Morgan shouted the words together. There was a sudden shock that hurled them together, and an earsplitting fr-r-r-r! Morgan seemed to have gone mad. He drove his fist into Tooter's face, and hurled him backwards. Then he struck Lance and sprang to the levers. The shrill fr-r-r-r! dwindled, and after the wild turmoil all seemed still as death.

Tooter picked himself up and wiped the blood from his mouth.

"What did you do that for, Morgan?" he asked fiercely.

"I'm sorry! Well, by thunder, I'll tell you why I did it!" said the engineer. "You were in the way. If I hadn't stopped those screws, they'd have been twisted into scrap-iron, and we should have been scraps down on the ice by now. You don't know how fast I was running them. They'd have buckled up into wire. Thank goodness we've got clear!"

Tooter held out his hairy fist.

"Great blackbirds!" he said. "Put it there, Teddy! But don't hit so 'ard in future. You've sprung all my front teeth, and they're wriggling as if they was on hinges."

Only a spatter of rain was falling now, and that quickly ceased. They pulled themselves together.

"Now for the damage," said Teddy Morgan. "By your leave, Mr. Maurice. Thank you, sir!"

Morgan, lamp in hand, and dragging the flexible wires after him, went out on the shining deck, and shot a bright ray of light upwards at each of the buzzing screws in turn.

"All right?" asked Lance anxiously.

"Barring the arc-lamps," said Morgan. "They might have melted like salt for all that's left of them. There are both gratings to glaze again."

Mr. Crooks and Mr. Jackson, whose voices had proceeded from the galley by means of the open porthole, were released.

Two feet of water was reported in the hold. Morgan and Maurice went down to inspect. There were two large doors on either side, but the water was below their level.

Presently the pump was clashing, and forcing the water through the hose. The awful rain had made plenty of work. To replace the arc-lamps would be a labour of time, and would necessitate a descent. However, the lamps were not indispensable. They could do without them very well until they had an opportunity of replacing them.

Although no one wished to sleep, Maurice was again firm. He even dismissed Morgan.

Lying on the floor of the wheel-house with a blanket round him, he was soon asleep himself, leaving Lance to watch the instruments. The lazy fr-r-r-r of the fans had accustomed itself to his ears. In reality the sound was shrill and discordant, but custom had softened the note. Lance was soon in a brown study. He leaned against the wheel, the light shining on his brown, clear-cut face.

"Who's that?"

Lance spun round as a ghostly figure loomed through the glass.

"S-sh! It is only me, dear lad. I gannot sleep, and so I have come oop to you. Even mein Shagsbeare not make me drowsy."

Von Haegel, in pyjamas and dressing-gown, stepped in. Lance was not sorry to have his company.

"Himmel! How black and how it is oppressive!" said Von Haegel, gasping. "It is like living in steam. I feel dot I shall melt. Ach, how it is dark; dark as der gates of Avernus!"

"Don't wake the dear old chap up, dad," said Lance warningly. "He's dead-beat, I expect."

The professor opened his volume at a place marked by one lustrous feather of the bird-lizard, whose capture had brought them there. He tried, but even the golden poetry of Shakespeare had lost its soothing charm.

"Hush! Did you hear anything?" asked Lance.

They both listened keenly. The screws shrilled their perpetual song through the chaos of gloom. That was the only sound.

"Nothing," said Lance.

"Nothing," repeated the professor.

Lance threw open his coat. The damp heat seemed greater and more oppressive. Great drops splashed down from the stays.

"Listen again," said Morton, his hand against his ear.

Then they were deafened. That same weird, grating, blood-curdling shriek that had terrified them on the previous night came piercingly out of the impenetrable gloom. It brought Fordham to his feet with a bound. Another wild yell answered it, and still another. And then rose a chorus of screams, shrieks, and jarring howls that drove the colour from their cheeks, as hidden wings beat the dark air around and above them.

A human cry, a cry of mortal terror, struck their ears. A man reeled in, and fell a huddled heap. The man was Jack-

slide the cook emerged. Crooks was a heavy sleeper, and very slow. He was completely dressed. Teddy Morgan sent him for a bottle of brandy, a syphon, and a glass.

"Was anythin' busted?" growled Crooks. "Why not? There was enough row. It woked me up."

"Hurry up," said Morgan; "and don't chatter! Fetch the stuff!"

The glass was passed round when it arrived. Jackson opened his eyes, but he looked dazed and vacant.

"It has come to this," said Fordham grimly; "that it's a case of go back. I don't think I'm a coward. A man knows himself better than anyone else can ever know him. I can tackle most things, but—"

"Horrible!" said Lance. "Fancy if one of them had blundered into and fouled our screws! Ugh! The loathsome, awful, ghastly birds! And the size of them! I'll wager their wings are forty feet from tip to tip."

Von Haegel blew his nose loudly.

"Ach, what a pity—what a pity!" he sighed. "But it is glorious—it is suplime—to have seen der pterodactyles, and to go back—to go back now! Oh, no, no, no! Not nit my consent, dear lads. Ach, no! Never—never!"

"I'm game to see the last of it, by thunder!" said Morgan. "If I'd only had a gun with a handful of shot in it, and a scrap of light, I'd have made one of the brutes extinct. I'll go on slap to the end! How is it, William?"

Mr. Tooter scratched his beard. The tittle of his face that was visible was decidedly white.

"Speaking for myself," he said, "and not being fond of wild-beast shows and menageries, I'd rayther not. My legs was like water when I clapped eyes on them warmints, and

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(For full particulars see page iv. of cover.)

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son. A tongue of flame cut the darkness, and a rifle cracked. A wave of flame swept across the sky, dashing the darkness away. The blinding light lasted but a fraction of a second, but it revealed a wild and awful picture.

Morton was clutching an upright like a drunken man, and he was down on one knee. Tooter lay across the barred, glassless grating. The deck shone like silver in the fierce, white light. Jackson had fainted. Von Haegel, Lance, and Fordham stood rigidly gazing through the open door, their staring eyes turned upwards.

And there, poised up against the aeronef on hideous, bat-like wings, hung two black monsters, two hideous shapes, their long, snakelike necks writhing to and fro, their great beaks open, as if ready to seize the wretched men who had dared to invade their territory.

Von Haegel uttered a scream.

"Der pterodactyles! Der pterodactyles!"

The light was gone. A crash of thunder made the aeronef quiver. The echoes rumbled and rolled away among the great peaks, and great rain-drops pattered down.

Teddy Morgan, shaking like a leaf, closed the slide. Then they looked at each other dumbly.

"They've—they've gone!" said Maurice, at last, but his voice was not like his own.

Jackson began to moan a little. Lance shook off his terror, and went to lift him.

"Get some brandy, Teddy!"

It was not raining heavily. When Morgan pulled back the

my blessed heart kicked like a mule. But where Mr. Maurice is, and where Mr. Lance is, that's where I is."

Crooks, who had seen nothing to frighten him, took his eye out of the glass he had just drained.

"And where you was, Bill," he said, "there shall be 'air—why not?—and also whiskers!"

"Und besides," puffed Von Haegel, "der pterodactyle was der least voracious of all der great beasts."

It was a poor consolation, a miserable consolation, and even the professor felt its weakness.

"Very well," said Maurice. "We'll go on for another twelve hours—till noon to-morrow. If we live so long!" he muttered, under his breath.

Jackson could not remember clearly what had happened. He only knew that the shrieks had aroused him, and that he had run up the ladder. He had a dim recollection, too, of great green eyes shining through the darkness, a loathsome smell, and a snapping sound close to his face. But the plucky little Cockney would not hear of turning back.

The night of terror dragged away. The pale dawn struggled up and slung its wan rays on wan faces. Still the aeronef seemed to float on a white mist that had frozen the earth. Slowly the great peaks and smoking volcano struggled into view. Mr. Crooks shook himself.

"Breakfast was a comforting meal," he growled; "but they won't get ready themselves. Why not?"

There was an angry sky. The men stretched their stiffened limbs.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 209.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO.'S MUSIC-HALL!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CHIFFORD.

"Jove, you look a miserable, washed-out lot," said Lance; "a full-sized set of scarecrows!"

"And your beauty isn't much to boast about, my boy," said Maurice. "Thank goodness for the honest light, such as it is! I recommend a cold bath as a pick-me-up for all. Here goes for my tub!"

Lance heard him splashing away and singing lustily as he passed the cabin door. A bath, a change, and a good breakfast worked miracles. They did not linger long over the meal. The propellers were working, but they could see little of the peaks, for the clouds were hiding them.

"Mr. Maurice."

"Teddy?"

The engineer beckoned Maurice forward.

"By thunder, sir," he said, "it's brewing up for a basting storm! I can smell it."

"I fancied so myself," answered Fordham. "What about it?"

"Nothing, sir. I was only thinking if it can only blow here like it can rain—well—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"She'll have to go with it—eh, Teddy?"

"Yes," said the engineer. "There are no two ways about it. She'd go with it, you bet, sir, just like a straw before a tornado. And how if it blew that way?"

He pointed to the towering peaks.

"Don't prophesy evil, old chap," pleaded Maurice; "and keep your mouth shut. We can only take our chance. Remember, we've had a southerly breeze all the time, and it's southerly still. I can smell the smoke from the volcano quite distinctly."

Maurice was very uneasy, and Mr. Tooter, the weather-wise, was watching the sky with disapproval. Von Haegel had dropped asleep in an easy-chair.

He dreamed that Professors Pedersen and Sadfern had apologised, and that the apology was being howled across Europe out of the funnel of a monstrous gramophone, fixed on the summit of Eiffel Tower.

All at once, with a roar like the blended crash of fifty thunderclaps, the funnel burst into atoms. The professor awoke, and rolled headlong out of the chair. The chair came toppling after him. Hoarse voices were shouting, the wheel-house was tilted over at a sickening angle. Struggling to keep his foothold, Morgan clung to the wheel. Maurice and Lance were clinging on to the brass guard-rails.

One vast billow of mist had leapt up without warning. Shrieking like a million demons, the wind struck the aeronef and she heeled over. She lay aslant, tossing and plunging as if she would never right. Then she darted forward like a horse cruelly spurred.

Morgan looked over his shoulder straight into Fordham's eyes. Fordham knew what he meant. On hands and knees he backed down the incline, and seized the levers and reversed the screws.

The vessel righted with a jerk that drove Morgan's chin against the wheel. There was a streak of blood on his hand as he drew it across his mouth. Lance was staring at him, and so was Maurice. The rain struck the panes like a shower of marbles. Morgan's lips framed the words:

"No."

He meant that the screws were powerless to check the aeronef. She was rushing like a swallow towards the south—towards the nameless peaks—towards doom!

Teddy Morgan Saves the Ship—Out of the Storm.

So terrible was the strength of the roaring storm that it whirled the aeronef onward like thistle-down before a summer gale. They were not conscious of any forward motion. Lance put the professor's chair to rights, and Van Haegel, his eyes and mouth wide open, and a ludicrous expression of questioning wonder, rubbed his head and puffed.

"Ach!" he pondered, his wits all at sea. "I have been dreaming, and I fall out of the chair. Himmel, dot was ein violent dream, for I fall hard on mein head! Mine prains rattle all doggedder. Phew! Der deafening noise dot der ship make!"

He rubbed his head harder, for there was a bump on it that had not been placed there by Nature or cultivated by study. The professor had lost his spectacles, and could only see dimly. Consequently the sight of the comrades' white and rigid faces did not startle him. Fordham's hand dropped on the engineer's shoulder.

"Teddy!"

There was a ring of hope in his voice. The engineer grunted.

"Lift her, Teddy!" shouted Maurice. "It may be calmer above. Try and get her higher."

Morgan nodded, and tugged at the lever as the gale flung the aeronef onward with redoubled fury. With despairing

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 209.

eyes they watched the aeronef. She rose a little, but very jerkily. The raging wind seemed to beat and hold her down.

"No use!" said the steersman, forming the words with his lips. "Not enough power!"

Lance groaned. The end was drawing near. They could not tell how far away the peaks had been when the storm struck Wings of Gold. But the aeronef was travelling with such appalling velocity that the fierce impact that would beat her into scraps of crumpled metal might come at any moment.

Lance and Maurice shook hands. The sturdy engineer watched the aeronef impassively, and whistled. His forehead was wrinkled. Tooter smoked nonchalantly, the professor puffed and panted, and so they waited the finish, the last of the tragedy.

Teddy Morgan was thinking hard as he bent over the useless wheel. He jerked up his chin, and Fordham leaned forward.

"Do you think it don't blow so hard up there, sir?" roared the engineer.

"I don't know. I only know that storms are seldom found at great altitudes."

"It's touch and go with us, sir," said Morgan, biting his lips. "I'll try it."

"Try what?"

"Never mind! Get ready to shut the door, that's all. By thunder, it's our last chance!"

Maurice looked at him wonderingly as he set the screws going at full speed, as if eager to hurl them more quickly to destruction. Then he clamped the wheel fast amidships, and sprang to the door. Lance dashed after him, expecting him to be thrown overboard by the wind.

To their astonishment there was not even a breeze. The aeronef was moving practically at the same pace as the storm. Morgan actually struck a match, which burned long enough for him to descend to the hold.

"What are you going to do, Teddy?" asked Lance.

"Tilt her."

Lance did not understand. Teddy Morgan ran along the passage, opening his knife. He slashed down the fire-hose, and yelled to Lance to hand the end to him. Then he switched on the light, and scrambled over the bales and boxes towards the water-tank. An instant later the water was gushing out.

"Drag the hose up to the mercury-tank!" yelled Morgan. "And if you love your life be smart, sir!"

He lay flat on the great tank himself, tearing at the screw of the filling hole with a wrench. Then he forced in the hose, and, shouldering it over the boxes, staggered up the ladder.

"Into the engine-room, sir!" he almost screamed.

Lance helped him with all his strength and energy. With feverish haste the hose was rigged to the pump. Clank, clank, clank! A stream of silver gushed out, and fell, not with a splash, but with a heavy rattle on to the floor. Beads and drops and splashes of quicksilver darted about like live things. A wave of it glided over the plates, and lifting up a steel winch like a cork, floated it merrily away.

"Get on deck," said the engineer hoarsely, "and tell them to hold tight, for we're going up!"

Lance pattered through the growing lake, his heart thumping with a new hope.

"Hold fast—hold fast!" he cried, and darted below again.

The glistening liquid was rushing aft. It surged in heavy, sluggish ripples against the bulkheads. Flimsy trifles often make the deepest impression in such terrible moments, and Lance noted that several steel nuts, a spanner, and several heavy bolts were sailing on the widening pool. And the floor of the engine-room was aslant. The pump worked steadily, and the engine thrashed and roared.

"Get on deck, sir!" shouted Morgan, his hands to his mouth. "I'll manage this."

Lance obeyed him. All that had been so mysterious was now perfectly plain to him. He shook the engineer's hand. The ladder had heeled over, and the wheelhouse seemed on the point of falling backwards. They had a light burning. The vertical columns were vertical no longer. The aeronef was like a vessel rushing up the side of a gigantic wave. He had to crawl on hands and knees.

They were clinging to the brass rails. Fordham's voice rang out clear and exultant.

"She's rising—she's rising!"

Teddy Morgan's plan had succeeded. The weight of the mercury he had pumped aft had pointed the aeronef's nose upward. The powerful fore and aft driving screws were doing what the feebler suspensory screws had failed to do. They were lashing the Wings of Gold upwards and onwards, but ever upward.

(This grand serial story will be continued in next week's issue of "The Gem" Library. Order now. Price 1d.)

A Grand, New Series of Short Complete Stories, introducing Frank Kingston, Detective, and Dolores—his pretty Lady Assistant.



CHAPTER 1.

A Puzzling Case—Kingston Gets Busy.

THE problem is an exceedingly knotty one, Mr. Kingston, and all our efforts to get to the bottom of it have failed. I doubt even if you, with all your extraordinary powers, can help us."

Sir Nigel Kane, the Chief of Scotland Yard, flicked the ash from his cigar into the glowing fire. He was seated in Frank Kingston's consulting-room at No. 100, Charing Cross, and had called upon the famous detective on business quite different from the matter under discussion, but a chance remark of Kingston's had brought the subject up.

"I have read a little concerning it in the papers," said Kingston lazily, "but I haven't followed it at all; I thought it quite ordinary."

"But it is very far from being ordinary," contradicted the other decidedly. "For the past two months a series of daring and well-planned robberies have been carried out, and the booty—consisting mostly of costly jewels—has been smuggled out of the country without the police making a single arrest."

"But all the seaports have been watched?"

"Watched! Why, my dear sir, practically every passenger by every boat has been subjected to the most careful scrutiny. How the stuff gets out of the country is a mystery. And the galling part of it all is we know who is responsible

—we know that the organiser of the robberies is an unscrupulous woman known as Olga Saratoff."

"Then why don't you arrest her?" asked Kingston.

"Because we haven't an atom of proof," replied the head of Scotland Yard worriedly. "Middle Saratoff has been known to the police for years, but she has never allowed herself to be trapped yet. She has a clever head on her, and the men who work with her are all experienced cracksmen."

Frank Kingston asked several questions, and Sir Nigel readily answered them. He knew what a clever man the detective was, and was delighted when Kingston announced his intention of looking into the case. It so happened he was without a case at the time, and the work was welcome.

"The police methods are too clumsy," he told himself, when Sir Nigel had taken his departure. "Unless they have positive proof they will not act. Personally, I believe in acting straightaway, if you are certain of your quarry."

Kingston sat in his easy chair thinking deeply.

"So mademoiselle lives in style in her own house," he thought. "She defies Scotland Yard, and carries on her work as if the police had no existence. Well, I shall set to work in my own way, and try to show Sir Nigel Kane that audacity is very useful on occasion. You only want to be sure of your meat, and there can be no mistake."

Kingston left his house in the guise of a rather dis-

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 209.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO.'S MUSIC-HALL!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

reputable middle-aged man. He believed in getting to work without losing a second, and very soon was on a motor-bus bound for Bayswater. Mdlle. Saratoff's residence was in a fairly busy street, and Kingston was able to keep watch without being noticeable. He knew that the Russian woman's movements were strictly noted by the police, but he was bent on quite another object.

Untiringly he stuck to his post throughout the afternoon, and in the evening was rewarded for his efforts. Towards six o'clock a smartly-dressed man stepped out of a taxi opposite Mdlle. Saratoff's house, and was instantly admitted. Kingston saw at a glance that the new-comer was a foreigner.

"Probably one of the principal members of the gang," the detective decided. "He's the fellow to honour with my attention. By Jove, it will be a stroke of luck if I hit the trail to-night!"

Half an hour later the front door of the house next door opened, and Kingston gave a casual glance at the man who came into view. He was tall, and wore a fair beard, and suddenly Kingston started.

"The same man," he told himself quickly. "Of course, Mdlle. Olga is probably the tenant of both houses, and when she wishes to escape police surveillance she disguises herself and leaves the next-door house as another person. This fellow must have played the same dodge."

Kingston made no guess; he was absolutely certain about the matter, and immediately commenced following the fair-bearded man. A taxi came in sight, and Kingston's quarry stopped it and jumped in. In the darkness he did not notice that someone had stepped up beside the driver.

"Drive to Scotland Yard," ordered Kingston firmly. "I am a detective, and the man inside is a criminal," he went on as the driver began to protest. "A sovereign if you get him there in safety."

That settled matters, and soon the taxi was bowling towards the police headquarters. Once the fare inquired where he was being taken to, but the driver made a vague answer that the roads were up.

Scotland Yard was reached, and before the man could realise what had occurred he was bundled into the building by Kingston and secured in a cell.

"Good gracious me, Mr. Kingston, you have lost no time!" exclaimed Sir Nigel Kane when he knew what had occurred. "Who is this man you have brought here?"

"I don't know," was Kingston's surprising reply. "I have not the slightest atom of proof against him, but I strongly suspect him to be one of the chief members of Mdlle. Saratoff's gang."

"But, my dear sir," protested Sir Nigel, "this is a most serious proceeding! If you have no proof—"

"I am now going to procure that proof, and other information besides," interrupted Kingston calmly. "It is all chance work, of course, and if I have made a mistake I shall apologise, and set matters right. But I have made no mistake."

Sir Nigel had on one other occasion seen proof of Kingston's amazing will-power, and he was again to have a demonstration, but this time in a different manner. He and the detective were closeted with the prisoner, who raved and threatened unceasingly. Soon, however, he calmed down, and then dropped off into what seemed an easy sleep. As a matter of fact Kingston had mesmerised him—it required but little of the detective's wonderful will-power to bring this about.

"Now," exclaimed Frank Kingston, in an even voice, "tell me your name and what the business was that took you to Bayswater to-night."

"My name is Charles Le Vasseur," replied the prisoner, in a dull undertone, speaking in good English. "I went to Bayswater to see Olga Saratoff about the stuff that is going across to-night. She's taking it to Tressider herself, as usual."

Sir Nigel's eyes met Kingston's.

"By gad!" muttered the former. "You were right, Kingston!"

"What is the stuff you refer to, and who is Tressider?" went on the detective, taking no notice of the interruption. "And where is Mdlle. Saratoff going to?"

"The stuff is the proceeds of the Glover jewel robbery," replied Le Vasseur monotonously. "Tressider is to take it across the Channel to-night. Olga will leave her house at ten o'clock, and walk to the corner of Queen's Road, where a car will be waiting for her. This will take her to some spot on the South Coast."

"Whereabouts?"

"I do not know."

"Which house will Mdlle. Saratoff leave?" went on Kingston, knowing Le Vasseur's last statement to be true—in his hypnotic condition he could not lie. "Will she be disguised?"

"She will leave by the house next door to her own, which is thought to be occupied by an elderly lady. Mdlle. Olga

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 209.

will be dressed in black, and will wear a veil. That is the only disguise."

Sir Nigel watched and listened wonderingly. Kingston's extraordinary power was truly remarkable. By sending the prisoner into his trance he was obtaining all the information that was necessary—or nearly all of it. There was a small bench in the cell, and Kingston produced a piece of blank paper and a fountain pen. These he placed before Le Vasseur.

"Write on that paper the following," he commanded, still in the same even tones: "On no account leave house to-night. The police are on scent, and if you take the goods to Tressider it will mean discovery. Remain indoors until I see you to-morrow." Now sign it."

Le Vasseur did so, and although he was doing it absolutely unconsciously, the writing and signature were perfect.

"Mdlle. Saratoff understands English?" asked Kingston.

"Yes. She always speaks English while in this country."

"Very good, Le Vasseur," said the detective. "In one minute you will open your eyes and become fully conscious. You will forget everything that has just passed, and imagine that you are still angrily protesting against your arrest."

"My dear Mr. Kingston," cried Sir Nigel, as the latter turned to him, "the exhibition you have just given me is a remarkable proof of your power—your tremendous will-power. But what is the note for?" he added, as he saw Kingston pick it up.

"That is to send by District Messenger to Mdlle. Saratoff," replied the great detective, with a smile. "I think there is plenty of proof against this fellow now, Sir Nigel, and by the morning the rest of the gang will, I hope, be brought to justice. But hush! The minute is nearly up."

A few seconds later Le Vasseur opened his eyes, and immediately commenced shaking his fists and uttering threats against the police. As Frank Kingston had ordered, he knew absolutely nothing of what had just transpired.

CHAPTER 2.

Dolores Takes a Hand.

FRANK KINGSTON lost no time in taking his departure from Scotland Yard. When he arrived at No. 100, Charing Cross, he found the time to be just after seven. As the car which was to have carried Mdlle. Saratoff to the South Coast was not to be at the corner of Queen's Road, Bayswater, until ten o'clock, there was ample time for him to make preparations.

He did not stay long in his rooms, but having given a few instructions to Fraser, his confidential servant, he sallied out once more, and walked up the Strand to the Hotel Cyril. He was a constant visitor here, for his fiancée occupied a suite of rooms in the famous hotel. He was half afraid he would find her out, but this was not the case.

"Why, Frank, I'd no idea you were coming this evening!" exclaimed Dolores delightedly. "Have you come on business or pleasure? It's quite impossible to read anything in your expression," she added, smiling into his languid-looking, immobile features.

"This time, little girl, I have come on business," he replied, seating himself. "I'm going to ask you to do something for me—something that contains just a spice of adventure."

Dolores' eyes sparkled eagerly.

"Oh, Frank, I'm just longing to help you again!" she cried. "Since you overthrew the terrible Brotherhood of Iron I've done practically nothing. Do tell me what I have to do to-night!"

Kingston smiled at the girl's impetuosity. This evening she was looking especially pretty, and the rosy flush which mantled her cheeks was a delight to the eye. The detective lost no time in telling her of the Saratoff gang, and how he had, by a stroke of fortune, got on the scent straightaway.

"Mademoiselle will receive the note purporting to come from Le Vasseur," concluded Kingston, "and will consequently remain indoors. I must find out who Tressider is, where he is situated, and how he conveys the stolen property to the Continent. To have followed Mdlle. Saratoff's car would have been impossible."

"Of course," agreed Dolores. "So you want me to dress myself in black, meet the car at the corner of Queen's Road, and be conveyed to this spot on the South Coast?"

"Exactly! The only thing against the scheme is the risk—"

"Oh, Frank, surely you can trust me?" exclaimed Dolores, a little reproachfully, remembering the dozens of risks she had taken before. "I can take care of myself. I think the idea is splendid; indeed, it is the only sure way of getting to know who this man Tressider is, and so obtain incriminating evidence. And you cannot go yourself, because you are not capable of disguising yourself as Mdlle. Saratoff."

"Hardly," smiled Frank Kingston, thinking of his six

foot of muscular manhood. "You, Dolores, are the only person who can help me, and though I've no doubts as to your courage, I don't care for the idea of sending you there alone."

"But you'll be close behind me, you silly!" laughed Dolores.

"I certainly shall," declared Kingston. "I am going round to Carson Gray now, and he and I will follow your car in Gray's racer. Of course, if Mdle. Saratoff had been doing the journey herself she would have kept a strict lookout, but you will be comfortable in the knowledge that friends are close at hand. The chauffeur will not trouble himself, you may be sure."

"The man Tressider will be caught red-handed," said Dolores confidently. "The case is simplicity itself, Frank, although, of course, something unforeseen may arise."

And something unforeseen did arise—something which, had Kingston even dreamed of it, would have caused him to send Dolores a thousand miles in the opposite direction rather than let her go through the terrible experience which was that night destined to come to pass.

At exactly ten o'clock a slight figure, dressed in quiet black and heavily veiled, stepped into a large landaulette at the corner of Queen's Road, Bayswater. The chauffeur accepted her as Mdle. Saratoff without question, and immediately drove off into the line of traffic.

Some distance behind, an open car of the racing pattern glided along. In it were seated two detectives—Frank Kingston and his friend, Carson Gray. The latter was fortunately free for the night, and had eagerly acquiesced when Kingston suggested the trip. Gray himself was a well-known detective, but he readily admitted that Kingston was in every respect his master.

"I thought there would be no hitch over that incident," said Kingston quietly. "The chauffeur evidently knows exactly where he has to go, so there was no necessity at all for Dolores to speak to him. And when they get to the end of their journey, we shall be so close behind that no harm can come to her."

Carson Gray shifted his pipe to the other side of his mouth as he handled the steering-wheel.

"In my opinion there is nothing to go wrong," he said lightly. "By Jove, Kingston, you've been jolly smart over this affair, and no mistake! The police have been hanging about for weeks, yet you calmly go and get on the direct track within a few hours. Once Tressider is caught, it will be simplicity itself to lay hands on Mdle. Saratoff."

Gray had not the slightest difficulty in keeping the landaulette within sight. It was travelling at a very moderate pace, and left London by the main Brighton road. Carson Gray's racer was fitted with an effective silencer, so he was able to follow fairly closely without his presence being suspected by the driver of the enemy's car.

All went well for an hour or more, and in Kingston's mind the chase was becoming rather tame. There was not much excitement in the adventure so far. Towards eleven-thirty, however, just as the two cars had left a large town, and were gliding through the open country, Gray heard a roar behind him, and swerved to the side of the road.

"Just in time!" he muttered, glaring round savagely. He had reason to be angry, for a huge, sixty-horse Napier flew by with hardly an inch of room to spare. And as it did so Kingston imagined he heard a sudden cry. The Napier's driver applied his brakes rapidly, and the huge car slowed down until it was proceeding at the same pace as Gray's.

Then, before either Kingston or his companion could realise what was coming, a quartette of revolver shots rang out, a terrific hiss sounded on the night air, as the bullets ploughed their way through the two front tyres, and the car swerved giddily across the road before Gray could stop it. It struck the bank heavily, and by that time the Napier had accelerated, and was rushing forward at express speed.

"The scoundrels!" cried Carson Gray furiously. "Good heavens, Kingston, they must have recognised me as I looked round into the glare of their lights! What a fool I was not to wear a disguise! And Miss Dolores—she'll be simply at their mercy now, while we're stuck here unable to lift a finger."

Frank Kingston gave his companion a grim look. "Helpless?" he said quietly. "My dear Gray, we're near the coast now, and if I have to run every inch of the way and follow the tracks of those cars, I'll do it. Dolores is in this predicament on my account, and it rests with me to get her out of it!"

CHAPTER 3.

At Turn of Tide.

DOLORES sat in the landaulette quite unconscious of the incident that had just happened so close behind her. The Brighton Road had been left behind some time since, and now the two cars—for the second racer, which

had passed Kingston and Gray, was close behind the landaulette—proceeded along a quiet, unfrequented by-road.

The sea was very close now, and the journey's end was near. Dolores had not spoken a word to the chauffeur, but occasionally glanced behind through the little window, and smiled comfortably when she saw the lights of the following car.

"Why, it's one of the easiest catches that Frank has ever made!" she declared to herself. "When I reach the coast Tressider will either be there waiting, or will join me after a little while. By that time Frank and Mr. Gray will have arrested the chauffeur, and will be ready for the others—that is, if there are more than one."

But Dolores was not aware that in the other car were seated Mdle. Saratoff herself and two of her confederates. The Russian woman realised what was in the wind, and meant to deceive Dolores until the very last. She got to know of Kingston's ruse by the merest fluke. It so happened that a member of the gang had been sent by her to the corner of Queen's Road to dismiss the chauffeur who was waiting there. The man, however, had arrived just in time to see Dolores step into the car and drive off. He immediately guessed that something was amiss, and hurried back to Mdle. Saratoff.

The result was that the adventuress had at once set out in the Napier to follow her own car, occupied as it was by some stranger. Her companions had recognised Carson Gray when passing, and the unfortunate result is known to the reader.

The night was dark as pitch, and Dolores was unable to see where she was going. At last, however, the car came to a standstill, and the door was immediately opened by a tall, thin individual of about thirty-five.

"Ah, Mdle. Saratoff!" he exclaimed, in a grating, unpleasant voice. "You're here to time, as usual. I suppose you have brought the stuff with you? The tide is nearly on the turn, and I must be off immediately."

Dolores did not reply, but stepped out of the car and glanced round her. She found she was on a wide, smooth beach, with high cliffs towering to the left. Close behind, up a narrow kind of gorge, the lights of the second car were rapidly approaching. A moment later it was on them, and Mdle. Olga's voice rang out.

"Hold that woman, Tressider!" she cried. "She is a police spy, and it is only by a stroke of luck that we have been able to frustrate the plan!"

The thin man uttered an exclamation of surprise, but before Dolores could make any effort to escape, she was caught in his strong arms and held firmly. The next moment the two other men had her secure, and the Russian woman ripped the veil from her face.

"So you thought to frustrate my schemes, eh?" she sneered viciously. "You look defiant, but that won't help you in the least. You are beautiful, too," she added, with an evil glitter in her eyes. "Before long you will learn what it is to cross my path!"

Mdle. Olga turned away, and, taking Tressider aside, spoke to him. He departed immediately, and Dolores was considerably surprised when she saw a monoplane suddenly dart from the entrance of a large cave and shoot down the beach. In a moment it rose, and soared swiftly and steadily out to sea.

"So this is the way the jewels are conveyed to France," thought Dolores. "What a splendid idea! On this lonely piece of coast they might have continued at the work for months. But what can have happened to Frank and Mr. Gray?" she added to herself in anguish. "They must be near at hand—they must be ready to help me!"

But this did not seem to be the case. Without wasting words, the two men who had accompanied Mdle. Saratoff—they were both Russians—grasped hold of her and forced her along the beach, the adventuress accompanying them. For half a mile they walked, making towards a huge jutting piece of the cliff, the base of which projected right out into the sea.

Dolores did not utter a word, although her captor taunted her ceaselessly. To struggle would have been useless. At last, after a scramble over rough rocks, the little party, headed by the driver of the racing Napier, who held one of the car lanterns, entered a low passage in the rock. A few yards further on, and they came to a halt on the brink of a natural basin. This was filled with water, and the little waves dashed splashing against the seaweed-covered rocks. Through the front entrance of the cave—the party had entered from behind—could be seen the wide expanse of the Channel, with the bright lights of a passing steamer far away.

"Now, my beautiful enemy," exclaimed Mdle. Olga, with a cruel smile, "I am going to prove to you that my words were not idle. If you escape now I should be lost, so there is only one course for me to pursue—"

"You're not going to kill me?" cried Dolores, horrified.

"I am going to do so," smiled the other woman. "It

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 209.

is the only way. And since you have dared to thrust yourself into my affairs, I am going to kill you in a manner that will be rather novel. Tie her up!" she added sharply to her companions.

In a very short time Dolores was bound securely by the hands and feet. A gag was placed over her mouth, so she could utter no sound, as she realised the fiendishness of the Russian woman's plan. In the water floated a number of thick logs, tied together, so that they formed a raft. On this Dolores was placed. The next moment a noose of thin, strong cord was placed round her neck, and the end of this was securely fastened to the rock above her.

Mdlle. Saratoff laughed heartlessly.

"There, my fine English rose," she sneered, "this will prove what your nerves are made of. The tide will soon be running out fast, and the raft you are standing on will gradually drop lower and lower. The rope round your neck is not very long, and in twenty minutes at the most it will be drawn taut, and then—"

The adventuress shrugged her shoulders expressively, and gave another laugh. Two minutes later Dolores was by herself, in almost utter darkness. A faint glimmer came in from the cave entrance, and she could just see the water lapping against the frail platform on which she stood.

The brave girl did not lose her head in the least, but quietly and calmly tried to extricate herself from the fearful position. But it was useless; escape was absolutely impossible.

"What can I do?" thought Dolores, in agony. "That fiendish woman can never mean to kill me in this way! It is a trick; she is trying to frighten me. Oh, will Frank never come!"

Something within her told her that the Russian woman was in deadly earnest. Again she tried to get free, but again the result was the same. The raft swayed up and down with

the waves, and once the cord came very near to stretching tight. With her hands bound the girl could do absolutely nothing; she must die a miserable death alone!

Then a thrill passed through her, and she drew herself tense and upright as she listened. Yes, it was true! She had heard Frank Kingston's and Carson Gray's voices! A moment later the two men, accompanied by a couple of well-dressed strangers, burst into the cave. The scene was revealed in a second, for one of the strangers carried a powerful acetylene lamp. Cries of horror burst from them all, and on Frank Kingston's face an expression of stern relentlessness showed itself.

"Good heavens," he cried, "to think that any woman could be such a fiend! But we are in time, Gray—just in time!"

He slashed the cord through with his knife, and after the lapse of a few seconds Dolores was unbound and clasped in his arms, caring nothing for the presence of the others.

"I knew you would come, Frank!" she murmured thankfully.

"But for the help of these two gentlemen we should have been too late!" exclaimed the great detective; and he explained how Carson Gray's car had been disabled.

"We had almost given up hope," put in Carson Gray, "and Kingston was on the point of setting out on foot when another car came towards us. We explained to these gentlemen what was in the wind, and they drove us here with all speed. The roads were thick, so the tracks of the other two cars were plainly visible, and easy to follow."

"And Mdlle. Saratoff," put in Dolores, "what of her?"

"She is a prisoner," answered Kingston grimly. "Her confederates escaped, but they will, in all probability, be captured very soon. It will be a very simple matter to secure Tressider when he arrives on his aeroplane from France."

THE END.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



Special Correspondence Exchange List Next Week. Order Early.

For Next Thursday.

"TOM MERRY & CO.'S MUSIC-HALL"

is the title of next Thursday's splendid, long, complete tale of the famous chums of St. Jim's, and will be voted by all my readers as one of our finest and jolliest tales of the old school that Martin Clifford has ever penned. The fun throughout is fast and furious, and the number of "star turns" is, of course, considerable. You will enjoy reading every word of

"TOM MERRY & CO.'S MUSIC-HALL."

So take time by the forelock, and

ORDER NEXT WEEK'S "GEM" NOW.

Cleaning and Mounting Stamps.

It is a well-known fact among stamp-collectors that, unless a stamp is properly cleaned and mounted, its own value, together with that of the whole album in which it is placed, is lessened. A valuable stamp is only too easily spoilt by careless and shoddy work; therefore, I propose to set forth a few hints as to the best method of cleaning and mounting stamps for the benefit of the readers of THE GEM who do not already know.

With regard to the

Cleaning.

When a stamp first comes into the collector's hands it is usually still sticking to the piece of paper with which it first came into contact. Obviously, therefore, the first thing to do is to remove this paper in such a manner that the stamp itself will still be intact when the operation is complete. It is no good catching hold of the paper and the stamp and pulling. The only way to accomplish the removal of the paper is to let it float on the top of a basin of warm water until the backing can be easily removed. If left in long enough the backing will fall off without any aid whatever,

but as the stamp in this case gets soaked with water, and takes longer to dry, no labour is really saved. When the stamps are in the water take care that none of them happen to become entirely immersed in it, as in some cases, especially the more recent issues, the colour is apt to run. A more satisfactory method for valuable stamps is the use of steam in place of warm water, allowing it to spray on the back of the stamp until the paper can be removed.

After cleaning, the stamps must be dried fairly quickly. Obtain a large sheet of fluffless blotting-paper, and, bending it in two, place the stamps in between, and remove all the superfluous moisture. After this, if put in a warm place, they will soon become perfectly dry, and will be ready for

Mounting.

Nowadays, instead of the old-fashioned method of pasting the stamp to the album, the more convenient method of using a gummed-paper hinge is employed. These hinges can be bought at any stamp-dealer's at varying prices.

The method of mounting is very simple and effective. The hinges, which are usually about one inch long, have to be bent about one-third of an inch down. This short piece has to be stuck down on to the stamp at the top, evenly and straightly, and the longer piece has to be stuck down on the album. Great care must be taken to insert the stamps carefully, seeing the edges are perfectly straight with the lines ruled in the album. If this is not carried out the album will look untidy.

The reasons for bending the hinges one-third of the way down are: Firstly, if the need arises, the stamps can easily be removed; and, secondly, the stamps can be examined for watermarks, etc., without any trouble.

If everything is carried out as described in this article the album should present an appearance neat enough to satisfy the most careful collector.

(Owing to pressure of space, this week's Correspondence Exchange will be found on cover, page ii., of our Companion Paper "The Magnet" Library.)