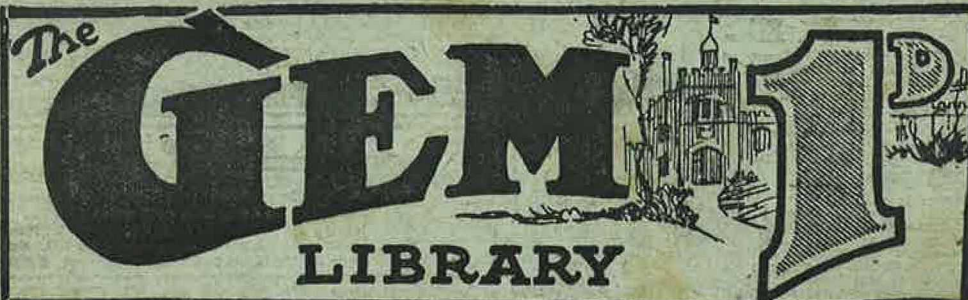


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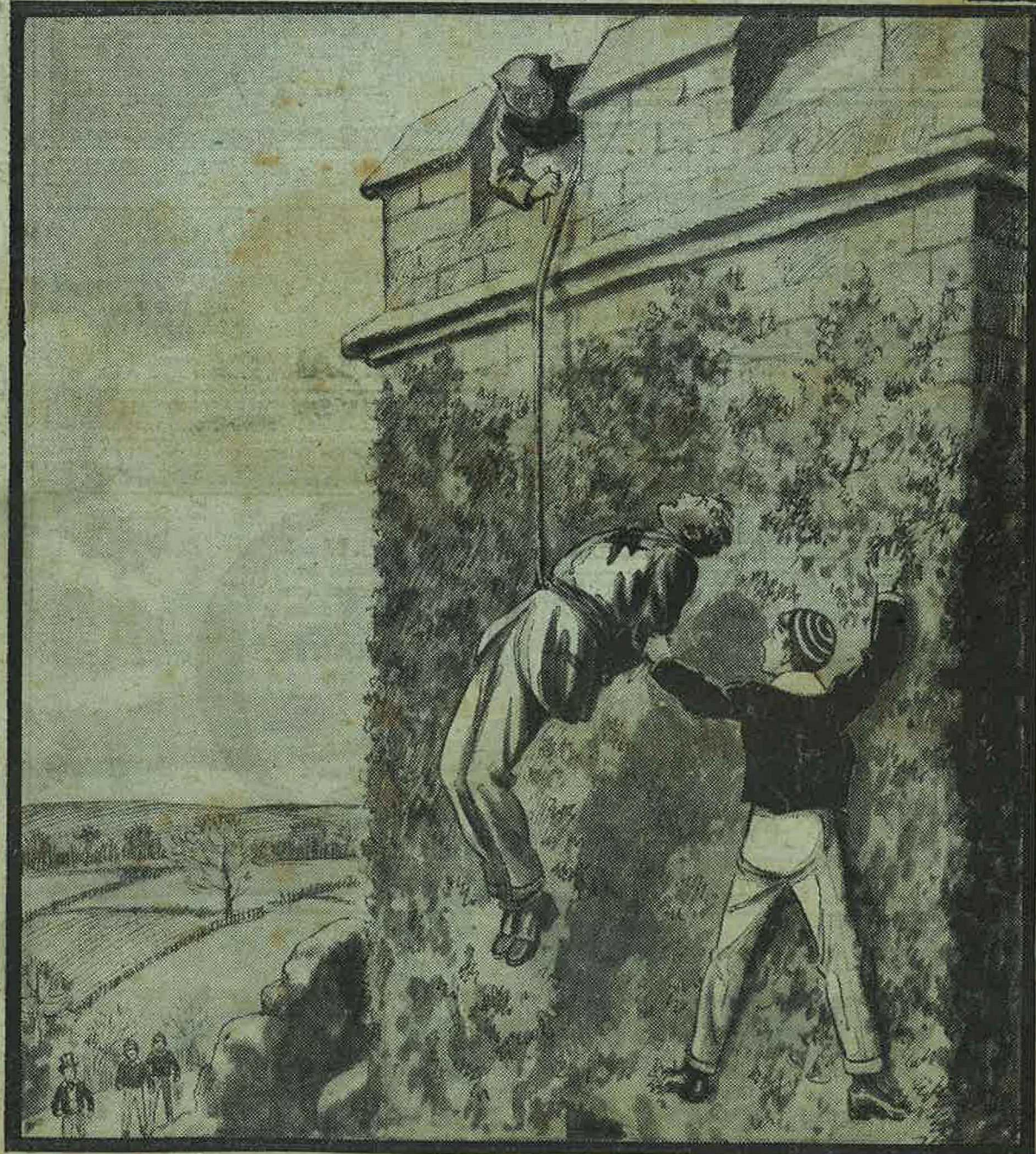
# THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!

BY  
MARTIN  
CLIFFORD.

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for ALL,  
and  
Every  
Story  
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GEM.



No.  
319.  
Vol.  
8.



Kerr dragged out his knife, and, clinging to the ivy with one hand only, he leaned over the Housemaster and cut the ropes which bound his hands and feet. "Now, sir, you can cling to the ivy," he said huskily. "When the scoundrel cuts the rope you won't fall!" (A dramatic incident in the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. in this issue.)

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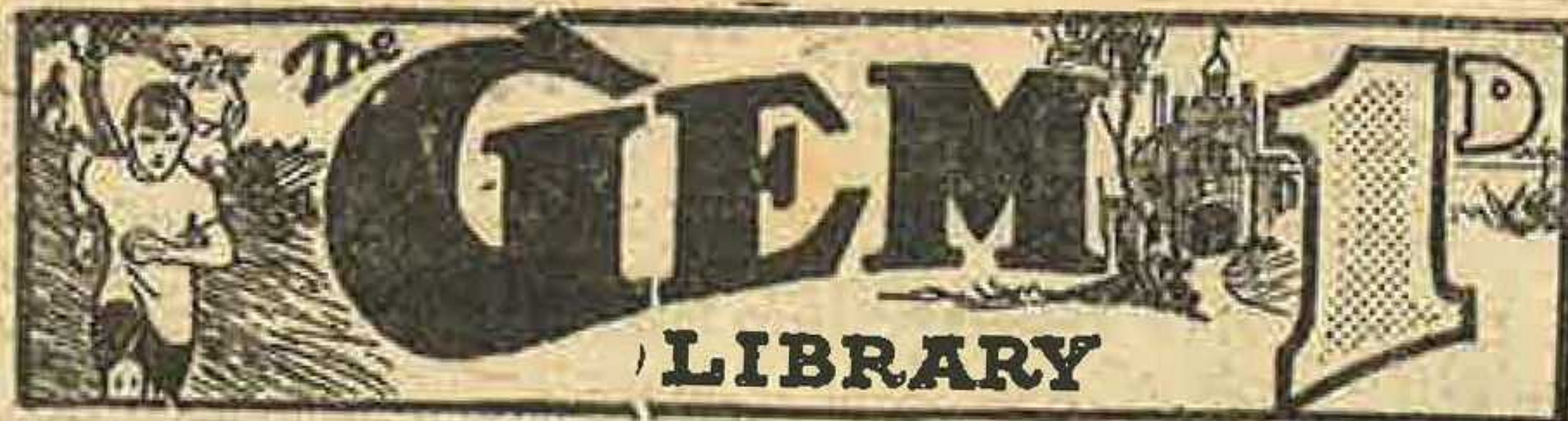
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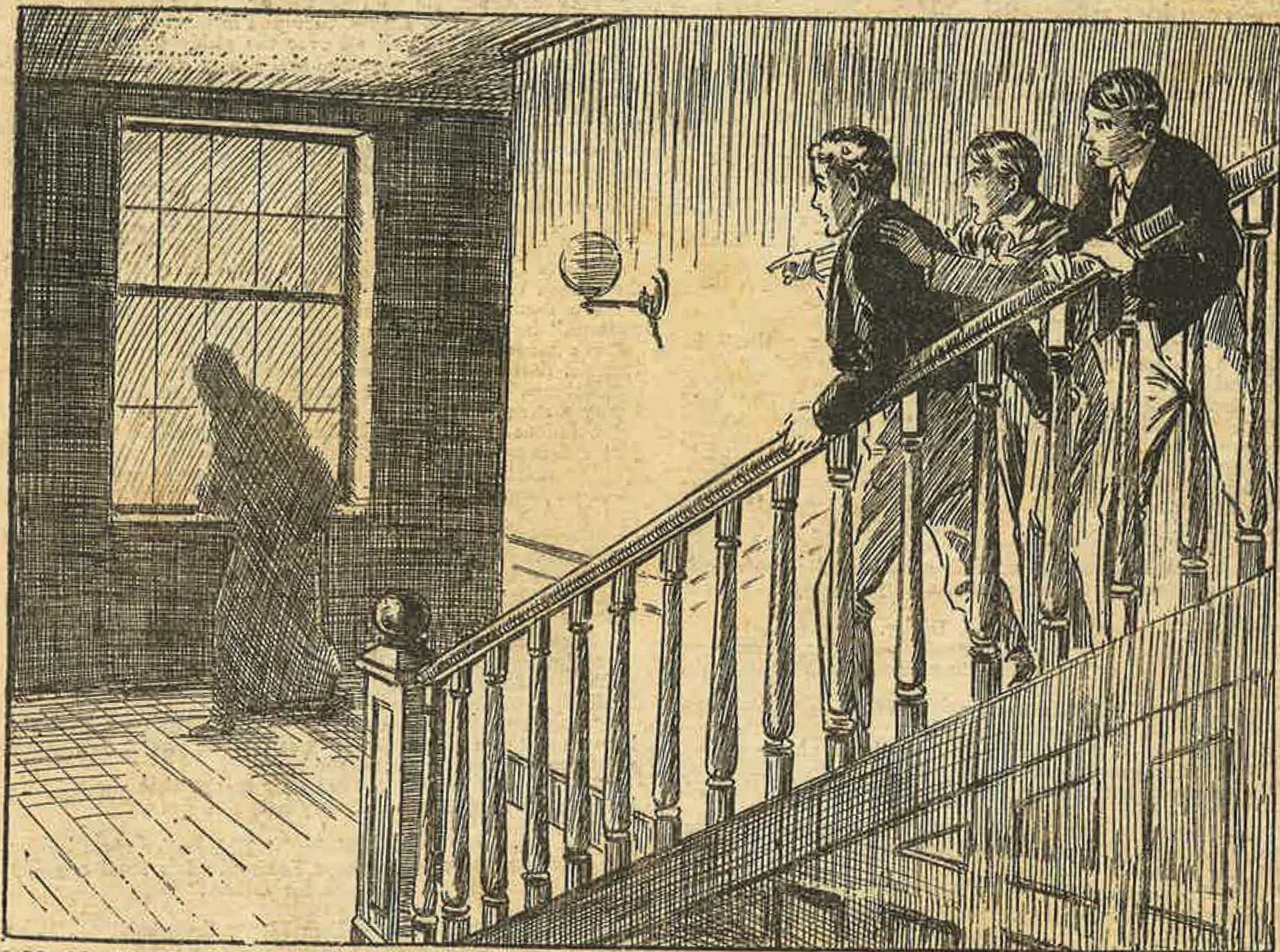


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# THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL

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

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



In the hall below the dim outline of a window could be seen, and the juniors saw something black and shapeless pass before it. "Great Scott!" gasped Manners. "What was it?" (See Chapter 6.)

## CHAPTER 1. Very Strange!

"**B**AI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, uttered that exclamation in a tone of considerable astonishment. He was gazing through his famous monocle upon one of the stonework pillars at the entrance gates.

"How vevy wemarkable!" murmured the swell of the School House. "Bai Jove! I wathah think this is some sillay joke!"

He continued staring at the gatepost for some moments, and then strolled thoughtfully across the quad in the direction of the School House. It was early morning, and D'Arcy happened to be first down. But now other juniors were appearing.

D'Arcy's chums of Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, and

Digby—appeared on the School House steps. Arthur Augustus regarded them rather absently, with a thoughtful frown upon his brow.

"Hallo, Gussy, you're an early bird!" said Jack Blake cheerfully. "Have you caught any worms?"

"Yaas—I mean no, you uttah ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with a start. "Pway do not be so disgusting!"

Blake chuckled, and Digby nodded approvingly at the blue sky.

"Well, it's a jolly fine Monday morning," he said. "Let's hope it sets an example to the rest of the week."

"Yes, it's a ripping morning," agreed Blake. "What do you think, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus nodded absently.

"Yaas, wathah; it is most mystewious," he said.

Blake stared.

"Mysterious?" he repeated. "Going dotty, or what?"

"No, I'm not goin' dottay!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly.

Next Wednesday:

"**UNDER HIS THUMB!**" AND "**PLAYING THE GAME!**"

"I merely said that it is vewy mystewious—vewy wemarkable, in fact!"

"You—you silly josses!" roared Blake. "How can the morning be mysterious and remarkable? Who ever heard of a mysterious morning?"

"Morning!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I nevah said anything about the morning! I was weferring to the gatepost!"

"The gatepost!" repeated Blake, in wonder.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Herries. "Gussy's had a relapse! He's gone dotty again!"

"He's always been dotty," growled Blake. "Explain yourself, you dummy! What do you mean by saying that the gatepost is mysterious?"

D'Arcy sighed.

"You are weally howwibly dense," he said. "But pewhaps you have not seen the notice."

"The notice?"

"Yaas."

"What notice?" roared Blake, in exasperation. "If you speak in riddles any more, Gussy, we'll bump you all down the steps!"

"I nevah speak in widdles," declared Arthur Augustus stiffly. "I merely said that the notice on the gatepost is vewy mystewious, and when you have seen it you will agwee with me."

His chums understood at last.

"Oh, so there's a notice on the gatepost?" said Blake. "Who put it there?"

"I have not the faintest ideah. It is vewy stwange, deah boy."

Herries started walking across the quad.

"It's no good asking Gussy who wrote the notice," he said. "Let's go and have a squint for ourselves."

"Good egg!"

"I don't believe there's any blessed notice at all," said Digby. "It's Gussy's idea of a joke."

"No, honah bwight, deah boys, theah's weally a notice stuck up."

And the chums of Study No. 6 crossed over to the entrance gates, D'Arcy's thoughtful manner told the others that the notice, whatever it was, was something unusual.

"Theah it is, deah boys!"

And Arthur Augustus pointed to a half-sheet of notepaper which was fastened to the stonework by a couple of small rusty nails.

"What's it say on it?" asked Digby.

They crowded round. The words upon the paper were written in pencil, and in a scrawling hand which none of the juniors recognised.

"I am here!" ran the notice. "There is one in this school who will understand.—G. M."

Blake turned an astonished face towards his chums.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he ejaculated.

"What the dickens does it mean?" asked Herries. "Who's here? And who will understand?"

"Can't make it out," replied Blake. "As Gussy intelligently remarked, it's jolly mysterious."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Digby. "It's some fatheaded joke of somebody's. I shouldn't be surprised if Lowther of the Shell stuck it up."

Arthur Augustus shook his head sagely.

"Wot!" he said. "That is not Lowthah's w'itin'!"

"I don't say it is," replied Digby. "He might have got some other ass to write it."

"But what for?" demanded Blake. "There's nothing funny in it. Lowther wouldn't do a thing like that. He'd know jolly well that he'd get it too hot when we found out."

Smith minor and Kerruish, of the Fourth, strolled up.

"What's the excitement?" asked Smith minor. "You chaps seem to be jolly interested in that gatepost."

"It's a mystewious notice, deah boy," explained D'Arcy. "Pway wead it, and give us your opinion."

Smith minor and Kerruish scanned the notice, and their opinion was that it was a joke of the New House juniors.

"Rats," said Digby. "It's Lowther's doing."

"Well, Lowther's just come out of the School House, so we'll ask him," remarked Blake. "Hi, Lowther!"

Monty Lowther of the Shell looked across the quad. His two chums, Tom Merry and Manners, were with him, and they looked also.

"What's the row?" asked Tom Merry, as Lowther's name was again shouted.

"Blessed if I know," replied the humorist of the Shell. "But as I seem to be in demand we'd better go across and see."

And the Terrible Three strolled to the gates.

"You're the chap I want," exclaimed Digby, grasping Lowther's sleeve. "Just squint at that piece of paper!"

Monty Lowther looked at it, and read the words.

"Very artistic," he said pleasantly. "I must say, your writing has improved, Digby, though I'm blowed if I can see why you should display it all over the giddy quad."

There was a general chuckle, and Digby glared.

"That's not my writing, you ass!" he said warmly.

"Oh, isn't it?" said Lowther. "Sorry! I thought you were proud of the thing, and—"

"Oh, shut up!" interrupted Digby. "We want to know if you wrote that, Lowther."

"If you want a thick ear, Digby, I'm always ready to oblige," answered Lowther grimly. "If you dare to suggest that I wrote that rotten scrawl, I'll jolly soon show you that I don't allow Fourth-Formers to be cheeky!"

Blake & Co. looked warlike, but Tom Merry stepped into the breach before matters went further.

"We don't know anything of the silly old notice, you chumps," he said. "What is it, anyhow? Who's 'G. M.'?"

"We haven't the faintest ideah," replied D'Arcy. "Digby thought that pewwaps Lowthah was playing a joke."

"Not me," said Lowther promptly. "When I play a joke I play a decent one!"

"Opinions differ," said Blake. "To my mind, this seems just about your mark."

"My mark will be planted on your nose in half a tick," retorted Lowther. "Now, what is this giddy notice? Have you Fourth Form asses bunged it up for some silly reason of your own?"

"Wathah not, dear boy," replied D'Arcy. "I was the first to see it. I was first out in the quad, as a mattah of fact, and stwalled across here by chance. Then I saw that piece of papah stawing me in the face."

"Looks to me as if it was put up by somebody in the night," said Tom Merry, eyeing the piece of paper critically.

"It's outside the gates, you see."

Monty Lowther re-read the words.

"I am here," he quoted. "Where? I can't see anybody here except you chaps. So, if this is true, one of you chaps must have shoved it up on the post!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "That only means that the writer's here, in the neighbourhood. My hat, I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"The solution," replied Blake. "This notice must be for Cutts of the Fifth, or perhaps Levison. It's from a giddy bookmaker, and 'G. M.' are his initials!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Sounds probable," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "The chap's put it in this way so that nobody else will understand it."

"Hallo, Cutts has just come out of the School House!" exclaimed Manners. "Let's ask him, and see what he has to say?"

"Good wheeze!"

And in one voice the little clump of juniors shouted across the quadrangle.

## CHAPTER 2.

### A Stranger Within the Gates!

GERALD CUTTS, the black sheep of the Fifth, looked across to the entrance gates and frowned.

"What on earth are those kids yelling at me for?" he muttered.

For a moment he took no notice; then, as his name was repeated continuously, he strode across the quad to the juniors.

Cutts was not on the best of terms with Tom Merry & Co., for his idea of enjoyment did not coincide with theirs. Cutts had dealings with bookmakers, and occasionally had little "flutters" on the racecourse.

The Fifth-Former frowned as he strode up.

"What's all this yelling about?" he demanded.

"Keep your hair on," said Monty Lowther genially. "We would hold converse with thee, fair Cutts!"

"If you want a thick ear, Lowther—"

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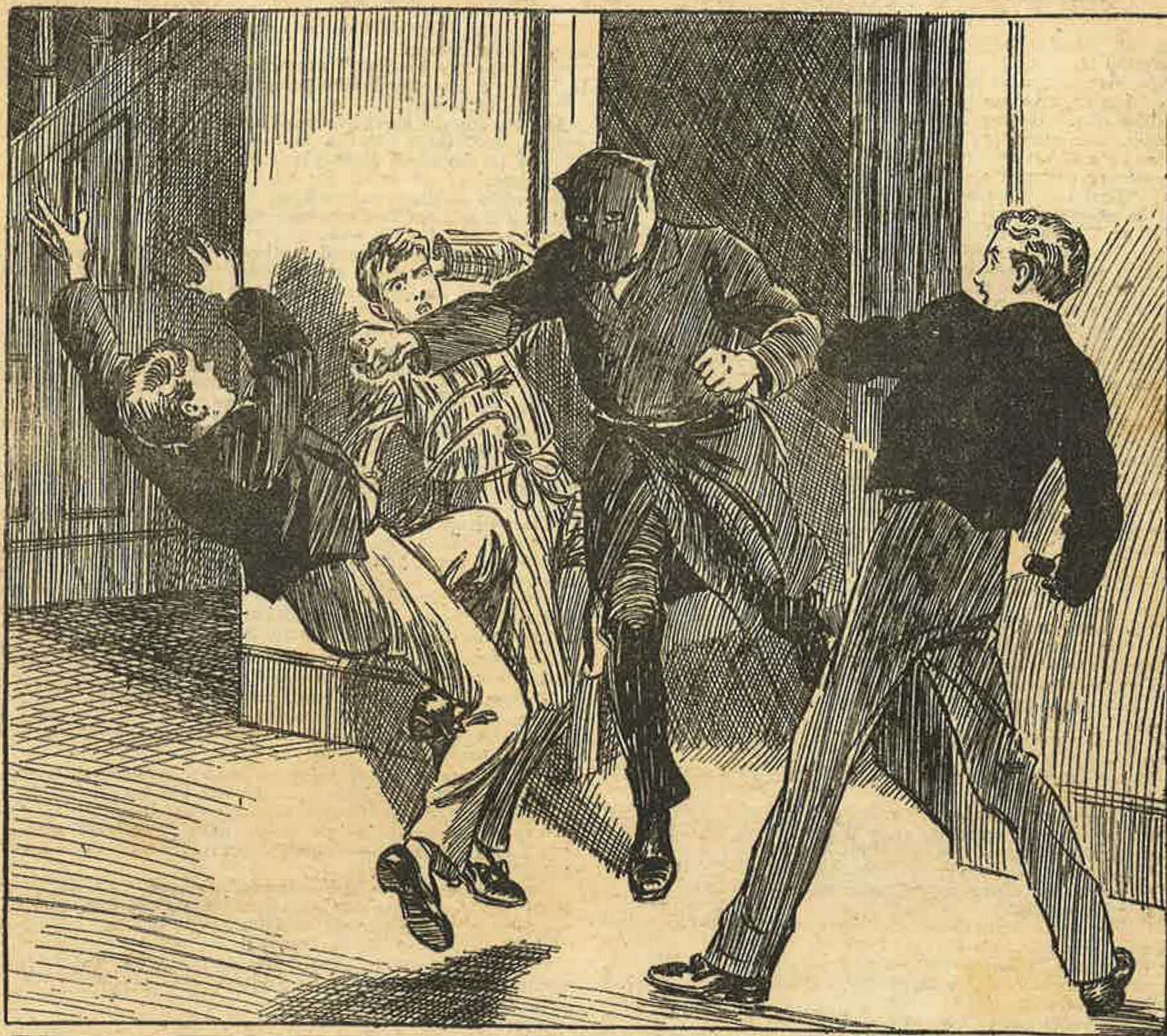
*See column 2, page 26 of this issue.*

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The stranger rushed at the blocked doorway like a charging bull. A fist caught Lowther in the chest and he staggered back, and Tom Merry was pushed aside as though he had been a feather. The next moment the man was darting up the stairs. "After him!" yelled Monty Lowther. (See Chapter 6.)

"I don't," said Monty Lowther promptly. "I haven't the slightest desire to possess a thick ear. We want to speak to you about this piece of paper."

"What piece of paper?" demanded Cutts tartly.

The juniors pointed, and the Fifth-Former read the mysterious words.

The Terrible Three watched his face closely, but it only expressed impatience.

"What's it got to do with me?" asked Cutts sharply. "I suppose there's a joke somewhere?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No joke about it," he replied. "We only thought that it might be addressed to you, Cutts."

Cutts stared.

"Me!" he said. "Why should it be addressed to me?"

"Because we think that it's from a bookie," replied Tom Merry blandly. "You have dealings with those gentlemen, Cutts, and we thought that one of 'em was getting a bit nasty with you. Do you know anybody with 'G. M.' for his initials?"

Cutts turned red.

"You cheeky young ass!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Do you know you're talking to the captain of St. Jim's? The thing's got nothing to do with me."

"Quite sure?" asked Monty Lowther. "You're a bit of a liar, you know, Cutts!"

"You young sweep!" roared Cutts, striding forward towards Lowther. "If you dare say that—"

"Oh, climb off it!" interrupted Lowther. "You had better not touch me, Cutts! There's a good few of us here, remember, and if you lay your dirty hands on me you

will find yourself used as a broom, and that wouldn't improve your nice clean clothes, would it?"

Cutts choked back his wrath, for he knew that the juniors would certainly make things warm for him if he became violent. So, with a furious frown, he strode off, amid a general chuckle.

Other juniors were out in the quad now, and Bernard Glyn, Kangaroo, Lumley-Lumley, Crook, Levison, and others marched across to the gates to see what the excitement was about.

Very soon quite a crowd had collected, and many conjectures were made concerning the notice.

"I wathah think it is from a beokie," said Arthur Augustus. "Nobody else would write a mysterious message like that. Pewwaps it is for you, Levison? Pewwaps somebody from the Gween Man is aftah you!"

"Rot!" said Levison of the Fourth. "It's nothing to do with me. I believe those New House bounders have done it for a jape. They'll come out here presently and start cackling at the excitement they have caused."

"Their cackles will soon change to howls if it is their work," said Tom Merry grimly. "I must say, we should look a nice set of asses!"

But when Figgins & Co., the leaders of the New House juniors came upon the scene, they were as mystified as anybody.

After prayers and breakfast, an effort was made to discover the writer of the notice, but by the time morning lessons started it was fairly evident that none of the juniors of either House were responsible for the strange document.

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NEXT  
WEDNESDAY:

**"UNDER HIS THUMB!"**

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of  
the Chums of St. Jim's. Order Early.

And it was not to be supposed that a senior could have had a hand in it.

Anything incapable of explanation is always arresting to the attention, and the juniors discussed the matter throughout the day. It was Monday, so there was little else to occupy their attention.

But by tea-time no explanation had been forthcoming, and the matter was still a mystery. Who had stuck the notice up? What did it mean? These were questions that could not be answered, and by bed-time the juniors were rather "fed up" with the thing.

The Terrible Three strolled out into the quad arm-in-arm about a quarter of an hour before bedtime in order to get a few minutes fresh air. The night was keen and dark, and the lights of the New House gleamed out on the other side of the quad.

"That you, Tom Merry?" asked a voice, in a whisper. The Terrible Three were discussing football, and the affair of the notice was forgotten for the time. But as they walked about the quad three figures suddenly appeared from beneath one of the old elms.

"Yes," replied the captain of the Shell. "What's up, Figgy? What's the giddy whisper for?"

"No larks, you know," said Manners. "It's bedtime."

Figgins & Co. loomed up out of the gloom.

"Shush!" said Fatty Wynn mysteriously.

"What do you want us to shush for?" asked Monty Lowther humorously. "I only believe in shushing when there's a good reason to shush!"

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Figgins. "We've seen something!"

"So have we," said Monty Lowther. "And it gave us quite a shock! You know, Figgy, your face is a bit of a starter to spring on anybody in the dark!"

Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

"You cackling fatheads!" hissed Figgins. "I'm not joking."

"Neither am I," said Lowther. "It's no joke, I can tell you—Ow!"

Monty Lowther staggered back as Figgins's fist caught him in the ribs.

"We've seen something!" repeated the lanky New House chief. "We were standing under the elm trees, talking, when a black form slipped round behind the gym."

"The ghost of St. Gym's!" chuckled Lowther irresistibly. "Have you been having too much supper, Figgy?"

Figgins snorted.

"Why the dickens don't you shove a muzzle on that fat-head?" he said, glaring at Tom Merry in the darkness. "When he's in one of these moods he ought to be put into a strait-waistcoat, and bunged into a padded room!"

Tom Merry grimaced.

"Don't get ratty," he said. "What's all this about a black form?"

"We saw it go behind the gym," said Kerr.

"One of the chaps, I expect," remarked Manners.

"Nothing mysterious in a chap walking behind the gym, Figgy. Very likely it was a School House chap with a parcel of grub. When he saw you chaps in the quad he naturally knew it was dangerous to show himself."

"My only hat!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "He's right, Figgy. I say, what asses we were to wait! We've lost a feed now!"

Fatty Wynn seemed quite upset.

"Well, I don't believe it was one of the chaps," said Figgins. "We had a good view of him for a moment, and I'm pretty sure it was a man. Are you game to come with us and make investigations?"

"Rather!" said the Terrible Three in one voice.

And the six juniors stepped quietly across the quad in the direction of the gymnasium. The Terrible Three were rather sceptical, and Tom Merry had a momentary suspicion that it was a jape, and that they were being led into a trap.

"I say, pax, you know!" he murmured. "This isn't a jape, I suppose, Figgy?"

"Of course not," said Figgins. "It's too late for japes."

They crept round the corner of the gym, and stood looking into the darkness in the direction of the woodshed.

"Nobody here," whispered Manners.

All was silent and still. Then Kerr suddenly grasped Tom Merry's arm.

"Look!" he whispered.

They all looked, and they caught a momentary glimpse of a form moving beside the woodshed.

"My hat! There's somebody there right enough!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Perhaps it's Levison," suggested Manners. "He might be having a cigarette before going to bed."

"Well, let's see."

And the juniors moved forward again. They all felt rather excited, for there was a certain mystery regarding the identity of the silent form. If it was Levison he would not have remained so quiet, for all the juniors knew that he occasionally indulged in smoking.

But, if it was not Levison, who was it?

That remained to be seen.

The juniors crept forward cautiously. Then, suddenly, the form dashed into view and scudded towards the Head's garden. And the juniors saw at once that it was the form of a man.

"After him!" roared Figgins.

The juniors rushed away in pursuit of the stranger. He arrived at the hedge dividing the Head's garden from the quad, and then doubled back with extraordinary agility considering his bulk, for he was a big man.

He ran right into the juniors, and for a second there was an exciting scuffle. The stranger struggled, and showed that he was possessed of tremendous strength. Then, without any apparent reason, he became quiet, and fell back on to the ground.

"Don't hurt me, young gents!" he panted. "I ain't done no 'arm!"

"What were you doing in here?" demanded Figgins suspiciously.

"Nothing, sir—absolutely nothing," declared the man; and while the juniors stared at him he kept up a continuous mutter, which could not be understood.

Kerr produced a little electric lamp from his pocket, and flashed the light upon the prisoner.

He was a heavily-built man, attired in a shabby, weather-stained suit. His chin was scrubby, and his eyes had a strange, wild look about them that made the juniors feel uncomfortable.

Tom Merry was just going to open his mouth to speak, when a tall form strode up. It was Darrel, the popular prefect.

"What are you juniors doing here?" he said sternly. "It's bedtime, and—Great Scott! Who on earth's that fellow?"

Darrel stared down at the stranger, who was sitting in the quad, surrounded by the juniors. He was looking straight before him, and muttered continuously.

"Who is it?" repeated Darrel.

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry. "He was skulking round the woodshed, and we collared him. Looks to me as if he was up to no good."

Darrel stared at the stranger.

"Don't sit there!" he ordered sharply. "Get up, and give an account of yourself!"

The man scrambled to his feet, and Kerr kept his electric light directed upon him.

"What are you doing in these grounds?" demanded Darrel. "It's a private property, and—"

"I know, sir," interrupted the man, turning his wild eyes upon Darrel. "I wasn't doing no harm, sir. I came in the gates, hoping as I could find something to eat. I daren't go to the house, though, and when I went to the gates again they was locked. So I thought I'd wait till all was quiet, and then climb over the wall. I didn't mean no harm, sir!"

The stranger's voice trailed away into a mutter until no sound was coming from his lips, although the latter continued forming words. Darrel regarded the man curiously for a moment, then turned to the juniors.

"Search him!" he ordered grimly.

The juniors obeyed with alacrity, but the stranger's pockets were absolutely empty, except for one or two trifling odds and ends.

"Well, he doesn't look like a burglar," said Darrel critically. "Where do you live?" he added, turning abruptly.

"Live?" repeated the man, uttering a strange laugh. "On the road, sir! I haven't tasted food since last night, and I thought that I might get a bite by coming here."

"Well, you should have asked properly for food, instead of skulking about the grounds," said Darrel sharply. "Here's a shilling for you," he added generously. "You'll find some shops open in the village if you hurry."

The man took the coin and dropped it into his pocket without a word. Then he seemed to realise what had occurred.

"Thank you, sir!" he said hoarsely.

Fatty Wynn felt in his pocket, and produced a bulky package. He gazed at it rather sadly for a moment, hesitated, and then held it forward.

"Here's a bag of sandwiches," he said good-naturedly.

# ANSWERS

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE, is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in CHUCKLES, 1<sup>d</sup>.

"They'll do to munch on the way to the village. It's perfectly rotten to be hungry!"

The stranger took the bag eagerly, and commenced operations without delay. He followed Darrel quietly across the quad to the gates, and waited silently while Taggles unlocked them.

As soon as they were open he walked straight out, mumbling continuously to himself. He did not say a word audibly, but disappeared into the gloom without even looking round.

"Nice goings hon," grumbled Taggles, relocking the gate. "If I'd know'd that feller was in the grounds I'd have had him out, and quick, too!"

"Well, he's out now," said Darrel; and Taggles went back to his lodge, rather ill-tempered at having been disturbed.

"Jolly queer bird!" said Figgins. "He seemed to be a little bit off his rocker. Still, he was harmless enough."

"What do you think about it, Darrel?" asked Tom Merry.

"I think it's high time you youngsters were in bed," said Darrel grimly. "Off you go, Figgins! I'll explain matters to Monteith."

Figgins & Co. hurried off, and the Terrible Three followed Darrel to the School House.

And the juniors in the Shell dormitory had another subject for conversation before going to sleep for the night.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Quite Unaccountable.

"MY only Aunt Jane!"

It was Bernard Glyn, of the Shell, who thus expressed himself.

He uttered the words in a tone of great surprise—and he certainly had good cause to feel astonished.

It was Tuesday morning, and Bernard Glyn had been punting a football about in the quad, waiting until the other fellows came out to join him. He had given the footer a hearty kick, and it had rolled out of the gates into the road.

Having recovered it, Glyn kicked it back into the quad. Then he followed leisurely. But as he came opposite to the gates he noticed something on one of the stone pillars.

For a second he thought it was the notice that had caused so much interest the previous morning. Then he remembered that it had been taken down and placed in the Shell common-room.

Another notice was nailed to the post.

Bernard Glyn uttered a gasp of astonishment. He saw that this notice was written on a similar piece of paper, and in the same handwriting. It ran:

"The time is near. Ten years is a long time, but I remember. To escape me is impossible.—G. M."

Bernard Glyn stood before the notice, gaping with astonishment. An exclamation of sheer surprise left his lips.

"What can it mean?" he murmured. "Great Scott! This is getting a bit thick!"

He looked round, and saw Figgins & Co. leave the New House.

"I say, you chaps!" bawled Glyn.

"What's up?" shouted Figgins.

"Come here!"

Glyn's tone was urgent, and Figgins & Co. crossed to the gates at a run.

"Wonder if it's another giddy notice?" said Kerr.

"My hat, it is!" ejaculated Figgins, as the trio halted at the gates.

Bernard Glyn looked at them curiously.

"Just squint at that pillar," he said. "There's another notice up there. Read it!"

Figgins & Co. read it.

"What the dickens can it mean?" said Figgins, in a puzzled voice. "It's quite plain that the notice has been shoved up there by an outsider. But who? I'm beginning to feel a bit queer."

"It's so jolly melodramatic!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "To escape me is impossible! Sounds like a bit out of a detective story."

"Whether there's anything in it or not, I'm going to find out the truth," said Kerr, the keen Scottish junior, with determination. "Anything mysterious like this interests me, and I shan't be satisfied until I have ferreted out the giddy facts."

"I bet you'll do the ferreting bizney all right," said Figgins admiringly. "You're an awfully deep chap, you know, Kerr."

Bernard Glyn left Figgins & Co. standing at the gates, and hurried into the School House. In the entrance-hall he met Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three. Glyn's face was flushed, and he looked excited.

"Anything up?" asked Manners.

"Yes," replied Glyn, quickly. "There's another blessed notice on the gatepost!"

"Another notice!"

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Great Scott!"

"It's a fact," said Glyn. "And it sounds awfully dramatic too! Come out and have a look for yourselves."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors streamed out into the quad and hurried across to Figgins & Co. They all read the notice eagerly, and then stared at one another with astonished looks.

"Well, this takes the biscuit!"

"It runs off with the giddy currant-bun!" declared Monty Lowther. "Who the dickens writes the things? It can't be a jape, because there's nothing funny in it."

Tom Merry & Co. were very puzzled. And while they stood there discussing the matter Mr. Railton approached from the School House. He seemed rather surprised to see so many boys collected at the gates.

"I wish to speak to you, Merry," said the Housemaster, looking round. "A man entered the grounds last night—But is there anything the matter here?" he asked, suddenly breaking off.

"It's this notice, sir," replied Blake, pointing to the paper.

Mr. Railton looked.

"I heard something about a notice yesterday," he said, stepping forward in order to get a closer view.

"Yes, sir; but this is another notice!"

"Another one altogether, sir!"

"And written in the same handwriting too!"

Mr. Railton read the notice through, uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and then read it again.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "This is most curious! Are you sure it is not the work of some humorously-minded junior, Merry, who thinks it laughable to create a mystery?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's not been done by any of the chaps, sir," he replied. "We took a lot of pains yesterday to find out the joker, but it's still a mystery."

"G. M.," murmured the Housemaster thoughtfully. "Who in the world can be the author of this remarkable warning? Can you tell me the sense of yesterday's notice, boys?" he added aloud.

"Yes, sir," replied Blake. "It simply read 'I am here. There is one in this school who understands.' And now this morning we find this, sir! I'm blessed if I can understand it!"

Mr. Railton looked at the notice again, and then took it down.

"I will show it to Dr. Holmes," he said, putting it in his pocket. "And now, about that man who was here last night, Merry. Darrel has told me that you and some other juniors found a stranger lurking by the woodshed."

"That's right, sir. He seemed to be a little bit dotty."

"You do not think he meant mischief?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Manners. "He was simply a tramp looking for something to eat. He came in when the gates were open, and then Taggles locked 'em. So the chap couldn't get out again without rousing Taggles."

"He seemed quite harmless, sir," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton asked one or two more questions, and then departed, leaving the juniors in little groups discussing the situation.

"Well, I don't know what to make of it, for one!" exclaimed Figgins to his two chums. "I say, I wonder if we shall find any more notices nailed up?"

"Shouldn't be surprised," answered Kerr thoughtfully. "The chap who's responsible is either off his rocker, or has got a fixed motive. I wonder—"

Kerr broke off absently.

"Well," said Figgins, "you wonder what?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"That must tax your brain a terrific lot," said Fatty Wynn sarcastically. "How can you wonder nothing, you ass? What were you going to say?"

"Well, it's jolly queer!" said Kerr.

Figgins snorted.

"That's not what you were going to say!" he exclaimed.

"You were wondering something."

"I know; but it was only a momentary thought," replied Kerr. "It's too improbable to be true."

"Well, what is it, anyhow?"

"It seems mighty curious to me that that tramp chap should be lurking about last night," replied Kerr. "We biffed him over, you know, and he was as strong as a giddy ox. Now, a chap who's been without food for hours, and who's a tramp on the road, isn't usually strong, is he?"

"My hat, no!" said Figgins.

"Rather not!" agreed Fatty Wynn emphatically. "Why, even if I miss a single meal I feel horribly weak for days!"

"Oh, rats!" said Kerr. "You're nobody to judge by, Fatty. One of your meals would last another chap a week. It's no wonder you feel starved if you miss one."

Figgins chuckled, and Kerr went on: "That chap's eyes too," he said. "Didn't you notice how wild they looked?"

"That's easily explained," said Wynn promptly. "How?"

"Why, the poor chap was nearly off his rocker with hunger!" answered Wynn. "Nothing else would give a chap that wild-eyed look."

"Oh, shut up, you giddy porpoise!" exclaimed Kerr impatiently. "If you can't talk about anything else but grub, you'd better ring off! My opinion is that the chap was not quite right in the head. And it struck me as being possible—only possible, mind you—that he might have written those notices."

Figgins and Fatty Wynn stared. "Rot!" said Figgins.

"Well, perhaps it is; but you never know!" exclaimed Kerr sagely. "Personally, I mean to keep my eyes open and get to the bottom of the business."

But it seemed as though the business had no bottom, for nobody could suggest any explanation. The day passed, and the affair of the warning notices was still a mystery.

During the tea in Study No. 6 Blake propounded a scheme which had occurred to him.

"Why shouldn't we take a rise out of the Shell bounders?" he suggested, as he piled into a plate of steak-and-kidney pie. "It's about time we did something, just to show them that we're leaders of the School House!"

"Have you got an ideah, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy. "Because if you haven't, I suggest that you welinquish the weins in my favah. I pwide myself that I could lead this studdy to victury—"

"Oh, rats, Gussy!" interrupted Blake. "I'm leader, and I'm going to remain leader. You can go and eat coke!"

"I uttably wefuse to go and eat coke!"

"Then eat your tea, ass!"

"I decline to be chawctawised as an ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus stiffly. "You are a howwibly wude boundah, Blake!"

"Eat your tea and shut up!" roared Blake, dropping a chunk of meat into his tea-cup by accident.

"I uttably wefuse to eat my tea!"

"Then drink it!" chuckled Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall dwink nothin' until Blake has wetwacted his wotten appellations!" said D'Arcy indignantly.

"Retracted his what?" gasped Herries.

"His wotten appellations!"

"What's he talking about?" asked Digby. "Rotten appell—something or other!"

"Sounded like rotten apples!" remarked Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How can Blake retract his rotten apples, Gussy?" asked Digby.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glared.

"Pway do not be so widge, Digby!" he said. "I nevali said anything about wotten apples! I said wotten appellations—disagweeable names, you ignowant duffahs! I am a perfectly wtractable chap as a wule, but I uttably wefuse to sit here—"

"You can stand up, Gussy!" suggested Digby.

"I uttably wefuse to sit here and be called names!" proceeded D'Arcy haughtily. "Therefore, unless you wender an instant apology, Blake, I shall be compelled to wise and wethiah from the woom!"

"Oh, lor!" groaned Blake. "Why were we saddled with this chunk of fatheadedness? Why were we?"

"Echo answers why!" said Herries.

"No echo doesn't," said Blake. "Echo answers we, you ass!"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

"I decline to sit at the same table with a wottah who wefers to me as a chunk of fatheadedness," he said firmly. "I—Ow! Gwooh! Wcally, Blake! Welease me at once!"

Blake grinned as he forced the swell of the School House back into his chair.

"Rats, Adolphus!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "We're not going to have you clear off in a huff. I've got a wheeze to suggest. In fact, I've been waiting to suggest it for a long time, only you've been jawing so much!"

"I uttably—"

"Piffle! Sit still!"

"I wefuse—"

"Sit still!" roared Blake. "If you cause any more com-

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motion, Gussy, we'll open the door and sling you into the passage!"

"On your neck!" said Digby.

"And the passage is all muddy!" added Herries.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus calmed down. Nothing would cause him to calm down so quickly as a threat to roll him in the mud. As it happened, he had put a clean collar on for tea, and had taken quite ten minutes to brush his coat.

"You boundahs!" he ejaculated. "I—I—"

"Will you sit still and quiet?" demanded Blake threaten-

ingly.

"I uttably wefuse—I—I mean, yaas, deah boy!"

"Good!"

And D'Arcy was left alone. He glared round indignantly for a few moments; but as his chums seemed to be oblivious of the glare, he transferred his gaze to his tea-cup, and glared into that.

Meanwhile, Blake explained his wheeze.

## CHAPTER 4.

### The Forgery!

"It's not much," began Blake modestly. "Still, I think we can give the Terrible Three and those other Shell chaps a jolly good smack in the eye!"

"What's the good of that?" asked Herries. "You can't call a smack in the eye a wheeze! It's nothing more than a rag!"

"I don't mean literally, you ass!" said Blake. "We'll give the whole Shell a smack in the eye, as it were. Now, my idea is this! Let's write a blood-curdling notice, and sign it 'G. M.', the same as those two which have been nailed to the gatepost!"

"Rotten!" said Digby.

"Idiotic!" agreed Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Uttahly widic!"

Blake glared.

"Well, that's a nice way to greet a jolly good idea!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Why can't you wait until I have finished? That's only the beginning of the wheeze!"

"Oh!"

"Get the rest off your chest, then!"

"That's what I'm going to do, you chumps! The notice will have to be worded carefully—something to the effect that ructions are going to happen after lights out. Then I'll dress up in some of the Fourth Form Dramatic Club's duds, and steal into the Shell dormitory after lights out. You chaps will be just behind—and if we don't make the Shell sit up, I shall be surprised! They'll all shiver with fright when they see my giddy revolver!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, do you think it's worth working?" asked Blake.

"Yes, it's jolly good," said Digby. "At first I thought you meant to shove the notice up only. There'd be no sense in that, so that's why I thought it was the whole of your idea!"

"Eh?"

Blake glared at Digby wrathfully.

"Do you want a thick ear, Digby?" he asked. "You know jolly well that my ideas are always first-rate!"

"Nothing like being modest," murmured Herries.

"Oh, rats! Let's write the giddy notice!"

"Good egg!"

And the juniors hurried over the rest of their tea. Then a corner of the table was cleared, and Blake got out an exercise-book and tore a sheet out of it.

"Now, lemme see!" he murmured, biting the end of a pencil. "How shall we start?"

"Beware!" said Digby solemnly.

"Eh? Beware of what?"

"That's the beginning of the notice, you ass!"

"Oh!" said Blake. "Well, that's not bad, though it's not exactly original. I'll shove it down, and see how it looks!"

And Blake drafted out the blood-curdling notice. After much scratching-out and substitution, it read thus:

"BEWARE! The hour has come! A horrible end awaits my victim to-night! Let one person in this great building close his eyes before midnight, and I strike swift and certain! So let the ONE to whom this warning is addressed take heed!

G. M."

Blake read it aloud.

"Sounds awfully villainous!" remarked Herries.

"Yaas, wathah; but wouldn't it be bettah to mention Tom Mewwy's name in it, deah boys?" asked D'Arcy.

"No fear!" said Blake. "Everybody would know it was a jape then. As it is, all the chaps will be wondering who the particular ONE is!"



"Right-ho! Write it out properly, and we'll sneak out and shove it on the gatepost," said Herries. "We must pretend to know nothing about it, though we must be careful not to tell whoppers!"

"I trust nobody in this studay is capable of tellin' whoppahs," said Arthur Augustus, looking at his chums through his famous monocle. "If I am asked about the notice I shall decline to answah!"

"That's right, Gussy," said Blake, preparing to write the notice in ink on a plain scrap of notepaper.

When it was done, it certainly seemed genuine, for Blake disguised his own handwriting completely, and wrote in the same scrawly hand as the two original notices.

"Well, that'll do," he said, regarding it critically. "But we mustn't forget that this is only a jape. The real mystery still requires unravelling, and it's up to us to get at the truth. I hear that Kerr, of the New House, is engaged on the case, as they say in the detective stories. Well, School House is cock-house, and we mustn't let Kerr find out the secret before we do. There's the honour of the House to think of."

"Yaas, wathah—the honah of the House, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "There is no need to wowwy, howevah. I have made up my mind to devote all my spare time to fewwetin' out the twuth."

"Good old Gus!" chuckled Blake. "I can see you doing the 'fewwetin' bizney successfully—I don't think!"

"Weally, you wottah, I am just the chap for the job," protested Arthur Augustus. "It only wequahs tact and judgment, and a little detective skill."

"That's all, Gussy, but as you don't possess a mite of either, you had better stand down," said Blake genially. "You're all right in your place, you know, but once you get out of it, there's no telling what ructions you'll cause. Your place is to remain an ornament to the School House—kind of fashion-plate, as it were, for the chaps to look at and admire."

D'Arcy glared at Blake through his monocle.

"I pwotest against this howwibly personal chawactewisation!" he exclaimed warmly. "I uttaly decline to be called a fashion-plate! I pwide myself—"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy, for goodness' sake!"

"Yes, let's go and stick this notice up!"

"Good!"

And Blake, Herries, and Digby trooped out of the study, leaving the lofty Arthur Augustus glaring wrathfully at the open doorway.

"Bai Jovo!" he murmured. "The wude boimdahs!"

He hesitated for a moment, then followed his chums out of the study, and caught up to them in the quad, which was now dark and deserted.

"Blake, you wottah!"

"Sh-sss-sh!" whispered Blake warningly. "Do you want to give the whole giddy game away? Not a word, Gussy, as you value your life!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus realised the necessity for silence. As it happened, the quad was absolutely bare, and not a soul saw the Fourth-Formers fixing up the piece of paper. The gates were not locked yet, although they would be very shortly, and Blake was anxious lest the paper should be unnoticed.

But in ten minutes' time, while the chums of Study No. 6 were talking in the entrance-hall, Crooke of the Shell rushed in.

"I say!" he ejaculated. "There's another giddy notice on the gatepost! Have you chaps seen it?"

"Another notice!" exclaimed Blake innocently.

"Bai Jove!"

"You're kidding," said Digby doubtfully.

"I'm not!" exclaimed Crooke, in excitement. "Go and look for yourselves, if you don't believe me!"

Blake & Co. rushed out, and in a short time a whole crowd of juniors were collected about the gates, most of them looking rather scared. The wording of the notice was certainly rather startling.

The paper was taken down, and passed from hand to hand. At last Tom Merry got hold of it. Blake looked over his shoulder.

"What on earth can it mean?" asked Blake wonderingly.

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry. "Somehow, this doesn't seem like the other notices! Can you see any difference, Blake? The paper doesn't seem the same, and I wouldn't swear that this is written by the same hand."

Blake scoffed.

"Rats!" he said promptly. "What on earth makes you think that, Tom Merry? Why, anybody can see that it's genuine! If you say that's not written by the same chap who wrote the other two notices, you're an ass!"

Blake's tone was positive, and Tom Merry gave him a quick look. Then the captain of the Shell transferred his gaze to the paper again. It struck him as being very peculiar that the notice should have been nailed up during

the evening, for both the others had been found in the morning. And there was something about the handwriting which was just a trifle familiar. Tom Merry held up the paper to the light above the gateway. Then his eyes gleamed a little, and he passed the notice on to Manners.

"Better not take any notice of it," he said carelessly. "I expect it's some fathoheaded jape or other."

"Jape!" said Blake. "Great Scott! It doesn't sound like a jape, anyhow."

"Better take the thing to Mr. Railton," suggested Bernard Glyn.

"Wathah not, deah boy," said D'Arcy quickly.

"Why not?" asked Tom Merry.

"Because Railton wouldn't understand, for one thing," put in Blake quickly, before Arthur Augustus could reply. "He'd have perfects shoved into the dormitories, or something like that. If this chap comes we can deal with him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And he'll get it hot, too—jolly hot," said Tom Merry grimly, but with a twinkle in his eye.

And when the juniors had dispersed, and Blake & Co. were once more in their study, Herries looked rather uneasy.

"I say," he said, "I'm not so sure about this jape panning successfully, after all. If those Shell bounders have jumped to it, they'll give us a jolly warm time when we appear."

"Rats!" said Blake promptly. "When I'm dressed up they won't know me from Bill Sikes. It'll be great fun watching the chaps dive under the bedclothes. My hat, I'll give 'em a fright!"

"If you want to give 'em a really good fright," said Dig, "you'd better not dress up at all."

"You fathead!"

Blake & Co. settled down to do their prep., feeling quite satisfied with the progress of the jape. Could they have been in the Shell passage at that moment, they would not have been so cheerful.

In Tom Merry's study the Terrible Three were chuckling hugely.

"It's simply a jape of those Fourth Form kids," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "I suspected it all along, but then I got positive evidence on the subject."

Tom Merry handed the well-thumbed notice to his chums.

"Hold it up to the light," he said.

Manners and Lowther did so, and the former uttered an exclamation.

"Why, this is a piece of your notepaper, Tommy," he said, in surprise.

"Exactly!" chuckled the captain of the Shell. "I spotted the watermark almost at once. Now, it's a bit too improbable to think this mysterious 'G. M.' uses the same kind of paper as I do. This morning I gave Blake a double sheet of my notepaper, with some jottings on it. What more need I say?"

"Nothing, learned counsel," said Monty Lowther. "The evidence is complete. We have proved positively and assuredly that the notice is a bogus one, and that it emanated from the portals of the famous apartment known as Study No. 6. The object of this notice is obviously a dark and horrible jape. What shall the punishment be?"

"Death!" said Manners solemnly.

"That's it," went on Lowther. "We'll collar Blake & Co. at their own game, and have them publicly slaughtered. Now, I suggest something lingering, with molten lead, or boiling oil, in it."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Well, we'll be prepared for them, anyhow," he said. "I don't say we'll boil them in oil, but we'll give 'em a hot time! Fancy those kids thinking that they could diddle us!"

"Preposterous idea!" scoffed Monty Lowther. "After lights out, I expect Blake and the others will put in an appearance, with the sweet intention of frightening our giddy lives out."

"It would be too bad altogether to disappoint them," said Manners concernedly. "So we'll put our heads together, and prepare a counter jape. Then we'll go round and give the tip to all the other chaps!"

And the Terrible Three sat down round the fire, and a plot was plotted.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Not According to Programme.

ALL was quiet in the Fourth Form dormitory. Darrel had just left, after turning lights out, bidding the juniors "good-night." The silence lasted precisely until Darrel's footsteps had died away down the corridor—then Jack Blake sat up in bed.

"All serene!" he murmured softly. "You chaps ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake & Co. slipped out of bed, and quietly pulled some of the GEM LIBRARY.—No. 319. Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. Order Early.

things on. The other juniors looked on interestedly, for many of them did not know of the intended jape.

"What's the idea?" asked Levison.

"Go and eat coke!" answered Digby bluntly. "You're not in this, Levison, so you'd better go to sleep!"

"It's too cold to get up, anyhow," said Levison, with a sniff. "I'm blessed if I'd turn out just to play a silly kid's jape!"

"No; you want something more exciting—playing cards at the Green Man, for example," said Herries contemptuously.

"Oh, rats!" growled Levison.

"What's the wheeze, any'ow?" asked Harry Hammond, the Cockney schoolboy. "What game are you chaps goin' to play?"

"It's a wippin' jape against the Shell, deah boy," answered D'Arcy, who was Hammond's special chum. "I tried to tell you before suppah, but Kangawoo and Dane were neah by, so I could not open my mouth."

"I thought you seemed sort o' worried," said Hammond. "Well, they ain't in here now, so let's 'ave the partic'lars."

"Wight-ho, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

And while he finished his dressing he briefly outlined the scheme.

"Blake's going into the Shell dormitory," he concluded; "but we shall be just inside the door to watch the fun, and to lend a hand if necessary."

"You won't be very safe if the Shell chaps tumble to the bloomin' wheeze," said Hammond, with his famous accent. "Best let me an' one or two others kim along with you."

"Good idea!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I'll go, too."

"Sure, an' it's meself that'll be another," said Reilly.

"That'll be seven," said Blake. "Can't let any more come, or we shall give the giddy show away."

So several of the juniors who would like to have gone, were denied the privilege. Later on they expressed themselves as being very satisfied with the arrangement.

For, while Blake was struggling into a large black cloak in the Fourth Form dormitory, the Shell dormitory presented quite an active appearance. The Terrible Three were busily making preparations for Blake & Co.'s visit. Bernard Glyn stood close against the door, listening for the first sound of the expected japers. The whole Shell knew of the facts, and everyone was awake. They intended giving Blake & Co. a considerable surprise when they arrived, just to show them that it was like their cheek to jape the Shell.

"Look out!" whispered Glyn suddenly. "I can hear somebody out in the passage."

"My hat!"

"Jump into bed, quick!" hissed Tom Merry. "Glyn, you stand behind that curtain against the door, and when they are all in, slip forward and lock it. We don't want the bounders to escape!"

"Right-ho!" murmured the Lancashire lad.

He slipped behind the curtain, and the dormitory was all still and quiet. For a whole minute nothing occurred, and the juniors began to think that Bernard Glyn had been mistaken. Then a slight sound came from the door, and everyone held their breath.

Blake & Co. crept into the Shell dormitory as silently as shadows, until somebody happened to tread on D'Arcy's toe.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped audibly.

"Shut up, you frabjous chump!" hissed Blake, making more row than D'Arcy. "You'll give the whole giddy show away!"

"I uttably decline to be called a frabjous chump!"

"Gag him, for goodness' sake!" whispered Blake.

The Shell fellows lay in their beds, grinning into the darkness, for they had heard everything quite distinctly. The dormitory door was closed, but not latched, and Hammond and Lumley-Lumley stood close against it.

Blake suddenly strode forward into the centre of the dormitory with a heavy, solid tread. Then he paused so that his dim form would be seen by some of the juniors outlined against the windows. He heard several beds creak, and then a quavering voice broke the silence:

"Who—who's that?"

The voice belonged to Monty Lowther, and sounded full of terror. Blake grinned in the darkness.

"I have come here to kill the treacherous wretch who I have sworn to—to kill!" he said, in a solemn, villainous voice. "Let him stand forth— Oh, my only Aunt Maria!"

Blake staggered back a pace and gasped. For, without any warning, a dozen electric torches had flashed out from a dozen beds, and Blake blinked dazedly at the dazzling lights. He was standing in a brilliantly illuminated spot, and his "disguise" looked extremely quaint in the glare.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A low murmur of laughter came from the Shell fellows.

"Look at the giddy avenger!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Let him stand fifth—I mean fourth!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake stared round in alarm. He wore a large cloak and a wide-brimmed hat, and carried a huge, aged old pistol, which had given up work years ago, and which was useless except for ornament. In the darkness, Blake made an imposing, awesome figure—but in the full light he looked quite funny.

"Rescue!" he yelled suddenly.

"Too late, my bonnie laddie!" chuckled Lowther. "Rescue is not within your reach. You are our prisoner, and we are about to slaughter you!"

"Wats!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly. "Wally wound, you chaps—wally wound! Stunday No. 6 for evah!"

The Fourth-Formers made a dash for their leader, but Blake waved them back.

"We shall be beaten in a tick if we stay here!" he said quickly. "Let's clear out while we've got the chance!"

The lights suddenly left Blake, and all focused themselves upon the door. Bernard Glyn was revealed, turning the key in the lock. He held it up, and grinned.

"Locked in, my beauties!" he chuckled.

"So the wallying wound business isn't any good," grinned Monty Lowther. "Collar the bounders!"

"You uttah wuffians!"

"Don't give in, Gussy!"

"Wathah not!" gasped D'Arcy. "Pile in, Hammond, deah boy!"

"Not 'arf!" wanted Hammond.

Half the Shell had sprung from their beds, and in less than fifteen seconds a terrific tussle was in progress in the middle of the dormitory.

Then, suddenly, a loud knocking sounded on the door. Silence fell instantly.

"Open this door!" ordered a voice sharply.

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered Tom Merry. "Darrel!"

"Open this door, you young rascals!" repeated Darrel sternly. "What is the meaning of all this uproar? How dare you lock the door?"

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "We're fairly caught!"

"Copped proper!" said Hammond.

"Slip under the beds, you asses!" whispered Tom Merry.

"We'll dodge back between the sheets, and Darrel won't know you're in here at all!"

"Good egg!"

"How about the door?" asked Bernard Glyn.

"You unlock it when the lights are all out," said Tom quickly. "Your bed is the nearest, and Darrel will think the door's been unlocked all the time!"

"Perhaps!" muttered Manners doubtfully.

"You cheeky young rascals!" exclaimed Darrel angrily. "How much longer are you going to keep me waiting?"

The Shell fellows dodged back to bed, and the Fourth-Formers slipped silently underneath the beds. Then Glyn silently inserted the key into the lock and turned it. A second later he was in bed.

Darrel, outside, was becoming quite angry. He grasped the handle and turned it.

"Will you open— My hat!"

The door suddenly opened, and he sprawled into the dormitory, and sat down abruptly on the floor. He had thought the door was locked, and was taken quite by surprise.

A suspicious sound of chuckling sounded from several of the beds, and Darrel sprang to his feet. He was unhurt, but his dignity had suffered. It was hardly the thing for a prefect of St. Jim's to sprawl headlong in the Shell dormitory, to the amusement of the fellows.

"You young sweeps!" he exclaimed warmly. "What was the meaning of the uproar in this dormitory a minute ago?"

Silence.

Darrel drew his breath in sharply.

"Merry!" he rapped out.

Silence.

"Lowther!"

A gentle snore from Lowther.

Darrel stepped across to the gas-bracket, and lit the gas. Then in the bright light he turned to the beds again. And something suddenly attracted his attention at the foot of Skimpoll's bed.

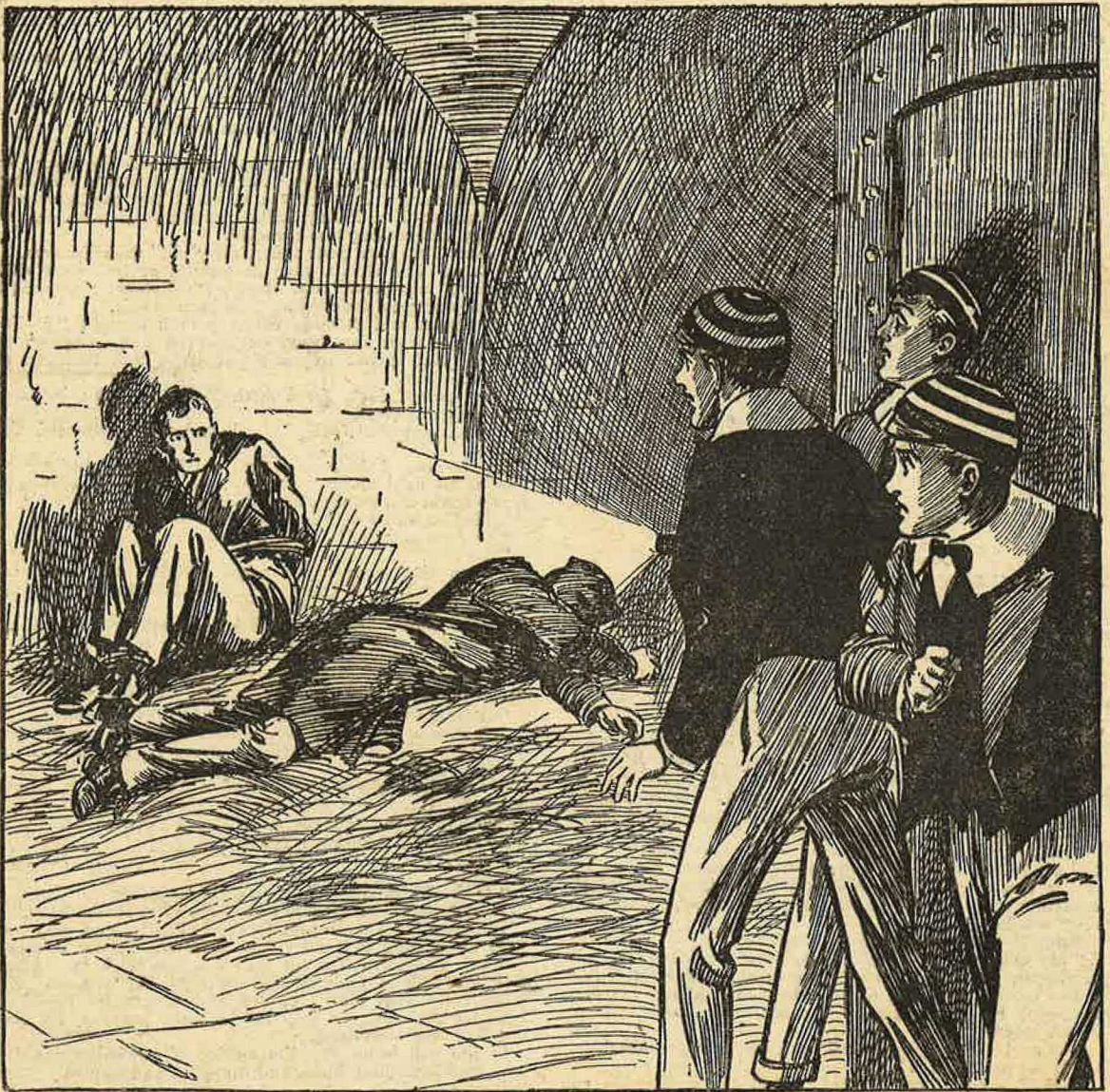
It was a foot!

Darrel smiled grimly, and strode forward. Next moment he dragged forcibly at the foot, and there was a sudden howl.

"Ow! Bai Jove, who has collahed my foot! Welease me, you uttah wottah!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove, I had no ideah it was you, Dawwel!" gasped



The light from the torch gleamed into the vault, and there, stretched at full length on his side, lay the man with the black covering over his head, and propped up against the wall sat Mr. Raitton, pale and haggard. "Thank goodness we've found you, sir!" whispered Tom Merry. (See Chapter 12.)

Arthur Augustus, sitting up, and blinking at Darrel. "Pway forgive me for callin' you an uttah wottah!"

Darrel forced back a smile.

"What are you doing in this dormitory, D'Arcy?" he asked.

"I—I— Weally, Dawwel, I am all in a fluttah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, groping for his monocle. "It's all wight, deah boy—there's no need to get watty."

"Answer my question, D'Arcy!" said Darrel sharply. "What are you doing in this dormitory? You do not sleep here!"

"Don't I, deah boy?"

Darrel frowned.

"No, you don't!" he retorted. "You ought to be in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory."

"Yaas, that's wight!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, rising to his feet. "Pway don't look so fewocious, Dawwel! Ewerything in quite all sewene. I will come with you now, and go back to bed. I—I was just playin' a jape on the Shell wottahs, you know! Shall—shall I turn the gas out, deah boy?"

Darrel smiled.

"You young rascal!" he exclaimed. "That's not good enough for me. You're not the only Fourth-Former in this room, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Dawwel, I am—I—I mean—"

Darrel looked under Tom Merry's bed.

"Come out of that, Blake!" he ordered. "And all the rest of you had better come out, too! If you don't show yourselves immediately I will give you all five hundred lines."

The Fourth Form japers appeared with surprising alacrity, and stood meekly before the prefect.

"It's all right, Darrel, old chap," said Blake. "We were only playing a joke—"

"That's enough, Blake!" interrupted Darrel sharply. "You should wait until daylight to play your jokes. This is a time when you should be in bed and asleep. Why did you not open the door when I knocked?"

"We—we thought you might not find us," said Blake meekly.

"Well, I have found you—and you will all take a hundred lines!" said Darrel. "Now go back to bed—sharp! And don't let me hear another sound to-night!"

"Right-ho, Darrel!"

And the would-be japers hurried out.

Tom Merry & Co. looked after them with joyful grins.

"That's what they call a proper finish to a fizzled-out jape," remarked Monty Lowther. "You treated 'em in the right way, Darrel, old man; they deserve all they got!"

"And you'll deserve all you get!" said Darrel grimly. "Every boy in this room will take a hundred lines!"

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Monty Lowther blankly.

"But I say, Darrel, that's not fair!" protested Tom Merry. "A lot of the chaps were lying in bed all the time—Crocket, Skimpole, and a lot of others!"

And Tom Merry mentioned the names of the boys who had taken no part in the tussle. Darrel listened, and then nodded.

"All right," he said shortly, "I'll take your word, Tom Merry. Only those boys who were concerned in the disturbance will write the imposition. Now go to sleep, and let me hear no more of you."

And Darrel turned the gas out and left.

A series of low groans arose as his footsteps died away.

"Well, this is a bit of all right!" grumbled Manners. "Got to write a hundred giddy lines, just because those Fourth Form rotters try to jape us!"

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"Awful!" growled Bernard Glyn.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, go to sleep!" he said lightly. "Blake & Co. are properly diddled, so that's something to be thankful for!"

And the fellows snuggled down and were very soon sound asleep—with the exception of Tom Merry. Somehow the disturbance had unsettled him, and although he closed his eyes, sleep would not come.

## CHAPTER 6.

### An Alarm in the Night.

**T**OM MERRY sat up in bed.

Over half an hour had passed since Darrel had departed, and Tom Merry had just dozed off. But he was far from asleep, and had been aroused instantly when a loud creak had sounded from a loose board out in the corridor.

"Well, I'm blessed," murmured Tom Merry, rubbing his eyes. "There's somebody out in the passage! It must be those Fourth Form asses come back again!"

He listened intently, and thought he heard the sound of a cautious footstep proceeding down the corridor. But there was no sound of whispering.

"There's someone there, as sure as fate," murmured the captain of the Shell. "Yet I can't hear voices. My hat, it might not be Blake & Co. at all!"

Tom felt startled for a moment. The hour was late, and the whole House was asleep except, perhaps, one or two of the masters. And Tom Merry knew that none of the masters would creep down the corridor in such a stealthy, silent manner.

Suppose—suppose it were a burglar!

"My only aunt," thought Tom Merry. "It seems jolly suspicious, I must say. I'm going to make investigations!"

And he slipped out of bed and bent over Monty Lowther. He shook his chum's shoulder gently, and Lowther sat up with a growl.

"Grooc! 'Tain't rising bell, you ass," he grumbled.

"Wake up, Monty!"

"Oh, it's you, Tom Merry? What the dickens do you mean by rousing me at this unearthly hour? It's pitch dark!"

"I know it is," said Tom quickly. "I just heard stealthy footsteps out in the corridor!"

"My hat, stealthy footsteps!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, now fully awake. "It must be Blake & Co.—"

"I don't think so," interrupted Tom Merry quickly. "It sounded awfully mysterious, Monty. It might be a— a burglar!"

"Great Scott!"

Lowther hopped out of bed and commenced slipping some clothes on. And while he was thus engaged, Tom Merry awoke Manners, who didn't seem at all pleased at the notion, although he followed his chums' example, and got dressed.

"A lot of rot, I call it!" he growled. "You must have dreamed it, Tommy."

"I tell you I heard footsteps, you ass!"

"Imagination!"

"I heard the boards creaking, you burbling chump!"

"Fancy!"

"Look here," said Tom Merry warmly, "if you don't want to come, you can get back to bed again! I believe there's somebody prowling about the house, although whether it's a burglar or not, I can't say. It might be Cutts of the Fifth, or Levison. Anyhow, if you're funky—"

"Funky!" roared Manners.

"Shut up, you fat-headed josses!" hissed Tom Merry warningly. "Do you want to wake the whole dormitory up with your yelling?"

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"Well, you shouldn't call me a funk!" growled Manners.

"I didn't call you a funk!"

"Well, you implied it," said Manners. "I'll come with you, and do anything you jolly well like!"

Tom Merry chuckled to himself.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes," answered his two chums together.

"Good!"

And the Terrible Three crept silently to the door, and emerged into the passage. For a few moments they stood there listening. But all was quiet. They carried electric torches, and Tom Merry flashed his light up and down the passage, but nothing was revealed.

"Must have been your fancy, after all," said Manners.

"Rats! The chap's gone downstairs or into some other corridor," whispered Tom Merry. "Anyhow, I'm going to have a jolly good look before I go back to bed."

His chums said nothing, but they both thought that Tom had either been dreaming, or that he had imagined the sounds. But it was impossible to leave him to make the search himself.

They passed down the Fourth Form corridor; but here, again, all was quiet.

"We'll just see if they're all in bed," murmured Tom Merry.

And he opened the door of the Fourth Form dormitory and flashed his light along the rows of beds. Then he switched it out again and gently closed the door.

"They're all there," he whispered.

"Levison as well?"

"Yes."

"Then that proves you were mistook, my boy," said Lowther. "Even if Cutts was out of bed, he wouldn't pass the Shell dormitory to get out."

"That doesn't prove that I heard nothing," replied the Shell captain. "It merely proves that it couldn't have been Cutts."

"Look here, Tommy, think it out properly," said Manners.

"Are you absolutely sure you heard something?"

"Absolutely positive!" said Tom Merry earnestly. "I didn't dream it, or fancy it. Somebody crept past the Shell dormitory; and he was obviously doing his best to make his footsteps silent."

Manners and Lowther shivered a little, for the passage was cold, and it was not exactly a pleasant undertaking to be searching through the silent School House for an unknown, unseen prowler.

"Well, it's jolly queer; that's all I say!" remarked Manners.

"It's awfully queer," agreed Tom Merry. "Let's go downstairs and see if there's any sign of anybody there."

The Terrible Three crept forward silently, and were very soon descending the stairs like shadows. It was a creepy business altogether, for the darkness was thick everywhere, and the windows dimly showed the night sky without.

Suddenly Tom Merry paused and caught his breath in. His chums came to a stop at the same moment, for they, too, had seen something.

In the hall below the dim outline of a window could be seen, and something black and shapeless had suddenly passed before it.

The three juniors stood rooted to the stairs.

"Great Scott!" breathed Manners cautiously.

"What was it?" asked Lowther through his teeth.

"I don't know," replied Tom Merry steadily; "but we'll soon see. Flash your lights on—now!"

Instantly the three shafts of electric light shot down into the hall.

Then the Terrible Three uttered a simultaneous gasp.

The hall was absolutely empty!

In the reflected light of the lamps the faces of the three Shell fellows were pale and drawn. They felt startled.

"Good heavens!" muttered Monty Lowther, aghast.

"There's nothing there—there's nothing there!"

What could it mean?

The night was dark, and the same thought entered Manners's and Lowther's mind at the same moment. It was nothing human at all!

The old legends of the School House were numerous, and nervous people believed that spirits roamed abroad at night. Manners and Lowther felt a creepy sensation ascend their backs and cause their hair to stiffen—at least, that is how it felt.

But Tom Merry uttered a short exclamation of satisfaction. "Come on!" he said quickly. "We've got him, whoever he is!"

"What do you mean?" panted Manners. "There's nobody there!"

"Didn't you see? Didn't—"

"See what?"

"The door of the common-room close to," said Tom Merry,

in a low voice. "The chap must have heard us on the stairs, and before we could switch on our lights he dodged into the common-room. But he wasn't slippy enough. I just saw the door close."

"Oh!" murmured Manners.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Lowther. "We—we'll go down and rout him out and see who he is. I reckon the three of us will be equal to the job."

"Rather!"

They descended the remaining stairs and crossed to the common-room door with quick strides. They knew that the intruder could not have made his escape, for the windows of the common-room were high up, and there had not been sufficient time for any man, no matter how active, to climb up and open the window.

Tom Merry opened the door. The three lights gleamed into the room.

For a second the Terrible Three caught a glimpse of a strange figure. It was a man dressed in black, and completely covering his head was a black bag like a miniature sack. Through two little holes his eyes gleamed brightly in the brilliant lights.

It was a strange, startling sight.

Then, almost before the juniors had recovered their breath after the first surprise, the weird stranger rushed forward.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry loudly.

"Collar the rotter!" gasped Manners.

But the stranger did not mean to be collared. He rushed at the blocked doorway like a charging bull. The Terrible Three stood their ground manfully, but the attack was too fierce for them.

A fist caught Monty Lowther in the chest, and he staggered back and rolled over with a roar. At the same time Tom Merry flung himself at the intruder.

The man gave a snarl, and Tom Merry was pushed out of the way as though he had been a feather.

"Great Scott!" gasped Manners.

The strange figure passed him before he could do anything, and the next second the man was darting up the stairs.

"After him!" roared Lowther.

The juniors were thoroughly excited now, and fully intended to capture the man if possible. They raced up the stairs, yelling loudly and causing a considerable commotion.

"There he goes!" panted Manners.

They could just see the fugitive rushing along the corridor. They were not far behind, and they heard, rather than saw, a heavy collision as the man bumped into somebody. Then Darrel's voice made itself heard.

"Hold him, Darrel!" bellowed Tom Merry frantically.

"He's a burglar! Hold him!"

They raced up at top speed, but when they arrived at the spot they found the perfect picking himself up from the floor.

"He's gone down the back stairs!" panted Darrel. "Who on earth is he?"

"A rotten burglar!" shouted Manners. "Come on!"

But Darrel led the way. He descended the stairs four at a time, with the juniors tumbling after him, and in one of the back passages they overtook their quarry, who had been stopped by a locked door. The passage was dimly lighted by two windows, and it was impossible to see more than the indistinct shape of the intruder.

"You'd better give in quietly!" exclaimed Darrel, in a grim voice.

The man did not utter a word, but, with a fierce mutter of fury, he flung himself forward. The next second he was fighting with mad ferocity. The Terrible Three clung to him like limpets, and Darrel had all his work cut out to escape the madly-aimed blows.

But Darrel was in fine condition, and his strength was surprising. Between the four of them they at last succeeded in holding the man at bay.

"Got you, you rotter!" gasped Tom Merry triumphantly.

"Rip that thing off his head, Darrel, and let's have a squint at his chivvy!" panted Monty Lowther.

But before Darrel could raise his hand to perform the operation another form appeared.

Then Mr. Railton's voice sounded in the passage, stern and angry.

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful uproar?" demanded the Housemaster sharply. "Boys, I am amazed! How dare—"

"It's all right, sir!" panted Darrel. "We—"

"Darrel!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "Upon my soul—"

Tom Merry managed to get one arm free, for at the moment the prisoner stood quiet, breathing hoarsely. Tom Merry touched the button of his electric-torch, and the light gleamed along the passage.

It showed Mr. Railton standing there, attired in dressing-gown and slippers, and obviously very much perturbed.

Then a startling thing happened.

As the light flashed upon Mr. Railton the prisoner uttered

a roar of fury which sounded almost demoniacal. He commenced struggling with amazing strength, and Tom Merry was obliged to drop the torch. But, with a wild cry, the man succeeded in getting free. Then he simply flung himself bodily at Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster was taken utterly by surprise. He had been in the act of hastening forward to assist in the struggle, and the man crashed into him with tremendous force.

Like a ninepin Mr. Railton was bowled over on to the passage floor. Then, with a low snarl, horribly brutal in its ferocity, the strange man leapt upon the prostrate master.

"Good heavens!" shouted Darrel. "The man must be mad!"

He and the Terrible Three grasped the intruder by his arms, legs, and head. And they did not particularly care how much force they used. Between the four of them they managed to drag him away, and Mr. Railton scrambled to his feet.

"You've not got me—by thunder, you've not got me!" exclaimed the man, in a harsh voice, muffled by the bag which covered his head.

With an almost superhuman effort he wrenched himself away from the grasp of his captors.

Then, with one bound, he was at the nearest window. Without pausing a second he hurled himself forward.

There was a splintering, shivering crash, followed by a dull thud, and a scuffle of feet on the pathway.

Then all was still.

The man had thrown himself completely through the window, wrecking framework and glass in the mad action.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Kerr Makes Inquiries.

"H E'S gone!"

"Great Scott!"

"He's smashed the window to smithereens!"

Mr. Railton stopped briskly to the window, and looked out into the night. But all was silent—the man had vanished as though he had been a shadow.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Housemaster. "This is a most extraordinary affair. The man seemed to be mad! He could scarcely have got through this jagged glass without doing himself frightful injuries."

Darrel looked at the smashed framework.

"I don't know, sir," he said. "The chap threw himself through the glass with such terrific force that there wasn't time for him to be cut. And, besides, his face was protected by that bag."

"Bag?" repeated Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir. Didn't you see it?"

"No; it was too dark to see anything distinctly."

"Well, the fellow wore a black bag over his head, so that he could not be recognized," said Darrel, rubbing his hands tenderly. "That protected his face from the glass."

"Dear me! It is most extraordinary!" said Mr. Railton.

"Who was the man, and what was he doing here?"

"I don't know, sir. I heard an uproar, and came out of my room just in time to be knocked down by the stranger," answered Darrel. "These juniors were chasing him."

Mr. Railton turned to the Terrible Three.

"Tell me all you know, boys," he said curiously.

"We don't know much more than you do, sir," said Tom Merry. "I heard somebody pass the Shell dormitory, so I woke Manners and Lowther, and we went out to make investigations. After searching for ten minutes or so, we found that chap with the bag over his head. He was in the entrance-hall, and he dodged into the common-room."

"And did you attempt to capture him?"

"Rather, sir! But he's got the strength of a giddy lion! He knocked us flying, and darted upstairs. We followed, yelling out, and Darrel came out just as the chap was about to descend the back stairs. We pounced on him in this passage, and you know the rest, sir."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Yes, yes," he said thoughtfully, staring into the night. "It is utterly useless searching for him, for he must have got clear away by this time. Burglary was his object, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Couldn't be anything else, sir."

Darrel stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"What puzzles me is the way in which the chap flew at you, sir," he said. "The very instant Tom Merry flashed his light upon you, the man tore himself away from us. One might think that he had come to the school especially to harm you."

Mr. Railton laughed grimly.

"Nonsense, Darrel!" he said. "I do not know a soul who owes me a grudge, and certainly not a grudge of this description! Why, the man seemed quite capable of killing me!"

"It's a mystery," said Tom Merry. "Thank goodness we were here to protect you, sir!"

"Yes, it was indeed fortunate, Merry," said Mr. Railton feelingly. "But it was no less fortunate that you chanced to hear him. But for the acuteness of your ears, he might have ransacked the place, and got clear away."

"Well, we only did a little, sir," said Manners. "It's perfectly rotten that the beast escaped! But we weren't prepared for such terrific strength. My hat, he was like ten Sandows rolled into one!"

Mr. Railton patted his watch-pocket—or, rather, the place where his watch was usually kept, for he was attired in his dressing-gown.

"It's very late," he said, "and you boys ought to be in bed. Run up, and get between the sheets without loss of time. You are quite all right, I suppose—no injuries?"

"No, sir."

"Only a bruise or two, sir."

"That's all right, then! Off you go!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The Terrible Three hurried up the stairs to the Shell dormitory, talking excitedly about the night's amazing happening. They found several juniors awake, roused by the noise of the chase.

But Tom Merry and his chums only gave a very brief account of the affair. Full details would have to wait until the morning.

And when the morning came the excitement was considerable. The Terrible Three found themselves besieged with questioners as they were dressing.

Then, when they descended to the quad to have a breath of air before breakfast, crowds of New House fellows asked for details, for news of the affair had already crossed the quad.

The Terrible Three had already told full details to all the members of the Shell, so now there were plenty of fellows willing to relate the story afresh to eager listeners. And there were plenty of listeners, seniors included.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were standing at the bottom of the School House steps, discussing the all-important subject, when Wally D'Arcy of the Third rushed up, his face red with excitement.

There were a crowd of juniors gathered round the Terrible Three and Wally bumped into them forcibly.

"Look-out, you young bounder!" yelled Rook of the Fourth. "What the dickens do you mean by clumping on my foot?"

"Sorry!" gasped Wally.

"Wallay, I am surprised at you!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy frigidly, gazing at his minor through his monocle. "Have you gone off your wookah—?"

"Oh, don't you start, Gussy!" interrupted Wally breathlessly. "I say, you chaps, haven't you seen it yet?"

"Bai Jove, you young wottah—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" said Blake.

"I uttably wufuse to shut up!"

"Then go somewhere and talk to yourself!"

"I decline to go—"

"Haven't you seen it?" yelled Wally.

"Seen what?"

"The notice on the gatepost!" exclaimed the scamp of the Third excitedly. "There's a new one up this morning—the third!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus forgot his indignation, and stared at Wally suspiciously. All the others had stopped their talk, too.

"There was one up last night!" chuckled Blake. "That was the third."

"Oh, that was a mouldy jape!" sniffed Wally. "The one up there now is genuine, like the other two. And it's written by the chap who broke into the School House."

"My hat!"

"How do you know?"

"Look heah, Wallay, if this is a wotten joke—"

"It's not, you fathead!" shouted Wally. "If you don't believe me, go and see for yourselves!"

Everybody had been so excited that they had not thought of looking for a fresh notice on the gatepost. The adventure of the night had driven the other matter completely from their heads, for the time being.

There was a general rush for the gates, and there, stuck up in the same place, as usual, was the third notice from the mysterious "G. M." Everybody saw at once that it was genuine, and that it was not another "forged" notice like Blake's.

"What does it say?"

"Let's have a squint!"

"Don't shove—stand clear!"

"Bai Jove, who's that stamping on my beastly foot?"

The juniors crowded round the gatepost in an excited

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mass. Figgins & Co, were to the forefront, and Figgins' lanky form rose above all the rest.

"My hat, this looks melodramatic!" he exclaimed. "Just listen: I have failed once, but I shall not fail again.—G. M." That means he's going to make another giddy attempt to tick the silver plate."

"The chap must be up the pole!" declared Manners.

"Completely off his rocker!" agreed Bates of the Fourth.

"Fancy giving us warning of what he's going to do!"

"It's queer—jolly queer," said Kerr thoughtfully.

The crowd dispersed from the gateway and gathered in little groups, discussing the strange happenings. It was now fairly conclusive that the man who had broken in was the writer of the notices; but that only made the affair more mysterious still.

During breakfast P.-c. Crump strode majestically into the gates, having come in answer to a telephone call from the Head.

Dr. Holmes gave the constable all the information he could concerning the mysterious visitant, and showed him the three notices, Tom Merry having handed over the third to Mr. Railton. P.-c. Crump assured the Head that he would keep a very strict watch upon the school during the next few nights, and gave it as his opinion that the scoundrel was as good as caught. For P.-c. Crump had a very excellent notion of his own detective skill, which was perhaps as well, for nobody else had.

During morning lessons the juniors were a little inattentive in the class-rooms, for they were busily making conjectures with regard to the curious circumstances surrounding the previous night's visitor to the School House. Lines were distributed liberally by the various Form-masters, but they seemed to have no effect.

After lessons the same subject was continued by juniors and seniors alike. Figgins & Co. were talking to the Terrible Three, all House rivalry being forgotten for the time.

Kerr did not say much, but his face wore a very thoughtful expression. When there was a lull in the conversation, he tapped Tom Merry in the ribs.

"Just a few questions," he remarked.

"Fire away," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Are you starting the Sexton Blake bizney, Kerr?"

"Well, I want to make sure of my facts before I decide on any plan of action," answered Kerr. "Now, it's pretty sure that the author of those notices is the fellow who you nearly collared last night?"

"Pretty sure, he blowed!" said Monty Lowther. "It's absolutely certain!"

"Very well, then, it's certain," said Kerr. "Now, doesn't it strike you that he broke into the School House for some reason other than burglary?"

"But there isn't any other reason," said Manners.

"Well, I think there is," went on Kerr quietly. "The first notice said that 'G. M.' had arrived, and that someone in the school would understand. The second notice was to the effect that 'G. M.' had been waiting ten years, and that the time was near."

"The time for what was near?" asked Manners.

"I can't say exactly, but it seems to me that the chap broke into the School House for the purpose of doing somebody bodily harm. In fact, everything points to it being a case of revenge. 'G. M.' is at St. Jim's for the purpose of—murder!"

"Murder!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors stared at Kerr aghast.

"I say, old man, that's a bit thick, you know," protested Figgins.

"Awfully thick," said Tom Merry.

"Whether it's thick or not, I believe it's the truth," went on Kerr. "Of course, I may be wrong—I jolly well hope I am—but it looks awfully suspicious. Anyhow, I mean to make it my business to investigate the affair."

"Good old Sexton Blake!"

"I'll bet you'll be a detective when you grow up, Kerr," said Figgins.

Kerr smiled.

"That's a long way off," he replied.

"I thought you wanted to ask some giddy questions?" said Monty Lowther.

"So I do. It's about the chap who nearly collared last night. Was he strong?"

"Strong!" repeated Lowther, with a sniff. "My dear chap, he was as weak as a rat. It only took four of us to hold him, and then he broke away. I expect half a dozen chaps could manage him between them. Oh, no, he wasn't strong!"

And Monty Lowther rubbed his muscles tenderly.

"That means to say he was as strong as an ox," remarked Kerr. "Was he a big chap?"

"Yes, a bit bulky."

"Tall?"

"Fairly tall, about six foot."

"He was a nigger, you know," remarked Monty Lowther.

"I have never seen anybody with such a black face."

"Oh, dry up, Monty!" said Kerr. "I'm serious. What were his eyes like?"

"Horrible!" said Lowther.

"That's the truth, anyhow," said Manners. "They were wild with fury, and seemed to gleam like living coals."

"Points of diabolical light would sound better," remarked Monty Lowther reflectively. "More effective, you know."

His eyes glistened and scintillated with diabolical illumination, as though reflecting vivid lightning from the very heavens themselves! How's that for literary power?"

The juniors chuckled.

"Makes me feel bad to listen to it," said Tom Merry. "I wish you wouldn't joke on these serious matters, Monty. Any more questions, Kerr?"

Kerr shook his head.

"No more," he replied.

"Of course, you've got the whole solution to the mystery now?" asked Lowther in matter of fact tones. "It's no good being a detective unless you can detect."

Figgins looked at Monty Lowther, and then tapped his own head.

"It runs in the family," he remarked gravely. "Water on the brain, I expect."

Monty Lowther stared.

"Well, I've always known you were a bit dotty," he remarked; "but I never thought you'd own up to it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins turned red.

"You silly ass!" he exclaimed. "I mean you!"

"How could you mean me when you tapped your own napper?"

The Terrible Three chuckled, and Figgins & Co. departed, their lank chief a little discomfited at the recoiling of his little joke upon his own head.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Mr. Railton's Peril.

KERR was very thoughtful after dinner. It was a half-holiday, and the New House juniors were playing a practice match that afternoon.

But Kerr was not included in the team. He had told Figgins that he wished to think over the mystery he had decided to solve. And with this object in view he sallied out, and walked down the lane towards Rylcombe.

The day was beautifully fine, and the sun shone quite brightly. Kerr crossed the little stile, and wandered along the footpath through the woods. Here all was quiet.

"One thing seems practically certain," Kerr told himself.

"The surprising thing is that nobody else seems to have connected the two incidents. Yet I wouldn't mind betting a quid that that chap we found in the quad the other night was the mysterious 'G. M.' Everything points to it!"

Kerr walked on slowly, and finally seated himself on a dry log of wood against some thick bushes, where the sun shone full upon him, thus keeping him comfortably warm.

"Everything points to it," he repeated to himself. "The description of the man in the black head-covering tallies exactly with the man in the quad. His eyes were unusually wild-looking. He was tall and bulky, and he possessed terrific strength. It's certain, too, that he's responsible for the dramatic notices on the gatepost. Therefore, the man in the quad, the man who broke into the School House, and the writer of the notices, are one and the same person!"

Kerr's reasoning was sound, and there was little doubt that he was correct in his surmises. But he was still a little uncertain regarding the reason for the man's strange proceedings.

Why had he written the notices? Did he imagine that somebody in the school understood them, and would, accordingly, be alarmed at their purport?

Why had he broken into St. Jim's? Could it be robbery? Kerr shook his head.

"No, it's not robbery," he told himself firmly. "It's my belief the man is off his chump, and that he's deadly dangerous. He was in the School House last night for the express purpose of doing someone bodily harm. But who could it be?"

Kerr could not solve that part of the problem, and he sat there looking before him with thoughtful, half-closed eyes.

Then suddenly he started, and his eyes opened wide.

A figure was approaching through the wood, and Kerr, after one careless glance, saw, with a start of recognition, that the man approaching him was the very man who filled his thoughts!

It was the man who had been in the quad—it was "G. M.!" "Great Scott!" muttered Kerr breathlessly.

He looked again to make sure. Yes, there could be no mistake. The man was big, and shabbily dressed in an old frock-coat. He turned his face towards the junior, and Kerr had no further doubt. For a moment he thought that he had been seen; but the man turned his face away again, and went on with his task.

He was collecting sticks, and already he had a big armful. Kerr quietly slipped through the bushes, and dropped into a ditch on the other side. Fortunately, it contained no water, and Kerr lay perfectly still, watching through the weeds.

"Good!" he murmured. "I haven't been spotted!"

The stranger wandered about for another few minutes, adding to his load. Then, having evidently collected sufficient for his needs, he set off briskly down the path, and headed straight for the meadows.

"My hat!" exclaimed Kerr, staring after him. "He's making for the ruins!"

There could be little doubt upon that point. Across the meadows, and at the top of a grassy hill, stood the ruins of the old castle. The juniors of St. Jim's had had many an adventure among the old vaults and passages, and they knew the ruins almost by heart.

Kerr left his place of concealment after the man had disappeared behind a little coppice. Kerr ran across the intervening space quickly, and found concealment again before he was exposed to view—which was extremely lucky, for the stranger turned and looked round several times. But he was evidently satisfied that he was unobserved. The castle stood quite by itself, and the surrounding meadows were, as a rule, absolutely deserted. Kerr himself had only been present by a pure stroke of luck.

When the man had gone another two hundred yards, Kerr managed to follow without betraying his presence. And so, in a very short time, the castle was reached.

Kerr did not approach the ruins, but crouched behind a tree, watching. And he saw his quarry disappear among the great, ivy-covered masses of masonry.

"Gone down into the vaults," thought Kerr.

But, although he had tracked this man to the castle, he had nothing whatever to prove that he was the man who had broken into St. Jim's. It was impossible to prove conclusively who the man had been.

But Kerr was positive that his deduction was right, and the only way to get proof would be to catch the man in the very act. Then the black bag could be removed, and the stranger's identity proved.

Kerr did not wait long. It was soon evident that the man was not coming up from his hiding-place again, so the junior slipped away, and returned thoughtfully to St. Jim's.

He had not obtained sufficient evidence yet, by a long way, for there was nothing criminal in staying in the old ruins, but the afternoon had been well spent.

Kerr did not say anything to his chums when he met them. After prep, when all was quiet, would be the best time to have a chat.

The other juniors were growing rather tired of the subject which was uppermost in everybody's mind. Discussion had almost given out, for the subject was exhausted. It was impossible to guess the truth, and many juniors were anxious for something else to happen.

The Head, too, was feeling concerned. Try as he would, he could not find an explanation for the mysterious notices and the visit of the man with the black head-covering.

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton had a long talk about the matter, and assured themselves that nothing further could be done. P.-c. Crump would remain in the vicinity of the school during the night, and his very presence there would probably keep the stranger from breaking in again.

On the previous night he had made his entrance at a little window at the back, which a servant had carelessly left open. The Head meant to make sure that all was secure before he went to sleep to-night.

Mr. Railton took a walk down to the village during the evening. He started just before supper-time, and walked sharply, for the night was cool. Dark clouds drifted across the sky, and the lane was very gloomy.

But the Housemaster had no thought of danger as he walked along. What danger could there be?

He reached the village, and completed his business. Then he started back for St. Jim's. He did not notice the figure of a big man detach itself from the hedge as he left the lighted village street.

Yet Mr. Railton was followed. The man crept after the Housemaster with stealthy footsteps, and the darkness made him quite invisible. The woods bordered the road on either hand.

Mr. Railton stepped out briskly. Suddenly he paused to tie a bootlace up, and from behind he thought he heard the sound of a footfall.

He glanced round, and stared into the darkness.

"Fancy, I suppose," he thought.

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But he felt strangely uneasy as he continued his way up the gloomy lane. He decided to test the thing, and again stopped abruptly.

But not a sound was to be heard. "I'm nervous," he murmured, with a half-laugh. "Upon my word, this will never do! Yet I am almost sure I heard something!"

He walked on again, and once more paused. This time a footstep sounded quite distinctly, followed by the rolling of a loose stone.

The Housemaster set his teeth. "I was not mistaken," he muttered. "Somebody is following me. A tramp, I expect—or perhaps the explanation is more simple. Perhaps one of the juniors—"

Before he could think further a quick sound of running steps sounded, and Mr. Railton saw a dim figure before him, looming up large against the background of trees.

"Who is that?" asked the Housemaster sharply. A low, brutal laugh sounded in the darkness.

"Who is it, I say?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, clenching his fists.

The form came nearer. "It is the man who has sworn to have revenge!" hissed a voice that quivered with triumphant fury. "It is Gerald Munro!"

"Gerald Munro!" Mr. Railton repeated the name in a tone of puzzled surprise. Dimly, in the back of his mind, he remembered having heard the name before. He gazed at the dim figure before him with a frown.

"Look here, my man," he said sharply, "I do not want any nonsense! If you do not go about your business—"

"Ah! My business!" exclaimed the stranger, in a curious tone. "That is just it, you hound! My business! I mean to set about it at once—before you can escape me again. Last night you had assistance, but now you are alone and at my mercy!"

Mr. Railton caught his breath in quickly. The man before him was the fellow who had entered the School House the previous night. And he had displayed the most astonishing strength. Rylcombe Lane was deserted. Mr. Railton was, indeed, at the stranger's mercy.

But the Housemaster clenched his fists tighter and made himself rigid. He was in a dangerous position, and he knew it.

"I do not understand you," he said quietly. "What is the reason for all this melodramatic rubbish? Do you wish to rob me?"

The other laughed harshly. "No," he exclaimed, "I don't want money! Money! Do you think I would touch your money? Bah! If you had a thousand pounds on you I wouldn't take it. It's you I want—you, you treacherous dog!"

And the man thrust a hand forward and laid it on Mr. Railton's shoulder. The fingers closed tightly, and the grip was painful. The Housemaster shook himself angrily.

"Release me, you scoundrel!" he said, jerking himself away. "If you touch me again—"

But the stranger interrupted Mr. Railton's sentence with a snarl of fury. At the same moment he jumped forward and lunged out with his right fist.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Railton.

He dodged and just managed to evade the blow, which, if delivered, would have laid him flat. Next second the pair were grappling desperately, and they swayed from side to side of the gloomy road.

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Mr. Railton felt at once that he was no match for his assailant. The man was possessed of the strength of a lion. His grip was terrible, and the Housemaster knew that he would be beaten.

For several moments no word was spoken, and only the gasping of the two struggling men could be heard. Then Mr. Railton managed to get an arm free, and he sent home a terrific blow into the other's face.

The blow sounded with a dull thud, and Gerald Munro—for that was evidently the stranger's name—uttered a roar of pain.

"Hang you!" he snarled. "I'll finish you for that!" He wrenched himself away, stepped back, then lunged at Mr. Railton with all his tremendous strength.

Thud! His fist struck the Housemaster's forehead with awful violence.

Mr. Railton uttered a gasping cry and staggered back. Then he collapsed into a heap in the roadway and lay still.

He was knocked senseless! His assailant stood over him, panting hard and muttering rapidly to himself. Then a chuckle escaped his lips—a low triumphant chuckle, horrible to listen to.

"I have got him!" he murmured exultantly. "He is in my power!"

Then, as he stood over the insensible master, the sound of heavy footsteps made themselves heard, approaching rapidly.

"Who's there?" shouted a gruff voice. "Wot's that there row?"

It was the voice of P.-c. Crump. Munro stood still, and his teeth snapped together. He crouched low down, as though waiting to spring. From his pocket he took a short, thick piece of wood, which he had been unable to get at in the struggle with Mr. Railton.

The constable's footsteps were now quite close. "Could ha' sworn I 'eard something," muttered Crump. "Sounded like a fight, or— My heye! Who's that a-standin' there?"

He had suddenly caught sight of Munro, crouching down. And before Crump could come nearer the stranger acted. Like a panther he sprang forward, his piece of wood upraised.

"Good heavens!" P.-c. Crump pumped aside, but he was a fraction of a second too late. The weapon descended and crashed on to his skull. The constable gave one cry and fell into the roadway.

With a horrible chuckle, Gerald Munro stepped over to Mr. Railton. He lifted the Housemaster as though he had been a child, and slung him on his back.

Then he walked to the hedge with his load, pushed a way through, and disappeared into the dim recesses of the wood.

CHAPTER 9.  
A Vain Search.

D R. HOLMES glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece of his study and then took out his watch. Both timepieces bore evidence that the hour was just eleven-thirty.

"Dear me, this is most unusual!" murmured the Head. "I have never known Mr. Railton stay out so late before. I confess I am beginning to feel a little uneasy."

The door opened, and Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, came in.

The Head looked at him inquiringly.

But Mr. Linton shook his head.

"He has not come in, sir," he said gravely. "Really, I am at a loss to account for his long absence."

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"It is most alarming," said Dr. Holmes. "I hope nothing has happened, Mr. Linton."

"I do not see how anything could have happened, sir," said Mr. Linton. "Mr. Railton is not a man who usually stays out late."

The Head nodded. "Quite so, Mr. Linton!" he said. "I do not see how he could have been detained in the village, as I understand he went down to make a purchase."

"He told me that he would be back in half an hour, sir," said the Form-master. "But that was hours ago. What can have caused him to stay? The shops close soon after nine. Do you think it possible that he has gone on to the Grammar School?"

Dr. Holmes shook his head doubtfully.

"It is possible, of course," he replied, "but I think it is extremely improbable. I arranged with Mr. Railton to look into some papers immediately after supper, and it is not like him to overlook such matters. No, Mr. Linton, I fear that it is something serious."

Mr. Linton looked startled.

"Surely you do not think that an accident has occurred?" he said.

"Really, I do not know what to think."

The Head paced up and down for a few moments, then glanced at the clock again.

"Twenty-five minutes to twelve!" he exclaimed. "Dear me, it is most extraordinary! We—we must do something, Mr. Linton."

"But what can we do, sir?" protested the master of the Shell. "It is useless telephoning to Rylcombe, for everybody will be asleep."

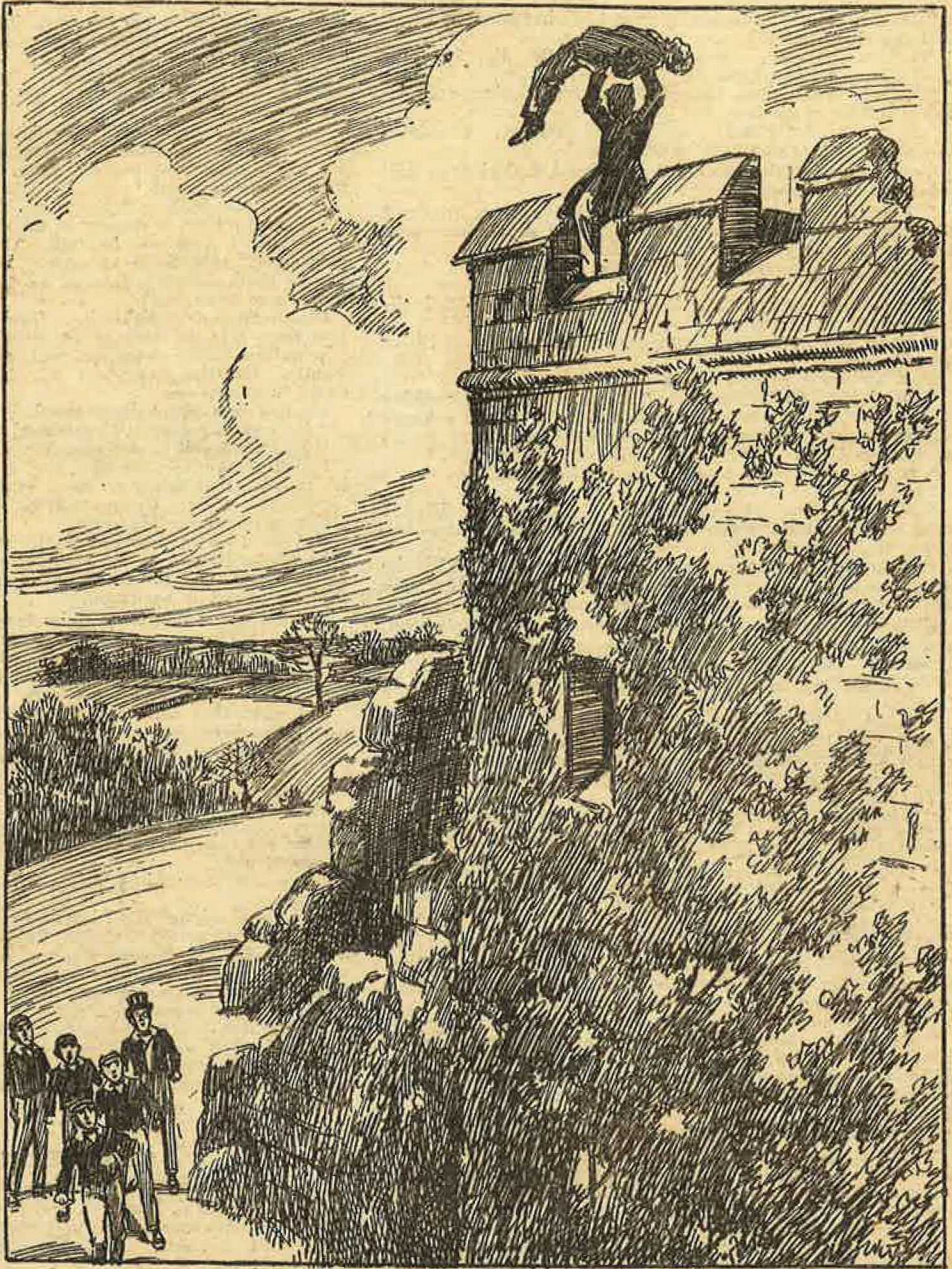
"Exactly! But we have legs," said the Head, "and we must use them. Please get your overcoat on, Mr. Linton, and meet me in the quadrangle in a few minutes' time. I intend to walk down the lane to Rylcombe. Perhaps we shall hear something to allay our anxiety."

"Very good, sir!" And Mr. Linton left the study. A few minutes later he met the Head in the quad, and they walked to the gates.

St. Jim's was black and silent; scarcely a light showed in any of the windows. The New House inmates were all in bed, including Mr. Ratchiff. The Head had thought of awakening Mr. Ratchiff, but realised that the circumstances hardly warranted such a step. For in all probability, he thought, Mr. Railton would turn up shortly with a perfectly ordinary explanation of his long absence.

The Head unlocked the gates with his own key, for Taggles had long since been in bed. Then the pair walked sharply down the lane towards Rylcombe.

But suddenly he paused.



Herries pointed upwards at the old ivy-covered tower. Standing on the parapet was Gerald Munro, the black bag still covering his head. And in his arms, above his head, was the helpless form of Mr. Railton. (See Chapter 12.)

"Wait!" he murmured. "I think I hear footsteps!"

Yes, there was certainly the sound of footsteps, and they were getting nearer. But they were uneven, and every now and again the feet of the walker slithered along the road, as though their owner was staggering drunkenly.

"Upon my soul!" murmured the Head, aghast.

"Can—can it be Mr. Railton?" asked Mr. Linton, in an awed voice.

"Who else would be coming to the school?" asked the Head. "But it is very curious. Does it not strike you that his footsteps sound—er—sound a little unsteady?"

Before Mr. Linton could answer the footsteps came to a stop.

"Oh, my 'ead!" exclaimed a voice quite audibly, and in a tone of dull agony. "Strike a light, I copped it that time! Fair an' square, and no bloomin' mistake!"

The Head started.

"Crump!" he exclaimed. "Surely that is Crump's voice!"

"It is, indeed, sir!" said Mr. Linton.

"Bless my soul! Something must have happened to him," said the Head quickly.

They walked forward, and then saw the dim figure of P.-c. Crump before them.

"Allo! Who's that?" asked Crump suspiciously. "Mind, I'm a hoffer of the law—"

"It is all right, Crump; it is I—Dr. Holmes!" exclaimed the Head. "Are you hurt in any way?"

Crump gazed at the two masters in relief, and gingerly laid a hand upon his head.

"Urt, sir?" he repeated. "Urt? Why, it's a wonder I ain't dead! If it hadn't bin for my helmet I should have been knocked out for good, an' no mistake!"

"Good gracious, Crump, you cannot be serious!"

"I am, sir!"

And Crump staggered a little. Dr. Holmes sniffed the atmosphere suspiciously.

"Have you—have you been—er—drinking, Crump?" he asked.

P.-c. Crump uttered a groan.

"Drinkin'!" he repeated. "I wish it wasn't nothing worse! No, sir, it ain't nothin' like that. I've had a knock on the 'ead, and somehow I can't see straight, an' my head's as dizzy as dizzy! 'Ave you any idea of the time, sir?"

"It is nearly twelve o'clock," said Mr. Linton.

Crump gasped.

"Nearly twelve!" he ejaculated. "My heye! Then I must have bin lyin' beside the road for over two hours—two hours, sir, insensible!"

Crump took his lantern from his belt, and lit it. Then he handed it to Dr. Holmes, and asked him to examine his head. The Head did so, and uttered an exclamation of horror.

A dark and ugly bruise marred the crown of Crump's head, and the skin was broken, though very little blood had appeared. The constable's helmet was battered in.

"But for my helmet I should have bin killed," said Crump.

"But how in the name of misfortune did you get this blow?" asked the Head. "Mr. Linton and I are out in search of Mr. Railton. He went out at about nine, and has not yet returned. Have you seen anything of him, Crump?"

The constable gave a start.

"Why, perhaps the chap who knocked me down—"

Then Crump paused breathlessly.

"Well, Crump, go on!" said the Head.

"Yes, sir. You see, it was this 'ere way," explained Crump. "I was walking along the lane when I 'eard voices, an' they was raised, so to speak. I thought it was a row, an' 'urried along to investigate."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, I got to the spot, an' in the gloom I seed a form standing in the road, kinder crouching like. An' close beside him was another form, stretched in the road!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Dr. Holmes. "Mr. Railton!"

"Mebbe, sir, though I ain't sure," said Crump. "Before I could step forward, the crouchin' feller simply chucked himself at me, an' give me a terrific whack on the 'ead! I went down like a ninepin, an' didn't come to myself until a few minutes ago."

The Head and Mr. Linton exchanged startled glances.

"This is terrible!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes. "There is little doubt that Mr. Railton has been brutally attacked and robbed. The scoundrel was at his villainous work when you appeared upon the scene, Crump."

The policeman nodded.

"That's about the size of it, sir," he replied. "But, my heye, the feller must have had some strength to bash my helmet in like this 'ere!"

"How far are we from the spot?"

"Why, only two minutes' walk, sir!"

"When you came to yourself did you look round?" asked the Head anxiously. "I mean, did you see any sign of Mr. Railton?"

"No, sir; I was that dazed at first that I hardly knew wot I was a-doin'. I just walked up the road, 'olding my head, an' wonderin' if it was whole!"

Dr. Holmes' face was pale.

"Then we shall, in all probability, find Mr. Railton's unconscious form at the spot where the attack occurred," he said quickly. "Good heavens, Mr. Linton, this is a most distressing business. I fear that Mr. Railton is—badly injured!"

"There can be no other explanation, sir," said Mr. Linton, feeling as though a cold hand was clutching his heart. "Some desperate tramp, probably, set upon him, and—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Head. "Pray lead us to the spot, Crump. Every moment is of value!"

Crump pulled himself together, and pulled a little flask from an inner pocket, which he had just remembered. It contained something stronger than milk, and a couple of sips

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made Crump feel much steadier. Then, gingerly placing his helmet on his head, he led the way down the lane.

"This 'ere the spot," he said, stopping suddenly, and flashing his lantern to and fro. "Just 'ere. Why, look—you can see the marks in the road, where the struggle took place!"

"Yes, yes; quite so!" ejaculated Dr. Holmes fretfully. "But where is Mr. Railton's insensible body? Dear me! I am really in a most nervous state. I fear that something terrible has occurred!"

P.-c. Crump looked at the Head blankly.

"You don't think that—that murder—"  
"Murder! Good heavens, Crump, do not be so ridiculous!" said the Head sharply, but with a pale face. "I merely think that Mr. Railton has been injured, and is lying somewhere close by."

Crump flashed his light about from side to side of the road. But there was no trace of the missing Housemaster. The trio walked slowly down the road, and the light flashed constantly. But the result was nil. No trace of Mr. Railton could be discovered.

He had completely disappeared.

"It is extraordinary!" exclaimed the Head, at last.

"Unaccountable!" declared Mr. Linton huskily.

"Well, he ain't in the lane, sir," said Crump. "'O course, it's possible that he's gone down to the village."

"To the village, Crump? What on earth for?"

Crump pointed to his head.

"Well, if he was knocked on the 'ead, like me," he replied, "he might have come to an hou' ago. He might ha' bin bleedin' bad, and thought it as well to hurry down to the doctor's to get it bandaged."

"Upon my soul, that is quite true!" exclaimed the Head eagerly. "That is certainly a plausible suggestion, Crump. We will hurry to Rylcombe, and make inquiries—and, at the same time, have your head attended to."

And they set off at a brisk walk.

But when they arrived at Dr. Short's, that worthy gentleman, after being roused from bed, assured the Head that he had seen nothing of Mr. Railton.

"Then I fear that something awful has occurred," said the Head of St. Jim's, in a hoarse voice.

Dr. Short was briefly told the facts, and he looked extremely grave. He bandaged Crump's head, and said that the bruise was an extremely nasty one, and that Crump had better get to bed at once.

The constable certainly looked bad, and he took the doctor's advice.

And the Head and Mr. Linton returned to St. Jim's.

There they learned that Mr. Railton was still missing.

That night Dr. Holmes did not get a wink of sleep. He was too worried, too anxious. The disappearance of the Housemaster was simply appalling if Crump's story was correct—which it obviously was.

Mr. Railton had been knocked senseless by some desperate scoundrel. But what had become of him?

What did it mean? What could be the explanation?

The Head shrank from putting his suspicions into definite thoughts.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Consternation at St. Jim's.

TOM MERRY, Manners, and Monty Lowther had a race the next morning with Bernard Glyn, Kangaroo, and Clifton Dane. The Terrible Three won by about half a minute.

They were first dressed and out in the quad.

As it happened, they were the first juniors out of either House, and they rushed across the quad to the gates.

For they were pretty certain that another notice would be attached to the gatepost in the usual place. But they were wrong—the pillar was bare.

There was no notice this morning.

"Well, this is what I call too much of a good thing!" grumbled Monty Lowther. "We scrambled out of our nice little cots especially to be the first to read the fresh blood-curdler, and there isn't anything here!"

"Well, there's a reason for it, I suppose?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Yesterday morning's notice said that he's failed once, but he wouldn't fail again."

"My hat!" ejaculated Manners excitedly. "I wonder if that means that the chap has been successful in clearing off with the school valuables? If he has done so, he wouldn't trouble to shove up the information."

The Terrible Three stared at one another.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "We should have heard something of it if it was so. Crump would have been up—"

"Great Scott!" interrupted Monty Lowther.

"What's the matter?"

"Why, Crump's coming up the road!"

Tom Merry and Manners stared down the road towards Eyclombe. P.-c. Crump was approaching, without a doubt.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"What are you blessed for?" asked Kangaroo, who had just come up with Glyn and Dane. "Where's the giddy notice?"

"There isn't one this morning."

"Isn't one? Well, what a rotten sell!"

"Don't you understand?" said Manners excitedly. "G. M.'s been successful, so he hasn't put up another paper. He's broken in, and ransacked the school!"

"My only Aunt Matilda!" gasped Bernard Glyn.

"I say, draw it mild, Manners!" protested Tom Merry. "That's only a suspicion, yet you're telling it to Glyn as though it was fact."

"It must be a fact, you ass!" retorted Manners. "Why, Crump's coming up the road now—coming in answer to a 'phone call, I expect."

The juniors looked at Crump's approaching form with interest.

"I thought Crump was going to guard the school?" said Kangaroo.

"A fat lot of guarding he did, I'll bet!" sniffed Manners. "The burglar diddled him as easy as winking, I expect. I say, Crump, hurry up!"

The constable stopped at the gates, and looked at the juniors eagerly. He had managed to knock his helmet into shape, but his face was pale.

"Hallo! You look a bit off colour, Crumpy!" said Tom Merry.

"An' I feel it, Master Merry," said Crump. "But—"

"Half a minute, Crumpy!" said Manners. "Have you come up here in response to a telephone call?"

"No, I ain't had no telephone call," said Crump.

"That's enough, Manners. You're squashed," chuckled Lowther.

Manners glared.

"I want you to tell me something, young gentlemen," said the constable quickly. "I want to ask a question."

"Fire away!"

"Let it rip!"

"Well, is Mr. Railton in the school?" asked Crump eagerly.

The juniors looked surprised.

"Is Mr. Railton here?" repeated Monty Lowther. "Of course he is! Where do you think he'd be? In Timbuctoo?"

P.-c. Crump's eyes opened wider.

"Mr. Railton's 'ere!" he exclaimed. "That's good 'earing, an' no mistake! I thought perhaps 'e hadn't come back."

"Come back?" repeated Tom Merry in a puzzled tone. "What's up with you, Crumpy? Come back from where?"

Crump's elation suddenly fizzled out.

"Have you seen 'im this morning?" he asked.

"No, of course not; but he'll be down soon."

"Oh! Then he's still missing?"

"Missing! Who's missing?"

"Mr. Railton," said P.-c. Crump.

"Mr. Railton!" shouted Tom Merry. "Rot!"

"It ain't rot, Master Merry. I wish to goodness it was, for I 'ate to think of Mr. Railton lyin' somewhere, injured an' helpless."

The juniors stared in amazement.

But Crump, in a few words, told them what had occurred the previous evening. Tom Merry & Co. listened with consternation in their faces. Mr. Railton missing! It was a terrible revelation.

Crump went on his way to the Head's house, and the juniors gathered in an excited group, talking over this latest and most startling piece of information.

The news got about like wildfire, and in a very short time the whole school was discussing the subject. Figgins & Co. were especially excited at the news, and Kerr said little.

At first everybody was rather inclined to scout the idea, to look upon it as a yarn. But the grim truth of it was made apparent when Darrel was approaching. Darrel had learned the facts from the Head, and he knew that it was no idle invention.

It was reality—appalling reality.

Mr. Railton had vanished. He had last been seen at the feet of a desperate scoundrel who had murderously attacked P.-c. Crump.

The juniors—of the School House especially—talked over the news with serious, anxious faces. Not a laugh or a chuckle was heard that morning at breakfast. Every face was grave. Even the noisy fags of the Third and Second were awed into a frightened silence, for Mr. Railton was the most popular master at St. Jim's.

In the New House the consternation was almost as great. Figgins & Co. whispered together at the breakfast-table, Fatty Wynn even forgetting to eat his breakfast.

"Of course, this explains everything," murmured Kerr. "The chap who attacked Crump—and who's obviously done something with Railton—is 'G. M.' Those notices were addressed to Railton."

"Of course!" said Figgins. "What asses we were not to tumble to it! It was 'G. M.' who broke into the School House the night before last. He went for Mr. Railton, you know, and was only dragged off by sheer force. Then he actually wrote a notice, saying that he had failed, and we didn't guess!"

Kerr was silent. He was telling himself that he had been very blameworthy for not going to the Head and telling of the man who he had followed to the ruined castle, for Kerr was positive that the man had been "G. M.," and that he was the author of all the mischief.

Yet Kerr was not to be blamed for saying nothing. The mere fact that the man had gone to the castle was no proof of guilt. Even if he was produced now, nobody would recognise him, and therefore he could not be arrested.

For nobody had seen the man who had broken into the School House. His features had been completely hidden. And P.-c. Crump had not seen the man who had attacked him. The darkness had been too thick.

So, although Kerr was certain of the facts in his own mind, he had nothing to substantiate his suspicions yet. Before many hours were gone he meant to have the proofs. He was eager to commence the search. He was eager to get to work, for he felt sure that he would be able to solve the mystery of Mr. Railton's disappearance.

But there were lessons to do. The thought caused Kerr to worry a lot, and to wish all lessons in Jericho.

After prayers in Big Hall, Dr. Holmes made a speech, telling the school of the unfortunate state of affairs. He said that the police would do their best to trace the missing master, who, he felt sure, had been the victim of foul play.

The fellows were silent as they filed out. When they collected in the quad, however, their tongues were let loose, and all manner of conjectures were voiced. Some of the juniors even went so far as to suggest that Mr. Railton had been murdered.

But Tom Merry sharply told these croakers to hold their tongues. There was no sense in making the worst of things. Yet the sunny captain of the Shell looked unusually grave.

"What's the good of leaving the thing to Crump?" he said to a little crowd of juniors, which included Figgins & Co. "Crump's hurt, for one thing, and, anyhow, I don't think much of him as a detective. He'll never do much to get at the truth."

"That's what I say," said Kerr thoughtfully. "It's a jolly serious matter, and we ought to make up search-parties."

"My hat! That's a good wheeze!"

"Yes. But how about lessons?"

"Oh, blow lessons!" growled Kerr.

"That's all very well," said Jack Blake. "We can't go off without saying a word. That would be playing truant, and we should have the very dickens to pay afterwards."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Besides, playin' truant is vewy w'ong. Pewwaps the pwesent situation wawwants a deputation to the Head."

"What the dickens for, ass?"

"I decline to be called an ass!"

"Well, donkey, then!"

"I uttably wufuse to be chwawctowised—"

"What's the deputation for?" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Yes; get it off your chest, Gussy!"

"The deputation to the Head would be for the purpose of askin' him to gwant a holiday," said Arthur Augustus, looking round through his "window." "You see, deah boys, the situation wawwants exceptional measuahs. I w'opose we go to the Head and ask him if we can make up search-parties to go and look for poor Mr. Wailton. The ideah is that, instead of mornin' lessons—"

"We spend the morning in searching the countryside?" asked Blake.

"Yaas; that's it, deah boy!"

The juniors looked eager.

"Sounds all right, Gussy. In fact, I consider it the Head's duty to grant the request," said Tom Merry; "but I'm afraid he won't see the matter in the right light."

"That's what I think," said Kerr. "Still, I'm game to go and ask."

"Rats!" said Blake. "It'll be no good. You seem to forget that the Head's nearly off his rocker with worry. If you go, you'll simply get fired out of the study with a hundred lines to do!"

But Arthur Augustus shook his head.

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"I am wathah inclined to think that he would listen to us," he said. "And it is vewy diswespectful to wufer to the Head as bein' off his wookah! He is wovvied, no doubt, but if we put it to him tactfully he'll considah it."

"Then you'd better not do the job," said Monty Lowther. "If tact is required, you're the very chap to stand down."

D'Arcy gazed at Lowther frigidly. "Weally, Lowthah, I must be allowed to remark that you show a wegwettable lack of taste," he said. "Jokin' at a time like this is weally wotten!"

"Quite so, Gussy; but I wasn't joking," said Lowther blandly.

"Weally, you boundah—" "Oh, dry up!" said Kerr impatiently. "Who's going?" "I'm weady, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

"An' me!" said Hammond of the Fourth. "'Arf a minute, though! P'raps I'd better not. The 'Ead might not like me goin' into his study with you chaps!"

"Wats!" said D'Arcy sharply. "Doozt be an ass, Hammond, deah boy!"

"Who else?" asked Kerr. "Oh, I'll go, if you like!" said Tom Merry. "All the same, I don't believe it'll be any good. The Head won't listen, as Blake says. It's perfectly rotten about Mr. Railton, of course; but the Head'll think that the police are the best chaps to do the searching—which is absolutely wrong, of course!"

Manners and Lowther stated their willingness to make up the number to six, and other offers were declined. A deputation of six would be quite large enough. As Blake said, it wouldn't do to overrun the Head's study, like so many rabbits.

Bernard Glyn glanced at his watch. "You'd better hurry if you're going," he said. "It's nearly time for lessons now."

"Huwwy up, deah boys!" "We're ready, Gussy!"

And the deputation, feeling rather nervous, made their way to the Head's study, Tom Merry having been declared the spokesman.

## CHAPTER 11. Kerr on the Track.

**T**AP!  
Tom Merry knocked rather hesitatingly on the Head's door.

"Come in!" called Dr. Holmes. The six juniors filed in—Tom Merry, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Kerr, Hammond, Manners, and Lowther. The Head had been pacing his study, and Mr. Linton stood by the window. Both headmaster and Form-master looked haggard and pale.

"Well, boys, what do you want?" asked Dr. Holmes, looking at them rather sharply. "I think you know that I am intensely worried, and that any ordinary matter must wait."

"Yes, sir; but—but we thought—that is—I mean to say, all the juniors think—"

And Tom Merry paused nervously. "Really, Merry, I am surprised—I am surprised at all of you, for coming to me at such a trying time as this!" said the Head severely. "Please leave the study at once!"

"Weally, sir, we have a suggestion to make," said Arthur Augustus quickly. "Tom Mewwy is fwrightfully nervous, so I will lay the mattah before you."

"Shut up, Gussy!" hissed Monty Lowther. "I wufuse to shut up, Lowthah!" said D'Arcy stiffly.

Lowther turned a beautiful red. "I must insist—" began Dr. Holmes.

"Pway be patient, sir!" interrupted Arthur Augustus eagerly. "We are heah for a weally important purpose—we wopresent the whole juniah school, sir. We are all fwrightfully upset about poor Mr. Wailton's disappearance, and we think that he has met with foul play from that howwid wottah who signs himself 'G. M.'! And we considah it our dutay to come to you to offah our services."

The Head looked at D'Arcy keenly. "To offer your services, D'Arcy?" he repeated. "I am afraid I do not understand."

"It's this way, sir," said Tom Merry, before Arthur Augustus could reply. "Nobody knows where Mr. Railton is—he might be lying, bound and gagged, in a ditch not half a mile away! Well, we think that, instead of doing lessons this morning, we ought to be allowed to make up search-parties, and go about the countryside, looking for Mr. Railton."

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes. "Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"We all want to find Mr. Railton," went on Tom Merry

eagerly. "In fact, we sha'n't be able to work until we know something definite. As you know, sir, the whole school is upset, and lessons will be a farce. We're too anxious to think of lessons!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We want your permiah to form search-parties, sir. It is pwactically impos for us to sit in class, for our minds will nevah settle down to work!"

"We want to look for Mr. Railton, sir." "And I'm pretty sure that we shall succeed in finding him, sir!" said Kerr quickly. "We sha'n't take advantage of the concession at all—we're too concerned to think of games!"

"Yaas, wathah!" "Sye the word, sir, an' we'll be off!" said Hammond.

The Head frowned a little as he gazed out of the window. Then he crossed over to Mr. Linton, and spoke in a low voice for a few moments. Mr. Linton nodded once or twice.

"Well, boys, I have thought over what you suggest, and I am very pleased to find you so anxious to do all within your power!" exclaimed the Head kindly. "It shows a splendid spirit. But—"

And Dr. Holmes paused, the juniors hanging on his words.

"But if I grant your request," he went on, "I shall expect you to behave honourably—I shall expect you to take up the search seriously. There must be no practical joking of any kind, there must be no shirking. Every boy must spend his time in searching for Mr. Railton. I think, at a time like this, I can trust you?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" "Rather, sir!"

"Bai Jove, of course, sir!"

"Then I will instruct Darrel to let the school know of my decision," said the Head. "As you say, work is practically impossible while we are in this state of uncertainty. Until Mr. Railton's fate is known we are all gravely anxious. And there is the added possibility that Mr. Railton is, as Merry suggests, helpless in some deserted spot quite near by. So the more searchers there are, the greater the probability that Mr. Railton will soon be amongst us again."

There was a little crowd of juniors awaiting the deputation, which filed out of the Head's study a minute later.

"Well?" asked Blake eagerly. "What's the verdict?" said Figgins.

"It's all wight, deah boys," replied D'Arcy. "The Head has given us permiah to form parties. We are to set off at once, and do our vewy best to find Mr. Wailton."

"Good!" "My hat, the Head's a brick!" "Rather!"

The juniors were pleased at the prospect of helping in the search for the missing Housemaster, but there was no demonstration. The news was taken quietly.

In fact, nearly everybody spoke in subdued voices, as though they were afraid to speak loudly. To laugh and joke was out of the question, with Mr. Railton's fate hanging in the balance, as it were.

In a very short time the prefects knew of the Head's decision, and search-parties were rapidly formed and sent off. There was no settled system. Several fellows simply got together, and set off into the country at random.

Tom Merry & Co. were together—The Terrible Three—and the chums of No. 6, and Figgins & Co. joined them. At such a time House rivalry was at a standstill. It was a case of all pulling together.

"Well, where shall we go?" said Blake, as the party walked sharply out of the gates. "There's no telling where Mr. Railton is. It's simply a matter of chance whether we go to the left or to the right."

"There's no chance about it," said Kerr grimly. "There's only one place to go to!"

"Bai Jove, where's that, deah boy?"

"Why, to the spot where the struggle took place," replied Kerr. "Possibly we shall find a clue. Of course, we don't know for certain that Mr. Railton's assailant was 'G. M.', but it's pretty safe to assume it."

"It must have been him," said Tom Merry.

"Well, I mean to make certain, if I possibly can," said Kerr. "If I find a clue we may be able to get on the track at once."

Kerr had spoken to Crump a little earlier, and had been told the exact spot where the struggle had taken place. The little party of juniors arrived there, and gazed searchingly at the road.

"This is the spot," said Kerr keenly. "Stand aside there, you chaps—don't stamp about more than you can help!"

The Scottish junior looked about him with sharp eyes.

But the road was hard, and there was scarcely a trace of anything beyond the ordinary footprints of pedestrians, and the wheel-tracks of vehicles.

"I say, this is a bit theatrical, you know," said Manners. "It's all rot, Kerr! How the dickens can you find anything here? The plain facts are that Mr. Railton was attacked, that Crump came up at the precise moment, and got a whack on the napper, and that Mr. Railton has been missing ever since!"

And Manners bent down absently and picked a little object up from the road.

"We'd better be going on," he said impatiently.

"Yaas, wathah."

Kerr stepped forward quickly, and grasped Manners's hand as he was in the act of tossing the little object over the hedge. Manners looked at Kerr curiously.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Did you pick this up just now?" asked Kerr, gazing at a black button.

"Yes."

"Where was it; the exact spot?"

"Just at my feet," said Manners. "I wish you wouldn't be such an ass, Kerr! What's the good of this tomfoolery?"

Kerr didn't answer; he was too busy examining the button.

"He's a jolly deep chap," said Figgins. "You wait, my sons!"

And they did not have to wait long.

Kerr suddenly uttered a murmur of satisfaction. His eyes gleamed, and he held the button so that all could see.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "And Manners nearly chucked it away!"

"Well, it's only a silly old button," said Manners.

Kerr smiled grimly.

"It's a clue," he said.

"A clue!"

"Yes; and a jolly important clue, too!" said Kerr.

"Without this I should have had to guess things—now I know for certain. I know who the man was who attacked Mr. Railton, and I'm pretty sure I know where to search for him!"

The juniors stared.

"Weally, Kerr, that's a twisfe thick," protested Arthur Augustus, drawing his noble form erect. "I uttably fail to see—"

"Whether you fail to see it or not Gussy, it's true," said Kerr. "Of course, I'm not absolutely sure, but this button practically proves the man's identity."

"But how?" asked Tom Merry.

"How on earth can it?" demanded Blake.

"Because it's the particular type of button which is always used for frock-coats," replied Kerr. "It's cloth-covered, but the stuff has a kind of chess-board appearance in miniature on its face."

"Yes; but that doesn't prove anything," said Manners.

"Yes, it does; because the man was wearing a frock-coat."

"How do you know?"

"He must have been, or this button would not be here," said Kerr.

"But how can you be certain that Mr. Railton's assailant was wearing a frock-coat?" asked Tom Merry.

"Because I saw him yesterday in it!" said Kerr calmly.

"You saw him!"

"Yes."

"Great Scott!"

"It's a fact," went on Kerr. "I saw 'G. M.' wearing a frock-coat yesterday afternoon. He was in the wood, picking up sticks, but he didn't see me."

"Yaas, deah boy, but how do you know it was 'G. M.'?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Kerr rapidly told his chums of his suspicions. He had intended telling Figgins and Fatty Wynn the previous evening, but an opportunity had not occurred.

"The man I saw," he concluded, "was big, heavy, and tall. He was the man we found in the quad that night. I've suspected all along that he was the chap who wrote the notices, and now I'm certain. He was wearing a frock-coat, and he went to the ruined castle. What further proof do we want? Here, on the very spot of the struggle, we find a frock-coat button! It shows quite plainly that I'm on the right track."

"And he went to the ruined castle?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Yes," said Kerr. "He's evidently been there all along now, just look at the facts. Mr. Railton has disappeared, and his assailant is known to be living in the vaults of the castle. There's only one thing to conclude!"

"That Mr. Railton has been taken there!" gasped Blake.

"Exactly!" said Kerr quietly.

## CHAPTER 12.

Found—But not Rescued!

TOM MERRY & CO. gazed at Kerr excitedly.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"Gweat Scott!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You've hit it, Kerr!" exclaimed Figgins. "What a deep chap you are! Fancy getting at the truth like that! Well, what are we going to do now?"

"We're going to the castle to investigate," said Kerr. "And if I'm not mistaken, we shall find Mr. Railton there, a prisoner."

"But why—why should he be a prisoner?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I can't tell you that," said Kerr. "But it's my opinion this 'G. M.' chap is a bit off his rocker. The only thing I fear is that he's done some real damage to Mr. Railton; and that's why I want to get to the castle without losing a minute."

And Kerr walked sharply down the road. Without hesitating, the others followed him, realising that the Scottish junior was on the right track, and that there was a distinct probability of finding the lost Housemaster.

They walked through the woods quickly, and passed two or three parties who were searching there. But the allied "Co.'s" did not waste time—they made straight for the ruined castle.

As it happened, no other party was searching in that direction, and Tom Merry & Co. found, when they arrived at the old ruins, that they were alone. Far away parties of boys could be seen, but in the immediate vicinity of the castle there was nobody but themselves.

The sun was shining, and the old ivy-covered ruins looked very picturesque. But the juniors were not there to admire the scenery; they were too excited with the matter in hand to think of anything else.

Once in the ruins, Kerr called a halt, for Kerr was, to-day at least, the leader of the party.

"Now, if the chap's here at all, it's pretty certain he's down in the vaults," said the Scots junior. "We can't all go down, because we should make too much noise. So I suggest that Figgy and Fatty and I go."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"Piffle!" exclaimed Blake.

"I quite agwee, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I waise an objection to Figgins & Co. doing this bizniz on their own. For one thing, they are hardly capable of undah-takin' such a delicate mission. For another, it is only wight that the School House should be wepwesented."

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Figgins warmly. "We're—"

"You're out of it, my son," interrupted Manners.

"No, I'm not," said Figgins; "and if you want a thick ear, Manners, you've only got to say the word."

"Look here—"

Kerr uttered an impatient exclamation.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Figgy," he said sharply.

Figgins turned red.

"Well, I like that!" he said, glaring.

"At a time like this, you start making a row," went on Kerr. "I suggested you and Fatty because you came to my mind first. Perhaps, after all, I had better go into the vaults alone."

"Rather not!" said Tom Merry quickly. "Why, you might get bashed on the head. I suggest that Blake and I go with you; then the three studies will be represented."

"Good idea," said Blake heartily.

And the other juniors agreed without further comment. Figgins was rather abashed at Kerr's sharp tone, and he realised that it was, indeed, no time for argument.

Kerr, Tom Merry, and Blake silently made their entrance down a flight of broken stone steps. Down below, in the old vaults, all was pitchy black. The three juniors stood listening for a moment; but no sound reached their ears save that of their own breathing.

"I say, we can't go on in the dark," murmured Blake. "We might fall into a giddy hole. Or perhaps the man himself is lying in wait for us in the dark."

"It's all right," whispered Kerr. "I've got an electric torch here, which I borrowed in case of emergencies."

"Good man!" breathed Tom Merry.

Kerr flashed his light on. Although the torch was a fairly weak one, the light seemed almost brilliant in the old passage. In any case, it was quite sufficient to illuminate the juniors' way.

They crept on like shadows. They were all alert and ready for any emergency. It was quite possible, of course, that they would find the vaults deserted. But, on the other hand,

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there was a distinct chance that their search would be successful.

They paused again, and listened intently.

Not a sound.

"Looks to me as if——"

"Shut up, you ass!" hissed Kerr, giving Blake a nudge.

Blake subsided, though it went against the grain to be ordered about by a New House junior.

The trio crept on, their faces grave and set. They knew quite well that they might run into terrible danger at any moment. But they did not hesitate. They had come here to search for Mr. Railton, and search they would.

It was eerie and chilly down in those underground passages, and the vaults loomed vague and gloomy on all sides. Each one was entered, but no trace of the missing Housemaster was discovered.

Then, just as the juniors were beginning to feel disheartened, Kerr suddenly switched the light out and stood perfectly still.

"Listen!" he muttered. "Listen!"

The others held their breaths and listened.

And, quite distinct in the heavy, damp air of the vaults, a low sound made itself apparent. It sounded extremely weird, and Tom Merry and Blake felt their hearts beat faster. To their ears the sound was like a curious, hissing moan.

"My hat, what is it?" muttered Blake.

"Blessed if I know," said Tom Merry.

"Haven't you got ears, you asses?" asked Kerr, under his breath. "That row's made by somebody snoring."

"Snoring!"

"My only topper!"

Tom Merry and Blake felt greatly relieved. And now, having been told, they recognised the sound. Could it be possible that the snore was coming from Mr. Railton?

"By jingo, we're on the track, right enough!" whispered Blake excitedly. "Come on. Let's go ahead and make investigations."

Kerr switched his light on again, and the three juniors moved slowly forward. They were standing in one of the vaults, and the sounds were emanating from an inner vault on the far side. The old door stood ajar, and the trio padded up to it with bated breath.

Kerr gave the door a gentle push, and it swung open with surprising ease. The light from the torch gleamed into the vault.

And there, stretched full length on his side, lay the big man in the frock-coat. He was lying on a heap of old straw, and over his head was the black bag. Obviously, he was wearing it because the vault was cold, and it afforded his head some warmth. Close beside him was a box, on which two half-burnt candles were stuck.

And, propped up-against the wall, sat Mr. Railton. The Housemaster looked pale and haggard; but he was awake, and looked at the juniors with eagerness and relief.

"Thank goodness we've found you, sir," whispered Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"Not a sound!" he breathed. "This scoundrel is possessed of amazing strength. He is, I fear, insane, and would not hesitate to kill me if he thought he was being thwarted. He has been threatening to kill me ever since I have been in his power, but for some mad reason, known only to himself, he has delayed the fatal hour. How many of you are there?"

"Three, sir," whispered Blake.

Mr. Railton cast a fearful glance at the sleeping man.

"Then go—go at once!" he ordered sharply. "You would stand no chance whatever in a fight. You would, indeed, suffer broken limbs, if not worse!"

"But we can't go, sir," protested Kerr.

"Rather not, sir," said Tom Merry. "We're not going to leave you at the mercy of this rotter!"

"But, boys, I insist——"

"Sorry, sir; it's impossible," said Tom Merry quietly.

And the three juniors crept forward to where Mr. Railton lay. Tom Merry had his knife out, and, with a quick jerk, he cut through the rope which bound Mr. Railton's wrist. Then he bent down to perform the same operation upon the other ropes.

But at that second Gerald Munro gave a deep breath and turned over. Then he sat up with surprising abruptness, and glared across the vault with wild, staring eyes.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

A terrible roar of fury broke from the man in the black head covering. With one bound he was on his feet.

"Run, boys, run!" gasped Mr. Railton.

And Tom Merry, Blake, and Kerr ran!

The scuttled out of the vault like rabbits, and Kerr switched off his light. Only just in time, for Munro, who

had at that moment grasped Blake's shoulder, stumbled on a loose stone.

With a gasp, Blake wrenched himself away from that terrible grip, and rushed after his chums. In a moment he had caught them up, and they heard the man blundering after them.

But in the darkness he could not catch them up. And at last, panting hard, the three juniors reached the steps, where daylight streamed down from above.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "I thought the brute was going to get us then!"

"I say, I feel an awful funk for running away!" gasped Blake.

"Rot!" exclaimed Kerr sharply. "It would have been madness to stay! The fellow's dotty, and he would have knocked us all senseless in two ticks. Look at the way he bowled old Crump over!"

Tom Merry and Blake nodded. As Kerr had said, they had not acted cowardly in escaping, for it would have been sheer madness to stop in that vault. Mr. Railton would have been no better off, and they themselves would most certainly have been badly injured. The juniors had, indeed, shown great presence of mind in escaping before it was too late.

At the top of the steps their chums met them.

The trio were looking flushed and excited.

"Well?" demanded Figgins quickly.

"What's the result, deah boys?" asked D'Arcy.

"He's there!" panted Tom Merry.

There was a shout:

"Who's there?"

"The chap who collared Mr. Railton!" replied Kerr calmly. "He's there, and we only just escaped in time."

"But Mr. Railton, deah boy—what of him?"

"He's there, too; bound up and helpless, but unhurt."

"Huwah!" yelled D'Arcy excitedly, forgetting himself to such an extent that he jerked off his shiny topper and sent it spinning into the air. "Bai Jove, that's wippin'! I feel twemendously welieved, deah boys!"

The other juniors showed their delight in various ways, but Kerr held up his hand, then rapidly explained what had occurred.

"Mr. Railton's in a position of great danger," he finished up. "We've simply got to rescue him. It'll be a risky bizney, but there's no help for it. If we go in force we can hold the chap, and I suppose you fellows are willing to lend a hand?"

"Of course!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll lend all the hands we've got!"

"And feet too!" added Monty Lowther grimly.

Kerr looked round quickly.

"It's no good relying upon fists," he said quickly. "We must have something more substantial."

"There are plenty of old sticks lying against the outer wall," said Tom Merry. "There's not a second to lose, so we'd better make haste!"

With one accord Tom Merry & Co. rushed among the old chunks of masonry until they reached the crumbling wall which surrounded the castle. Here they found plenty of sticks—thick, heavy ones—which would prove quite capable of dealing stunning blows.

"All ready?" asked Kerr.

"Yes."

"Pway wait a moment, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wish to find a thickak stick. You see, I shall lead the way, and it will be necessary for me to be pwopably armed. Bai Jove, when I meet the wottah, I shall administah a most feahful cwack upon his nappah!"

"You might receive a terrific crack on your own napper, Gussy," said Tom Merry grimly. "You'd better be in the background, my son."

"Oh, come on!" said Figgins impatiently.

But as the juniors commenced to make their way back, Herries suddenly stopped and pointed upwards at the old ivy-covered tower.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "Look there!"

His chums all stopped dead and gazed upwards. And the sight which met their gaze caused them to catch their breath. Their hearts nearly stopped beating.

For, standing on the parapet of the tower was Gerald Munro, the black bag still covering his head. And in his arms, above his head, was the bound and helpless form of Mr. Railton, held as though he had been a mere feather-weight.

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CHAPTER 13.  
In Deadly Peril.

THE juniors stared upwards with a strangely sick feeling. Their faces were chalky white, and for the moment they were struck dumb with horror.

For Mr. Railton's position was an appalling one. His captor stood upon the narrow parapet of the tower seventy feet above the ground. Directly beneath were the hard stone cobbles, and a fall would have meant instant death!

Tom Merry could see that Mr. Railton held himself perfectly rigid and still, while his face was, like Tom Merry's own, deathly pale. He realised his awful peril, and had sense enough to remain still.

"Good heavens!" breathed Blake, in an awed voice.

"Don't talk!" muttered Kerr. "Wait—wait!"

And for a whole minute the juniors waited. Then, to their intense relief, Munro stepped backwards on to the roof of the tower and lowered Mr. Railton.

A great sigh arose from all the juniors. For the time being, at least, the tension was relaxed.

"The villain! The howwible scoundwel!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "How did he get up there?"

"It doesn't matter how he got there. He is there, and Mr. Railton with him!" said Digby grimly. "He must have rushed up the old stairs at the other end of the vaults."

"What's he doing now?" asked Manners.

It was impossible to say. The madman—for it was quite obvious that Munro was out of his senses—was bending over Mr. Railton, and the juniors could hear him talking and chuckling.

A minute later he again lifted the Housemaster, and swung him roughly over the parapet. For one awful moment the juniors thought that he was going to fling his victim to eternity.

Then they saw that Mr. Railton was held by a rope. The Housemaster dangled helplessly three feet from the summit of the tower, suspended there by a thin rope, which was apparently fastened to an unseen projection. Munro stood looking down at the juniors, and in his hand he held a glittering knife.

The juniors watched with bated breath.

"So you thought that you could rob me of my victim?" shouted the man loudly, looking extremely bizarre in his curious headress. "I am going to kill him! Kill him, you understand? In five minutes' time by my watch I shall cut through the rope and allow the dog to drop to his death!"

"You scoundrel!" shouted Tom Merry hoarsely.

"Let's wush forward 'and ovalpawah the wottah!" shouted D'Arcy.

"If any single one of you moves from his present position I shall cut the rope instantly!" shouted Munro. "Stand still, every one of you!"

The juniors stood rooted to the ground.

"A single movement, and my victim will meet his death without a second's loss of time!" shouted the man. "That has surprised you? For five minutes I will allow you to watch your master dangle between life and death. Then, on the tick of the watch, I shall cut the rope!"

The juniors stood sick and horrified.

"Do not move, boys!" shouted Mr. Railton, his voice perfectly steady.

"But we must do something, sir!" shouted Blake frantically.

"It is impossible, Blake!"

And the juniors realised that the Housemaster was right—at least, all of them except one did. And that one was Kerr. With wonderful presence of mind the Scottish junior had ducked behind the old wall a minute earlier while Munro looked momentarily away.

The ruse was successful. Munro did not notice that Kerr was missing. He watched the other nine juniors closely, ready to use his knife at the first sign of movement.

But Kerr was not within his vision. Kerr was crouching behind the wall unseen. Tom Merry and Blake were aware of the facts, and a wild gleam of hope entered their eyes. But they did not betray their knowledge by looking towards Kerr.

There were four minutes in which to act. It was a terribly short space of time. But Kerr set his teeth, and determined to risk his life, if necessary, in order to save the Housemaster from certain death.

He had already formed a plan. Moving stealthily but swiftly, he glided along the wall, unseen by Munro, and in less than half a minute he was almost at the man's rear, and then to show himself.

Then, stepping silently, he crossed an open space to the wall of the tower. He was within view of all the juniors, and, although their hearts beat rapidly, they pretended not to see

him. If Munro became aware of Kerr's movements, the end would be swift and sudden.

Kerr was crouching against the side wall of the tower, and he edged his way round until he stood immediately beneath Mr. Railton. The tower jutted out at the top, so it was impossible for Munro to see the junior unless he leaned well over the parapet and looked directly downwards. But, having no suspicion of the truth, Munro did not do this.

The old tower was covered with ivy from base to summit. It was old, and the roots were tough, and firmly fixed to the wall. Nevertheless, it was a risky business that Kerr proceeded to undertake.

He grasped hold of the ivy branches, and swung himself upwards. The juniors watched him with bated breath.

Would he succeed?

How could he aid Mr. Railton, even if he did reach him?

It was a terribly trying time. The juniors stood like statues, and Gerald Munro kept his eyes sharply upon them, ready to cut the rope at the least sign of an advance.

"One minute left!" he shouted, with a chuckle of mirth. "In one minute's time this treacherous hound will be flung to his doom!"

Kerr heard the words distinctly, and he climbed now with reckless haste.

"Can I do it?" he muttered to himself. "One minute! My hat, I shall have to be jolly slippy!"

Up he went, foot by foot. The ivy held firm, and, clinging with feet, knees, and hands, the brave junior fought his way upwards. A slip would have meant a terrible fall; but Kerr was not thinking of slips. His sole thoughts were for Mr. Railton.

Still he went upwards, and at last Tom Merry uttered a low sigh of thankfulness.

For Kerr was clinging to the ivy directly alongside Mr. Railton. Munro, from above, had no idea of the junior's close proximity. The wind, rustling in the ivy, had prevented him hearing the noise of Kerr's efforts. The black bag, also, muffled his ears.

Kerr, to his intense delight, found that the rope by which Mr. Railton was hanging was quite separate from the one which bound him. It had been added afterwards, and was simply fastened round Mr. Railton's waist.

In a second Kerr had his knife out, and, clinging to the ivy with one hand only, he leaned over the Housemaster, and cut the ropes which bound his hands and feet.

"Now, sir, you can cling to the ivy!" breathed Kerr huskily. "When that rotter cuts the rope you won't fall!"

Mr. Railton took a firm grip of the sturdy branches.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured fervently. "My boy, I cannot—"

"Don't talk, sir, please!" murmured Kerr.

A little colour had come back into Mr. Railton's cheeks, and even as he took a firmer grip of the ivy a sound of laughter came from above.

"The five minutes is up!" shouted Munro's voice. "Watch! You will see your precious master dashed headlong to the ground!"

"I don't think!" murmured Kerr, beneath his breath.

There was a sharp tug at the rope, and then the cut end of it fell down and landed upon Mr. Railton's shoulders.

A shout of triumph rose in a roar from the juniors below, and they rushed forward. Mr. Railton and his brave rescuer were clinging to the ivy unharmed!

And above them, looking downwards with a demoniacal light in his eyes, was Gerald Munro. A string of furious exclamations left his lips; then he suddenly darted back from the parapet.

"Quick, sir! He's going to throw stones!" gasped Kerr.

The Housemaster nodded, and commenced descending rapidly. The ivy creaked and groaned under the strain, but it held firmly. And suddenly from above something whizzed between Kerr and Mr. Railton. It was a big stone.

The pair were barely fifteen feet from the ground now, and they simply scrambled downwards with tremendous haste.

And suddenly, with a rending tear, the whole mass of ivy gave way at the roots. Kerr and Mr. Railton gave cries of alarm as they were pitched headlong downwards.

Next second they struck the cobbles forcibly, and rolled over. The broken ivy fell upon them in a great pile, and completely hid them from view.

CHAPTER 14.

Mr. Railton Explains.

"GREAT Scott!"

"My hat!"

"They've fallen!"

"The ivy's busted!"

The juniors rushed forward to the spot, forgetting all about Munro in the excitement. Tom Merry had been about to lead a party to the tower, but now he stopped, and hurried to the pile of ivy with the others.

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A leg protruded, and a moment later Kerr crawled out backwards.

"My only aunt!" he gasped.

"Are you hurt?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Only a giddy bruise or two!" said Kerr. "Let's get Mr. Railton out!"

But the Housemaster appeared without any aid. He was not injured, but the fall had shaken him considerably. Both he and Kerr were very lucky to escape so lightly, for had the ivy given way higher up the result would have been serious.

"My boys, I hardly know what to say!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, passing a hand over his brow. "I have been through an awful experience, and I never hoped that I should be saved, for help seemed impossible!"

Manners shouted out with great abruptness.

"Look!" he yelled. "The rotter's escaped!"

The juniors turned, and saw that Manners was right. In the excitement of the moment they had overlooked Gerald Munro. The man had taken his opportunity, and had descended from the tower.

And now he was running across the meadows as fast as his legs would carry him. He had torn the black bag off, and was bareheaded.

"After him!"

"Yaas, wathah! Don't let the wuffian escape!"

"Yes, boys, you must make every effort to capture the man," said Mr. Railton quickly, recovering rapidly. "He is dangerous, and will probably do a lot of harm if left at large!"

"What asses we were to let him escape!" said Tom Merry.

Without waiting another second, the captain of the Shell rushed off, and the other juniors streamed after him, Kerr amongst them, for the Scottish junior meant to be in at the "death."

The Housemaster, too, made an effort to run with his rescuers, but he found it too much for him. In his bruised and weak condition, it was almost impossible to run, so he hurried after the running juniors as fast as possible.

He had been through a terrible experience, and it was a wonder that he remained so collected. Many men would have collapsed through sheer reaction.

Tom Merry led the runners, and he found himself forging well ahead of all the rest. In front of him Gerald Munro ran with great, leaping strides.

But the man was bulky, and he would be unable to keep up the pace for long. Even now he was going perceptibly slower, and he staggered a little. He glanced over his shoulder from time to time, and seemed to realise that, if caught, he would never fight his way to liberty again.

Tom Merry was as fresh as paint. He ran easily, and slowly, but surely, overtook the fleeing man. Close behind him were Manners, Lowther, Blake, and Figgins. In the rear Fatty Wynn puffed along nobly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could run when he liked, and he liked now. All his noble dignity was forgotten; his hat was missing, his tie undone, and his waistcoat gaping open. Behind him sailed his monocle, dangling at the end of its cord.

"Buck up, deah boys!" he panted. "Catch the wottah!"

At last the wood was reached. The escaping man had hoped to elude his pursuers here, but they were too close behind him. One glance in his rear told him that if he stopped the game would be up. He could not hope to dodge so many.

So he went straight on, crashing through the undergrowth with great force.

Then he suddenly uttered a shout of dismay.

Before him were half a dozen more juniors. They were Bernard Glyn, Kangaroo, Lumley-Lumley, and others, searching for Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry caught sight of them through the trees.

"Rescue, St. Jim's!" he roared hoarsely.

The shout was heard, and Bernard Glyn turned.

"Stop him!" yelled Tom Merry. "Collar him!"

"Yaas, wathah! Collah the boundah!"

The little crowd of fellows saw Gerald Munro suddenly dodge to the left, and they understood.

"My hat! Tom Merry and the others are chasing that chap!" exclaimed Lumley-Lumley. "I guess we'd better lend a hand!"

"Rather!"

And the half-dozen juniors rushed to intercept Munro. The man saw that he was beaten, and he glanced swiftly round for a weapon. His gaze rested upon a great log of wood, and he picked it up.

But before he could raise it to strike the juniors were upon him with a terrific rush. Over he went like a ninepin. For a second he lay on the ground, panting hard, then he made a last effort.

But it was useless. Tom Merry & Co. streamed up, and THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 319.

jumped upon their captive. In less than fifteen seconds Munro was simply jammed down under the weight of a dozen fellows—to move was almost impossible.

"Got him!" gasped Kerr triumphantly.

"Yaas, wathah! We've collahed the wightful wuffian!"

"Who is it?" asked Glyn excitedly.

"The chap who nearly killed Mr. Railton!" answered Tom Merry grimly. "We've rescued him!"

"Who—Mr. Railton?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

In a moment the news was general, and the excitement was intense. Kerr looked at Munro's face, and then rose to his feet.

"I say, the chap's absolutely done up!" he said. "Get off him, you fellows!"

The juniors rose, and looked at the man. He lay on his back, gasping heavily. There was no doubt about the matter—he was quite exhausted.

"Where's Crump?" asked Blake.

"Somewhere near by," answered Kangaroo.

"Sure I saw him not a minute ago," said Reilly of the Fourth. "I'll fetch him."

"Good man!" said Blake.

Reilly hurried off, and in three minutes returned with P.-c. Crump. The constable was looking eager, and he pounced heavily upon Munro.

"Got you!" he exclaimed, snapping a pair of handcuffs on the man's wrists. "My heye! I'd like to pay you out for that there whack you give me last night!"

"Hang you!" snarled Munro. "Hang you!"

"You ought to consider yourself lucky that they don't hang you!" said Monty Lowther. "You jolly well deserve to be hanged!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Munro was dragged to his feet, and he stood glaring round him furiously. Every face was grim and stern—the juniors felt no compassion for the man. He seemed perfectly sane now, and the wild light was hardly apparent in his eyes.

But suddenly it appeared there, and a snarl of frustrated fury escaped his lips. Mr. Railton had suddenly appeared through the trees, and he approached.

"We've got the rotter, sir!" said Kerr, with shining eyes.

"Yes, my boy; and I'm very glad!" said the Housemaster quietly, turning to the others. "Boys," he added, "Kerr saved me from a terrible death a short time ago, and I wish to say that a braver boy does not breathe! His action was splendid—it was superb!"

"Oh, I say, sir, draw it mild!" protested Kerr.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I am speaking the truth, Kerr," he said. "I owe you my life, and I shall never be able to repay you for your great service!"

And the Housemaster told Crump and the other juniors what Kerr had done. Kerr found himself blushing confusedly, for he did not relish this publicity. But he would have to put up with a lot more of it before the affair was forgotten.

"But who is the man, sir?" asked Tom Merry. "What's the cause of his terrible ferocity towards you?"

"Yes, sir, please tell us!"

"It is a very simple explanation, my boys," said Mr. Railton quietly. "Those notices on the gatepost ought to have given me the clue, but I did not connect them with this man. His name is Gerald Munro. Ten years ago he committed manslaughter, and I gave evidence against him. It was a particularly brutal case, and I did not hesitate to tell the Court all I knew. But for my evidence he would have been acquitted, but he received a sentence of seven years' penal servitude. In the dock he swore to have revenge upon me, but I never gave the matter a moment's thought—I never suspected that he actually meant what he threatened."

"I did mean it," snarled Munro, "and I will have you yet!"

"Now, none o' that!" growled Crump.

And he marched his prisoner away to the police-station.

Mr. Railton and the crowd of juniors returned to St. Jim's, where there was general rejoicing. The Head declared that the rest of the day was a holiday, and the juniors took full advantage of the exceptional opportunity.

Feeds were held in nearly every study, and Kerr was the hero of the day.

The New House had come out top this time, as everybody was bound to admit; and Tom Merry & Co. were the first to declare themselves in the background.

THE END.

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## INTRODUCTION.

After an exciting election at Grovehouse College, Geoffrey Foster is chosen to fill the vacant position in the college cricket eleven when they play Headingham—one of the most important matches of the year. The fact that Geoffrey is elected earns him the enmity of Jeffcock, who tried means fair and foul to secure the coveted position for his friend and crony, Sidney Weames. Later, Geoffrey makes his way to the nets, where Jeffcock, William Hewitt—captain of the school and Foster's firm friend—and a lad named Adams are practising. As Foster approaches, Adams looks round.

(Now go on with the story.)

### At the Nets—The Challenge.

"Hallo, Foster!" cried Adams. "I am glad you've come. You can have a bowl. Jeffcock's got the devil in him, and you can't get him out."

Jellotson and Hewitt stopped batting, and watched the trio with interest. What would Jeffcock say or do? The big Sixth-Form lad scowled at Foster.

"If you think you can bowl me," he said, "you'd better have a try."

Geoffrey Foster hesitated. He knew how Jeffcock hated him. Why should he come into open opposition with him?

"You'd better get somebody else," he said, half turning away.

"Nonsense!" said Jeffcock irritably. "You've got pluck enough to bowl to me, haven't you; or are you afraid I'll drive a ball at you purposely? I know the Fosters haven't much pluck as a rule!"

Foster motioned Adams aside.

"I'll bowl!" he said.

He waited until Jeffcock was ready, and then, taking three swift strides to the bowling crease, he sent in a swift, curling ball wide to leg, which broke in quickly as the batsman hit at it and spread-eagled the stumps in a second.

Jeffcock uttered a cry of rage.

"That was a good enough ball, I should think," said Haines at the next net, pausing in his bowling in order to make the remark.

"Try again!" said Jeffcock, on his mettle.

Geoffrey Foster sent down a second ball, which Jeffcock, to his astonishment, had some difficulty in stopping; then a third, straight to the bat, which somehow he missed, and once again the stumps were broken.

He beat them into position and replaced the balls.

"Now!" he hissed between his teeth, literally mad with rage, for the other seniors had stopped play to watch the pair.

Geoffrey Foster, cool and imperturbable as before, bowled a slow ball; and this time the batsman hit it. Hard and true he got the willow to it, and nobody saw the ball go. Nobody but the bowler, at least; and he, reaching out his hands, made a grab at something which struck his fingers with a dull, fleshy crack, and the next moment Foster held the ball for all to see.

The batsman was caught and bowled.

"How's that?" he cried.

Before anyone could make a remark, before Geoffrey had time to realise what was about to happen, Jeffcock hurled his bat to the ground, and, striding up to Foster, struck him a violent blow in the face that knocked him clean off his feet.

Dazed, Geoffrey lay extended full length on the ground, whilst above him stood his enemy, his face livid with rage and hatred.

"Foster," cried Jeffcock, his voice shaking with emotion, "your father was a poltroon and a coward, and robbed mine of his legitimate command under his lieutenant-colonel of the 29th during the South African War. My father made amends by winning the Victoria Cross for carrying him out of action. Since then he has befriended him through thick and thin. If you have an ounce of pluck, meet me at the gravel-pit in half an hour's time, and I'll fight you for your place in the school team!"

In a moment a crowd of schoolboys had gathered round.

Jellotson helped the half-dazed Foster to his feet.

"Jeffcock," he cried, "you're an infernal blackguard! You're not fit to associate with gentlemen!"

"How do you feel, young 'un?" asked Haines, who, if the truth must be told, was twelve months Geoffrey's junior.

"I'm all right," said Geoffrey, recovering himself with an effort.

"And you're going to fight him?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Haines. "He carries too much weight for you, Foster; but you've got the grit, and it'll surprise me if you don't give the bully as much as he gives you."

"They're going to fight it out," said Jellotson, turning towards the captain of the school. "What's to be done, Hewitt? As captain you ought to interfere, you know."

"And make matters worse for poor Foster!" said William Hewitt, with a shake of the head. "No, I must let the fight go on. I'll disappear so as to be in order; but see fair play, Jellotson, for me, will you, and don't let Jeffcock's

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NEXT  
WEDNESDAY:

"UNDER HIS THUMB!"

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faction rule the roost. For all that, I can see it looks like a put-up job."

Jellotson nodded.  
 "I think so, too," he said. "Jeffcock thinks he's got a walk-over and will damage Foster so much that he won't be able to play in the big match. I only hope the youngster triumphs, that's all."

"So do I," said the captain of Grovehouse, walking away, his brows contracted into a frown of anger. "I shall be waiting by the fives court. You can send messengers to me, letting me know how the fight goes on."

"All right," said Jellotson cheerily. "I'll see to that! And now, youngster, you give yourself into my hands, will you? Jeffcock, we'll meet you at the gravel-pit in half an hour."

**In the Old Gravel-pit—The Fight—Jellotson Gives Good Advice—Foster Shows His Pluck—The End of the Greatest Fight in the History of Grovehouse.**

The gravel-pit, in which most of the historic fights of Grovehouse during recent years had taken place, was situated on the confines of a wood which abutted on to the school grounds. It was no distance away, and the very place for an affair of honour to be decided without fear of interruption.

Here, at the conclusion of half an hour, most of the boys of the school gathered together, seating themselves round the fringe of the pit and on the shelving sides, where the fallen gravel formed an admirable grand-stand.

Jellotson took it upon himself to second Geoffrey Foster, while Sidney Weames looked after Jeffcock. Bob Haines, with that naturalness that always characterised him, had taken upon himself the task of assisting Jellotson, and Fred Talbot, too frightened to refuse, had promised Jeffcock to help Weames look after him.

It was a very orderly affair. The preliminaries were coolly discussed and carried out. Sponges and bottles filled with cold, clear water from the spring near by were placed in opposite corners of the pit, and everything was ready for the fight.

Jeffcock, who was all eagerness to get at the boy he hated,

and who never doubted his success for a moment, eagerly stripped to the waist, and, tightening his belt, announced that he was ready. He walked into the centre of the pit with cold-blooded brutality, and opened and shut his hands, the palms of which he had anointed with oil, whilst he waited for Geoffrey Foster to come up to the scratch.

Geoffrey was slow. His face was extremely pale, his lips were set grimly together, but quivering, for he had no love for the task in hand. He could fight—ay, fight until his hands dropped, if it were necessary!—but he did not wish to fight Jeffcock! He could not forget that this big, bullying lad was the son of the man who had saved his father's life, and he would have done anything rather than have laid his hands upon him.

Jellotson, patting him on the back, drew his things off for him, removed his own belt and placed it round Geoffrey's body, and then bade him cheer up.

"Is there no way out of it?" whispered Geoffrey.  
 "I'm afraid not, my lad," said Jellotson, eyeing the boy critically and wondering in his own mind whether he was a coward or not.

Geoffrey Foster hesitated.  
 "Jeffcock's waiting," whispered Hob Haines. "You'd better hurry up, Foster, or he'll get too confident."

The boy arose at that, and walked quickly into the centre of the natural ring. The schoolboys looking on, most of whom were trembling with excitement, commenced to whisper amongst themselves, all of them noticing how pale and nervous Geoffrey was.

"He doesn't stand a chance," said Adams, "and Bully Jeffcock will crow more than ever!"

But Geoffrey was speaking.  
 "Jeffcock," he cried, "although you struck me just now, I have no wish to fight you. If you will apologise I shall be glad to shake hands."

"Apologise to you!" said Jeffcock, with a sneer. "It's a likely thing, isn't it? I'll see you langed first!"

"Then," said Geoffrey, his cheeks flushing, "you give me no alternative."

"I don't wish to give you any!" said Jeffcock. "I'm fighting you for your place in the team, and when I've done with you I reckon you'll be too much damaged to play for the school on Friday against Headlingham!"

"Shake hands!" interrupted Jellotson sharply, looking at his watch.

The boys gripped hands limply, then crossed over and swung round.

"Time!" cried Jellotson. And the fight began.

It had become the custom of the school for the last twelve years or more to allow two-minute rounds in their fights, which previously had been conducted under Prize-Ring rules. They found that the two-minute scheme shortened the battles, the combatants becoming exhausted very much sooner; and, besides, the men were never so badly hurt.

Jeffcock was a huge, lumbering youth, whose bones and muscles had not quite fully grown as yet. He towered two inches above his smaller and lighter opponent, and had an advantage in length of reach. It seemed any odds on him when one looked at the pair.

But to Jellotson's trained eye there was something higher class about the trim, muscular, splendidly-developed, if lighter frame, of Foster. Every boy in Grovehouse knew that Foster could box, but most doubted whether he could fight.

Jeffcock, on the other hand, had engaged in three battles since his first appearance at the school, and he had won them all with the greatest ease. He had an enviable reputation as a fighter, and the way in which he started now suggested that he would not be long in settling poor Foster's account.

Fighting with both hands, and shifting his feet cleverly, always on his guard and yet ever ready to strike, he circled round his more youthful antagonist; and presently he struck Geoffrey a fearful blow on the mouth, which drew blood instantly.

Geoffrey made no attempt to hit back, though he winced and the colour came flooding to his cheeks.

"Steady, young 'un!" cried Jellotson. "Stand up to him, but keep your distance. Don't let him think you're afraid of him. He's only fourteen pounds heavier, after all!"

Geoffrey made no reply, and the two circled cautiously round each other. Jeffcock was surprised at the boy's scientific attitude and the clever way in which he shaped. He had hit him badly, it is true, but he could not find another likely-looking opening, and the two minutes began to fly rapidly away.

"Now, then," cried somebody, "don't keep us all night!"  
 That decided Jeffcock. And, with a rush, he sprang at Geoffrey, hitting wildly, his teeth set hard. He landed lightly

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on the side of the head, and, again, a half-arm jab on the chest.

But this time Geoffrey had settled down, and coolly pushing his opponent away as he clinched, he hit hard on the mark and then flush on the point of the jaw. And down went Jeffcock full length on the gravel, whilst Bob Haines danced with delight.

Jellotson began to beat the seconds off with downward sweeps of his right forefinger:

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—"  
 "Look alive, Jeffcock!" screamed Sidney Weames.  
 "You'll be counted out!"

The possibility of defeat nerved Jeffcock to an effort, and he scrambled to his feet just as Jellotson counted ten. He staggered a bit as he put his hands up.

And springing at him with a hard left-handed blow on the head, Geoffrey sent him down again just as Jellotson called time.

Geoffrey had had far the best of the round, and Jellotson, true to his word, sent one of the fags pell-mell to where Hewitt waited at the fives court to tell him how the fight was going.

Haines made a knee for Geoffrey in one corner, while Jellotson sponged his head and face and fanned him with the towel.

Talbot and Weames performed a like service for Jeffcock, and under their united efforts the big lad revived. The momentary paralysis caused by Geoffrey striking the nerve centres of the jaw had passed away by the time the half-minute was up, and Jeffcock stepped into the ring as fresh as at the start, but determined now to give his opponent no mercy.

Then commenced one of the most desperate encounters ever recorded in the annals of the school. The two stood up to one another, and, almost discarding science, they exchanged hit for hit, blow for blow, until the air resounded with the dull thud of fist on flesh.

It was cruel, savage work, and Jellotson called in vain to Geoffrey to get away and rely on out-fighting. Jeffcock was the heavier man; he possessed the longer reach, and he hit a bit the harder.

Before the round was up both lads were swaying with fatigue, and unsightly to look at. They began to clinch, Jeffcock in particular throwing his entire weight upon Geoffrey and trying to bear him down, whilst the chivalrous youngster exhausted himself by heaving his enemy off by sheer strength and hitting him then as best he could.

Their bodies were red raw before the second two minutes was up, and time came to both as a great relief. Jeffcock had had the better of the round, and Geoffrey was dreadfully exhausted.

"Another round must see him out," whispered Weames in Jeffcock's ear, as the big lad leant back with arms extended and eyes closed against the body of young Talbot.

Jeffcock nodded. He was panting for breath, and dared not trust himself to speak.

Off went another fag with a message to Hewitt. Meanwhile, Jellotson had poured the whole of the contents of a bottle of water over Foster's head, and had sent for more. He was towelling for all he was worth and giving his man good advice at the same time.

"Laddie," he said, "you're playing into Jeffcock's hands by fighting like that. You are cleverer than he is. Keep away and hit him where you can. Husband your strength instead of wasting it. You'll beat him yet if you keep cool. You were a mug to stand up to him like that."

"I didn't want the school to think that I was afraid!" gasped Geoffrey.

"The school be hanged!" cried Jellotson. "You've got to think of yourself. Keep steady next round, Foster. Keep away, and paste him when you see signs of him flinching."

Time was now called, and the lads faced each other for the third time. Both had wonderfully recovered, but Jeffcock was the fresher of the two. Grinning confidently, he went weaving in again; but, to his surprise, instead of Geoffrey standing and taking his gruel as before, the lad dodged away, and he received a reminder that he was still alive in the shape of a terrific punch in the small ribs, and another on the side of the head, which sent his teeth together with a vicious snap, and made his brain rock again.

With a howl Jeffcock rushed in; but his man was not there, and as he steadied himself and came round, putting more weight upon his right foot than on his left, Geoffrey dashed in, and hitting him hard upon the mark again, he upset the bigger lad's equilibrium and sent him down to grass once more.

Foster stood over his fallen antagonist, waiting for him to rise, and Jellotson began to count the seconds off again. There was no help for it; Jeffcock had to rise or lose the fight. He scrambled up, and was no sooner on his feet than Geoffrey knocked him off them again; and Weames, shouting

to Talbot to look after his man, sprang out of the gravel-pit and began to run as hard as he could towards the school. William Hewitt, waiting gloomily with hands in pockets by the fives court, saw him coming, and as he came running by seized him by the collar.

"Where are you off to?" he asked.  
 "To tell the Head they're fighting!" cried Weames, struggling desperately to free himself from his captain's clutch.  
 "Let me go, Hewitt!"

"Not me!" said the captain grimly. "They've got to fight it out. It seems to me, Weames, that your man is being beaten."

And he held on to Weames firmly until the third fag came running from the gravel-pit, his face radiant with joy.  
 "How's it going, youngster?" asked the captain of Grove-house.

"Jeffcock's nearly licked," panted the fag. "My stars, didn't Geoffrey Foster go for him! He nearly had him counted out twice in that round, and when he got on his feet the second time, Jeffcock saved himself by clinching. He's not fighting fair now. He was trying to get his breath. Jellotson's warned him. If he doesn't improve he'll be disqualified. Can't say more. I'm going back to see the next round."

And he dashed off again as hard as he could go. William Hewitt seated himself, holding on to Weames all the time like grim death. He didn't want any tales carried to the Head just then.

Meanwhile, in the gravel-pit the combatants had by this time faced each other for the fourth round. Jeffcock, whose recuperative powers seemed wonderful, had shaken off his fatigue. A lad named Hughes had taken Weames' place as his second, and he was well looked after.

He had determined to fight a cautious fight now. Geoffrey, whose form improved with each round, was far too clever to be disposed of by sheer forcing tactics, and something of the slimmness of Brer Fox came to Jeffcock as he faced his man again.

The schoolboys looking on were breathless in their excitement. It was a record fight for Grove-house, and Geoffrey Foster's pluck in standing up against the odds amazed them all.

Seeing that half a minute of the fourth round had passed away without any tangible result being achieved, Jellotson, whose anxious eyes saw that each moment found Jeffcock regaining much of his lost strength, shouted to Geoffrey:

"Don't let him rest!" he cried. "Go in at him, my boy! Bustle him! Take the initiative now!"

Geoffrey understood, and now the school saw what the boy—whom at least fifty per cent. of them had hitherto despised—was made of.


The way in which he rattled Jeffcock was a sight to see. He fought him all over the gravel-pit. There were no ropes, the boundary-lines of the so-called ring were purely imaginary. From one corner to another he fought his man, giving him no rest, until Jeffcock hardly knew what he was doing. His courage forsook him. If he could not have everything his own way he always lost heart. This had been noticed at fives, at rugger, at cricket, and in racing on the flat.

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A panic seized him. Geoffrey's hurricane of blows, though there was no great sting behind them, unmoved him; and presently, blindly stepping backwards, he fell over Talbot, who was in the way. His second helped him up. Geoffrey was immediately at him again. He hit him once, twice, thrice, without a return, and had him limp and staggering.

The boy dropped his hands, expecting Jeffcock to give in. Instead, the bigger lad, taking advantage of the opening, hit him upon the body.

Geoffrey's hands were up instantly, and with a one, two, three, he sent Jeffcock to earth for the last time.

Down the mass of flesh dropped, until Jeffcock, groaning, and unaware of where he might be, writhed and twisted upon the red gravel.

Jellotson, in ecstasy, counted the seconds.

"One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten!"

A wild burst of cheering went echoing onward to the school, carrying with it the glad news of Geoffrey Foster's amazing victory.

Pouncing upon the lad, Haines and some of his chums lifted him shoulder high, and carried him off to the spring near by, so that he might cool his bruised face and body with the cool, bubbling water.

Jellotson, with a smile, replaced his watch in his pocket, and sauntered to where Jeffcock lay, to see how he was getting on. But the big boy was insensible. He had been hammered as rarely Grovehouse boy had been hammered before.

"It strikes me," muttered Jellotson musingly, "that Jeffcock won't be able to play in the big match against Headlingham, which is curious, to say the least of it, seeing that he wished by this fight to put Geoffrey Foster out of the team."

And, disregarding all the boys who crowded round him to congratulate him upon his seconding of Foster, and his refereeing of the fight, he clambered out of the pit, and walked off to give his captain the full details of Foster's gallant victory.

#### The Cricket Match—Jeffcock Stands Down.

The big match with Headlingham College was fixed for the Friday and Saturday of that week in which the famous fight between Foster and Jeffcock took place. The Friday morning broke fine and clear, and the school having a double holiday was early astir, lesson-books being put aside for the nonce, and impositions being scamped, with the ready acquiescence of the various masters, who were strangely lenient on these big match days.

The sun was soon high in the heavens, and not a breath of air stirred to temper the intense heat of the day. It was perfect cricketing weather for young schoolboys whose blood coursed freely through their veins, and there was an early rush to examine the pitch that had been selected for the two-day match on the school cricket ground, and on which groundsman Bates had been expending especial care ever since the cricket season started. It was pronounced to be perfect by the Grovehouse boys, an opinion which was endorsed by the members of the Headlingham College team, who arrived in a brake at ten o'clock.

The game was fixed to start at twelve o'clock, and by that time the seats surrounding the field were packed. Many visitors had arrived, the ladies, mothers, sisters, aunts, and cousins of schoolboys, all looking especially smart in their various coloured dresses, and their pretty sunshades—which every schoolboy voted a nuisance, inasmuch as the ladies would hold them up, and the sunshades would obstruct the view.

But the ladies did not mind, bless 'em! and schoolboy selfishness was soon forgotten in the excitement of the big match.

At ten minutes to twelve, what time the toss was made and won by Hewitt, the Grovehouse captain, who decided to send his side in to bat, Jeffcock limped down to the stand and took his place in some seat near to those in which the Head and his wife and daughter and his sisters sat.

Dr. Morgan—for so the Head of Grovehouse was named—gave Jeffcock a searching glance out of his cold grey eyes. He had been a schoolboy himself, and he knew what those aching, bruised muscles and tired limbs of Jeffcock's were to be credited to. One of Jeffcock's eyes was black, and tinged with purple and red. He had lost a front tooth, and his neck and shoulders were so badly bruised that he could not bear to wear a collar. He was too ill to take part in the match against Headlingham, and, blessing his luck, he moodily gazed at the bright green of the pitch, hoping deep down in his heart that the school might lose.

(This grand serial will be continued in next week's issue of The GEM Library. Order NOW.)

## "THE GEM" LIBRARY FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

V. E. Hull, Elsimore, Albion Street, Waverley, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in the British Empire interested in stamps.

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R. Eyes, 508, Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 15-16.

Miss Doris Farrell, Courier, North Street, Marrickville, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in the British Isles, age 15-16.

E. L. McLean, c/o G.P.O., Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 19-21.

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Miss M. Kilkery, 284, Mount Royal Avenue, East Montreal, Quebec, Canada, would like to correspond with boarding-school girl readers, age 16-19.

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The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

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# Our Weekly Prize Page.

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## THEY DID IT.

The manager had hung up in the office a card bearing this inscription, "Do it Now," evidently with the idea that it would sharpen up the wits of his clerks. The following morning he found that his head cashier had decamped with £5,000, the office-boy had left to become a highwayman, the head clerk had eloped with his typist, and his other three clerks were worrying him for a rise. The wording of the card had apparently touched home.—Sent in by J. W. Cheadle, Kilmarnock.

## NOT IN HIS LINE.

Two seamen were hotly engaged in an argument as to what class of animal a hog belonged to.

A sheep, the younger of the two thought; but the other asserted himself that it was a pig.

Not being able to agree, one of them turned to an old salt who was standing idly by.

"Here, Bill, you've knocked about a bit," he said. "What is a hog? Is it a pig, or is it a sheep?"

Whereupon Bill, after due consideration, replied:

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't 'appen to know much about poultry."—Sent in by A. Tait, Govanhill.

## BLACK JUSTICE!

Jinks: "I've been most unlucky."

Jenks: "How so?"

Jinks: "I saw a piece of bread in the street, poked it with my stick, and was arrested for disturbing the peace" (piece).

Jenks: "What hard luck! My brother was treated just the same. He saw a bad penny lying in the road, and because he walked by it he was arrested for passing bad money."—Sent in by Harry Hayes, Wolverhampton.

## "NUT" QUITE RIGHT.

The teacher was instructing the youngsters in natural history.

"Can any little boy or girl," said she, "tell me what an oyster is?"

The small hand of Jimmy Jones shot into the air.

"I know, Miss Mary—I know. An oyster is a fish built like a nut," he triumphantly announced.—Sent in by Miss L. Jordan, Bournemouth.

## HE KNEW.

Mr. Brown could be heard speaking to his son in a tone of extreme anger on the subject of late hours.

"When I was your age my father would not even allow me out at night," he said to the boy.

"Your father must have been a nice, kind man!" the lad replied.

"I had a jolly sight better father than you have, you young rascal!" the father vociferated.—Sent in by Wm. McQuaker, Glasgow.

## HE GUESSED IT.

During a most important match which was being played in the North, one of the spectators persisted in making loud remarks about the conduct of the referee.

"Look here, my man," said the official angrily, pointing a warning forefinger at his aggressor, "I've been watching you for about fifteen minutes."

"Ah thowt so!" came the scathing reply. "Ah thowt so! Ah knew varry weel the wasn't watching t' game!"—Sent in by C. Clayden, Yorks.

## IN THE PORRIDGE.

Mary and her father had taken a stroll out into the country, and were about to take a rest, when they came across a field of oats.

"What kind of grain do you call them?" said Mary.

"Oats," answered her father.

Presently Mary noticed, much to her astonishment, a dog running in and out of the oats.

"You wicked, doggie," she cried, "come out of the porridge at once!"—Sent in by Miss M. Wood, Glamorgan.

## A GOOD RESTORER.

Pat: "Mike!"

Mike: "What is it, Pat?"

Pat: "Supposin' I was to have a fit, and ye had a bottle of whisky?"

Mike: "Yes."

Pat: "Would ye kneel down and put the bottle to my lips?"

Mike: "I would not."

Pat: "Ye wouldn't?"

Mike: "No; I'd bring ye to yer feet quicker by standing up in front of ye, and drinkin' it myself."—Sent in by Stanley Davies, Carmarthen.

## CORRECT.

In one of the big cities of Canada a circus had been pitched, and a crowd of small boys had mustered outside the entrance of a large tent, trying hard to get a glimpse of its interior. A kind-looking old gentleman, who had been watching the lads for quite a long time, stepped across to the collector.

"Let all these lads in," he said, rattling some money in his pocket, "and count them as they pass."

The official in uniform did as he was bade.

"Twenty-eight!" he shouted, in a rough tone, when the last of the boys entered. "That'll be—"

"Good!" said the old man. "I guessed right!" and made off.—Sent in by R. Wilson, Canada.

## SAME AS USUAL!

Arriving Missionary: "May I ask what course you intend to take with me?"

Cannibal King: "The regular one; you will follow the fish."—Sent in by C. Busfield, Leeds.

## MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

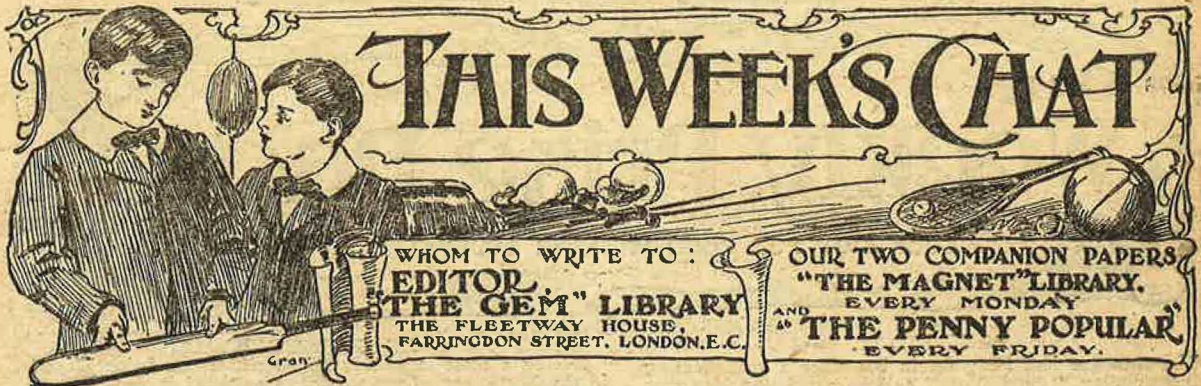
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THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in other wise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

## OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

**"UNDER HIS THUMB!"**  
By Martin Clifford.

This grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. deals with the position of the chums under the new regime at St. Jim's. For the new Captain of the School is Cutts of the Fifth, with whom Tom Merry & Co. are on the worst of terms. Cutts has his knife into the juniors—not without some reason—and he soon begins to show that he intends to make every use of his power.

The chums drop in for a very poor time indeed. Cutts never leaves them alone, yet they cannot catch him tripping. One of Bernard Glyn's wonderful inventions at last provides the key to the problem, however, and Cutts is taught a valuable lesson. The black sheep of the Fifth, however, still remains Captain of St. Jim's, so that Tom Merry & Co. are still more or less

**"UNDER HIS THUMB!"****HOW TO GET ON IN CANADA!**

In next Wednesday's "Gem" Library will start a series of really comprehensive articles dealing with the question of emigration. At this time of the year especially thousands of young fellows are hesitating, uncertain whether they will try their luck in a new country, or keep on with the struggle for a fair living in England. Before making up their minds one way or another they must have really

**Reliable Information**

about the country to which they are thinking of going. Even in these days, when so much has been written about Canada, really disinterested advice is hard to come by. Emigration agents and other interested persons are sometimes prone to exaggeration in order to "rope in" hesitating emigrants. "The Gem" series of special articles will be written by a young man who emigrated in the ordinary way, went "through the mill" like anyone else, and found out things for himself.

He wooed fortune in a new land, not being satisfied with his prospects in England, and his experiences are exactly what the intending emigrant wants to guide him. In addition to being naturally of very great

**General Interest,**

our Special Contributor's articles teem with first-hand information. He describes things as he actually found them, not as he supposed them to be before leaving England.

**HOW TO GET ON IN CANADA**

is the title of this splendid new series of articles, which will interest every "Gemite," whether he or she is contemplating going to Canada or not.

**ITEMS OF INTEREST.**

The Westbourne "Gem" and "Magnet" League has vacancies for a few more members of either sex. The secretary is Master John P. Barnes, of 21, Burlington Mews, Ledbury Road, Westbourne Park, W.

Master K. Raney, 416, Laurier Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, wishes to form an Exchange Circle, to be called "The Gem" Wide-World Correspondence League." He would be glad to hear from "Gem" readers all over the world, with a view to joining.

Master E. A. Makins, of 45, Kelvin Road, Highbury, N., is forming a "Gem" Boxing Club for "Gemites," of 12 to 13 years of age, and would like to hear from readers willing to join.

**THE NAVY AS A PROFESSION FOR BOYS.**

By Admiral the Hon. Sir E. Fremantle.

Adam Smith, in his "Wealth of Nations," when comparing professions, argues that the pay of any calling is commensurate with the skill required, and the agreeable or otherwise nature of the duties; thus sailors ought to be highly paid, but, as he puts it, though the skill and dexterity required is "much superior to that of almost any artificers," they only receive the wages of a common labourer.

This he philosophically accounts for by saying that "the dangers and hairbreadth escapes of a life of adventures instead of disheartening young people, seem frequently to recommend a trade to them."

We have the same idea in Tennyson's "The Sailor Boy," who refuses to listen to the warnings of danger:

"'Fool,' he answered, 'death is sure  
To those that stay and those who roam,  
But I can nevermore endure  
To sit with empty hands at home.'"

That the Viking blood in their veins specially appeals to our youth is an unquestioned fact, and it is said that every boy at one time or another wishes to go to sea. The wish for a seafaring life, then, certainly exists. Let us see how it is met, and what the prospect is for those who follow the sea as a profession in this twentieth century.

Of the merchant seaman I do not speak here, apprentices for men before the mast are seldom taken, and our lads are not encouraged to join the merchant service, so that British ships are being gradually manned by aliens and lascars. This is a national danger, for I hold that a Navy must rest on the maritime instincts of the people, and that unless it does it is an exotic which will be unequal to bearing the severe trials of a sea-life, especially in war.

**How to Enter the Service.**

But my theme is that the Navy is a profession for boys, and our recruiters find no difficulty in getting boys to enter the naval service, even though they have to bind themselves to serve for 12 years from the age of 18. The time is past when magistrates could and did empty the gaols by tipping the inmates into his Majesty's ships, and every boy wishing to join the Navy must have the consent of his parents, besides being medically eligible, and reaching a high standard both educationally and physically.

It should be understood, however, that we are not now entering so many boys as previously for several reasons—one is that the proportion of the seaman class to stokers and mechanics is diminishing; but, putting aside the question of stokers and mechanics, who are entered as men at the age of 18, of recent years instead of entering all our seamen through the training-ships as boys, we have adopted two other systems of entry, which I will describe in detail in next week's article.

(Another Special Article  
on this interesting sub-  
ject next Wednesday.)

# SECRET SERVICE!

By "AGENT No. 55."

(THE CLOSING CHAPTERS OF THIS GREAT ADVENTURE STORY.)

## Friends in Need!

Progress through the pinewood was slow. Emerging from it, with the sun as guide, Jerry crossed an endless tract of sandy land, covered with poor grass. At last he gained a road, a deserted by-way, and followed it for hours, not passing a single human habitation. Hunger began to make itself felt, but there was nothing to eat, so he had to endure it. Many an anxious glance he cast at the sky, but no aircraft showed itself. Night came on, and he got what sleep he could under an apology for a hedge.

"Better than being in gaol, though," he consoled himself, as he awakened, damp and stiff in every limb, and his stomach crying cupboard most insistently.

He had omitted to wind his watch, but judged it near nine in the forenoon when he saw the first passer-by. Two men and a woman going to work in the fields passed him, looked at him without curiosity, and went on. Later he saw a village, and made a wide round to avoid it. But the next he spied he could not shun. His belly was too insistent.

A few curious glances were cast upon him as he went into the village, seeking an inn, and a precious miserable-looking house it was when found.

"You can give me something to eat and drink?" he asked a surly-looking man, who answered his repeated stampings.

"Ja."

And then the fellow asked him where he was from.

"That's my business! Get me some food!" Jerry replied shortly, for he was ravenous.

He spoke in German, though he believed he had actually passed the frontier into Holland, but his knowledge of Dutch was limited. He held out a silver coin, and the surly fellow appeared, seemingly satisfied.

In five minutes he was back again with black bread, some pale-looking, dry cheese, and several unskinned onions.

"Gelt!" he growled.

And Jerry handed over the coin, already biting into the rye bread.

The meal was tempting only to a very hungry man, but Jerry was feeling like two such. Half of the victuals had disappeared when the surly man was back again, bringing a thick mug of beer, but no change.

"Am I in Holland?" Jerry asked the gaping boor.

"Nein."

"What, then?" Jerry's knowledge of frontiers was not accurate. "Belgium?"

"Nein."

"Oh, murder! Still in Germany!" he muttered. "How far is the frontier, landlord?"

The fellow stared at him, then suddenly produced the coin given him, and jerked out the word "Englander."

"Ja—gangen! Tourist," replied Jerry.

He thought it was about time he made himself scarce. The man seemed suspicious.

While he was swallowing the beer the man went out. But at the doorway Jerry found himself confronted by five burly villagers, one of whom wore something that looked like a uniform tunic. The landlord was behind them, and had evidently had them waiting.

"Englander, wo ist euer Reisepass?" demanded the one in the tunic peremptorily.

But Jerry had no passport to show, so couldn't produce it. In his best German he explained that no passport is necessary for a Britisher travelling in Germany. He asked them to stand aside, but none moved, and he hesitated about making things worse by using force.

The men whispered among themselves, but keeping an eye on Jerry, and he heard the word "Spaher," and realised that his position was dangerous; for of all the disagreeable beliefs a Britisher in Germany can arouse is that he is a spy.

"Rubbish, you blockheads!" he exclaimed angrily. "Get out of it!"

That brought matters to a head. The man in the tunic called to Jerry to stay where he was. "In the name of the Kaiser," and got out of the way so as not to hinder the others trying to make Jerry do as requested. They had no objections, chance never having given them the opportunity of coming into collision with a British fist. But this was soon rectified.

The villager who grabbed at Jerry's collar went over backwards under the influence of a stiff uppercut, and the second valiant man received a severe drive in the pit of the stomach. And then the innkeeper, reaching over from behind, caught Jerry a wild smite on his crown with the broken handle of a field shovel. He staggered, and, before recovering, received a violent kick on the shins and a chopping blow in the face.

As soon as he could he sent in a number of rapid, straight-arm drives that temporarily disabled one combatant and brought a gasping stream of "Blitzens" and "Schwein-hunds!" from the others. But they did not confine themselves to mere words; and when two chance passers through the village joined in to take a hand in the fray, Jerry had been pretty badly dealt with. Still, he had done a deal of damage, and was still full of fight, for, seeing the new-comers, he shouted: "Cowardly swine! Seven to one—eh?" and floored the man nearest to him with a left hook that found the point.

"Here, what's the row, sir? Can't we give you a hand?" It was a British accent and a British voice, and Jerry recognised both immediately.

The next instant two of his assailants went sprawling before the intrusion of a couple of young men in rough tweed Norfolk and breeches.

Recognising the folly of further fighting, those of the villagers still on their legs took to their heels, headed by the man in the tunic. The surly innkeeper was a good second.

"Looks to me as though you'd better get out of this quick," remarked one of the new-comers. "There's no one else to fight."

He spoke almost regretfully, and Jerry, glancing at his face, liked him at once.

Without further words, the trio started through the village, and no opposition was offered. Not until a couple of miles had been covered at a good stiff pace was a word spoken. And then:

"Lively scrap, sir," the taller of the two young men observed.

"More lively than pleasant," replied Jerry.

(Continued on page iv. of Cover.)



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## SECRET SERVICE!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"Bet a sovereign some of those German johnnies thought so! By Jove, sir, but you did handle them! What was it all about?"

"Because I'm a Britisher and had no passport, they jumped to the conclusion I was a spy. And it isn't exactly healthy for a Britisher in Germany to be suspected of spying," Jerry explained.

"They agreed, telling Jerry of some of their own mild adventures. They were making a walking-cum-motor-car tour, and their attitude towards most things German was not exactly sympathetic. Sir Philip Vaughton and John Hallett they gave as their names, and they were hugely surprised and very considerably excited by the particulars about himself Jerry informed them of. Already they knew him by name, Elton also, and began excitedly to discuss means for rescuing the great inventor from his German prison.

"A job a bit too big for us, I'm afraid," said Jerry; "but if I can only get away safely to England and make known the treachery by which Elton was captured, I reckon means will be found to do the trick."

"And you bet, Mr. Osborne, we'll help you all we can!" they cried enthusiastically. "Tell us what we can do, and it's done. A Britisher who won't stand up to the limit for a fellow-countryman in trouble abroad is a rotten outsider, and I don't think we're that, even if we belong to what is called the idle rich."

"It means gaol for us all if we're discovered," Jerry warned them. "We're not playing some game, remember."

"Gaol be jiggered! You've to get away, Mr. Osborne, and it's up to us to do our level best to help you do it. Tell us what that is."

### Britain Moves.

It was not until three weeks after the flight from the Wesel flying-park that Jerry Osborne, hastening from Charing Cross Station, made his way towards Downing Street and Sir Edmund Black.

Those three weeks had gained him two friends for life and given the three of them excitement enough to satisfy the most exacting. Direct return to England had been impossible; there had been the frontier to cross; the Germans had been unrelenting in their search for him, and he had guessed the ports of Holland and Belgium were being watched.

Right down into South Germany Jerry and his new friends had gone, at last to slip across the frontier, and reach Calais after traversing half the length of France.

The interview with the Foreign Secretary was long and important. It was renewed the next day, when other members of the Cabinet, together with the highest representatives of the Army and Navy, were present. Jerry Osborne found himself an individual of importance, one to be listened to with deference.

"There is no need for hurry, Mr. Osborne. Depend upon it no harm will happen to Mr. Elton," Sir Edmund said. "But I can appreciate your apprehensions. Our Government will make representations."

"And Germany will deny they know anything of the

matter. It was boasted openly that at any risk Elton would be kept."

"It will not be assumed that the German Government does know anything about the matter," Sir Edmund replied. "We shall merely institute inquiries, and ask their assistance."

"But what's the use—" began Jerry. And then he stopped dead. He smiled. "I suppose, sir, you don't want them to suspect we know what their game is—going to throw dust in their eyes?"

"For public consumption only," explained Lord Croft, the Premier.

"And meanwhile—"

"Something else will be done."

But the Premier spoke nervously.

"To obtain Elton's release?" persisted Jerry.

"Precisely. Diplomatically, of course. Britain must do nothing rash or provocative."

Jerry saw the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Berrymann, Sir David Went, and the Foreign Secretary exchange glances. What Lord Croft had said didn't satisfy him a little bit.

"Oh, yes; diplomatically, of course!" General Ranger said.

And Admiral Berrymann and Sir David nodded.

"I think that this gentleman should be acquainted with our intentions," said the Foreign Secretary quietly. "He has the right. Britain owes much to him and Mr. Elton. Have I your leave to explain?"

Lord Croft nodded. He didn't appear very well pleased.

Jerry came away from that interview in good spirits. Britain was going to act, and in a manner worthy of her old traditions. Max Elton was not to be sacrificed. The blustering Teuton was to be given a wholesome lesson. The effect would certainly not promote a better feeling, but at least it would let the Teuton know that Britain, when aroused, could still demand and obtain respect.

But Jerry Osborne could only guess at the difficulty Sir Edmund Black had had to bring the Prime Minister to a reluctant agreement. Not that he cared.

That night, in company with General Ranger, he left London. Twenty-four hours later he was driving through the streets of Berlin. And his feeling was that of the man who holds the thirteenth trump card at whist, with one round to play and the tricks taken equal.

"My dear Ranger, and what brings you of all men in the world to Berlin?" was the question of Lord Riversdale, the astonished British Ambassador at Berlin, when his two callers entered his private room.

"I'm correct in saying this gentleman, Mr. Gerald Osborne, is the chief cause of my being here," replied General Ranger; and the Ambassador, acknowledging Jerry's presentation, bowed, and was more puzzled than before.

Taking the despatch handed to him, Lord Riversdale read it through, and his face was expressive of his agitation.

"You ask me to go to the Kaiser with that?" he gasped. General Ranger nodded.

"Mr. Osborne and myself go with you."

"Well, gentlemen, this will mean war within twelve months time, or I do not know my business!" said Lord Riversdale, with conviction. "Still, with this direct charge from the Government, I can only obey."

(This story will be concluded in next Wednesday's "Gem" Library.)