

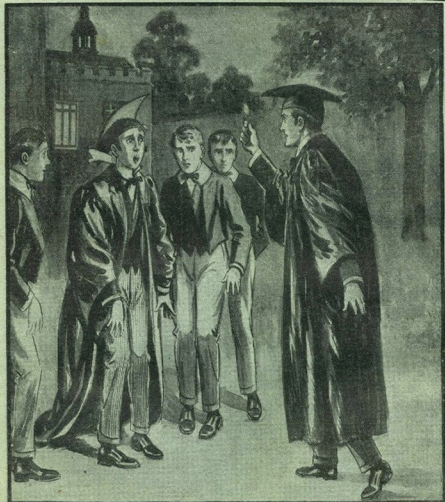
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CAUGHT!

As Figgins stood before the House-master, he presented a grotesque caricature of that gentleman. The gown he had borrowed had got split up the back in his efforts to tear it off; his collar was flying loose, and his face was smeared with dust over the grease-paint! (An amusing incident in the magnificent long, complete school tale in this issue.)

THIS WEEK'S CHAT.

The Editor's Personal Column.

For Next Wednesday—

"SCOUTS TO THE FORE!"

By **Martin Clifford.**

In this grand, long, complete story the St. Jim's Scouts find some real work to do, and, as usual, acquit themselves with credit. Wally & Co., the heroes of the Jackal Patrol, distinguish themselves as much as anyone, and make an important find. Figgins & Co. are hot on the track, and get very near their quarry—very near indeed!—but the credit of the capture is not for them. Tom Merry & Co. make a capture in fine style, but it turns out somewhat unfortunately, and their hopes are disappointed. In the end it is Levison, the cad of the Fourth Form, who furnishes the vital clue; but all through the story it is a case of the

"SCOUTS TO THE FORE!"

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Will the following readers please accept my very best thanks for their letters and helpful suggestions: E. A. Salisbury (Hereford), "A Bolton Reader," "Stanley," and "A Gemite" (Wellington).

Pauline D.—Very many thanks for your appreciative remarks about our "Invincible Trio." I am afraid I cannot accede to your request, for various reasons.

"Eggs" (Motherwell).—Most decidedly.
Eva Nicholas (Fulham).—Many thanks for your letter. By the time these lines appear in print your hopes will have been realised, I fancy.

F. Slina (Northampton).—Write direct to the reader with whom you wish to correspond.

"An Old Reader" (Old Kent Road).—I do not consider it advisable to do as you suggest—at any rate, for the present.

V. Dolman (Chippenhain).—The three countries boasting the largest fleets in the world are: 1. England; 2. Germany; 3. France. Tom Lynn is still at St. Jim's. Kildare is about seventeen years of age.

D. McIntyre (Ruthenglen).—It would spoil the interest in the tales were I to do as you suggest.

KEEP SMILING.

At the present time, when the shadow of war is hanging over our fair land, and gloom is pervading the minds of many who were hitherto bright and cheerful, there is one little duty which all my readers would do well to bear in mind. That is, to be of good courage in this crisis, and, instead of adding to the general depression, to go about their duties with calm confidence; to have unwavering faith in our brave soldiers and sailors, who even at this moment are fighting for King, Country, and Right in a manner which calls forth wonder and admiration from all quarters of the globe.

There have been many conflicting opinions expressed of late on this subject. Many people are of the opinion that, as far as possible, the regular routine of daily life should be pursued, in order that panic and consternation may be avoided. Others emphatically state that it is a disgrace to the nation to allow football matches and other forms of recreation and amusement to continue. There is something to be said for both sides. But of this I am certain: Long faces are not an attribute of victory; and there is, and will be, quite enough anxiety in our midst, without having it augmented by bitter words and ugly looks.

It is distinctly gratifying to note what a splendid example the Boy Scouts are setting in this respect. Cheerful and strong, calm and courageous, they go about their duties in a manner which has won them the approval of many of our great naval and military leaders. Many of them have brothers at the front, but one would never guess this from their faces as they swing through the streets singing their marching-songs. They realise, brave youngsters that they are, where their duty lies, and the burdens of many anxious mothers and parents will be considerably lightened by their behaviour.

I feel sure, then, that I can rely upon my thousands of reader-chums—scouts, cadets, and others—to continue to set a glowing example by cheerfulness and industry in this, England's dark hour. And when the war clouds have dispersed—which we all hope may be soon—you will never regret having done your best to live up to the inspiring motto: "Keep smiling!"

THE EDITOR.



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TOM MERRY'S FIND!

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By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Tom Merry set off at a run, the baby clinging closely to his neck. He could not run very fast, but it was quicker than walking, and he could think just as well while running. (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER I. A Strange Hamper.

TOM MERRY came along through Rylcombe Wood. It was unusual for Tom Merry to be alone. If that had been the only unusual thing which marked this particular day, it would have been of no consequence, however.

But it was not.

"Hallo!"

Tom Merry stopped as he uttered the ejaculation, and listened intently.

He had heard something; that was beyond doubt. But he didn't feel quite sure what the sound was, so he listened for it again.

This time he was sure. It was the cry of a baby.

"Well, I'm spifficated!" said Tom Merry.

What should a baby be doing in Rylcombe Wood at this hour of the day, which was well past the time when babies were usually abroad?

The baby was there, however; that much was certain. Curiosity and humanity alike suggested a search for it.

Tom Merry glanced at his watch. He had very little time to spare if he was to be in for call-over, he saw, and not being in for call-over entailed penalties.

But it was impossible to go on and leave the baby there.

All the yarns he had heard and read of small kids deserted by their mothers rushed into his mind. They raised doubtful thoughts, too.

"Hang it all! I don't believe I'm cut out for an adopted father!" marmured Tom Merry. "No, that's not right, of

Next Wednesday:
"SCOUTS TO THE FORE!" AND "A BID FOR A THRONE!"

course! I mean an adopted chi— No, that isn't right, either. But I know quite well what I do mean."

He rather wished Monty Lowther and Manners had been with him. It was all very well to act on one's own judgment most times, but a baby was the sort of responsibility that a fellow would willingly have divided.

While he thought of all this he was diligently searching. The baby could not have been left by accident, or it would not have been hidden like this.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. He had found the baby.

"Goo-goo!" said the baby. She had seen Tom Merry, and apparently liked the look of him.

"Well, you're a nice kid, I must say!" said Tom Merry.

"Goo-goo!" said the baby again, and stretched out her arms to him.

She was well wrapped up, and snugly tucked away in the lee of a bush out of the wind. At a glance it was evident that she had not been left by accident.

"That's all very well. But if I take you, who's going to answer for how and when I'm going to get rid of you—eh, kid?"

"Goo-goo!" said the baby, and then added something that sounded rather like "Nice."

"If I'd only got time I'd take you to the village. I dare say the bobbie's wife would look after you till I'd made up my mind what to do. But I haven't got time, and the only possible thing seems to be to leave you to it—eh, kid?"

"Goo-goo!" said the baby, as if perfectly understanding that he didn't mean anything of the sort.

Of course he didn't. To leave the child there was out of the question. It was quite possible that no one might happen to come along that path before the next day.

Tom Merry looked at his watch for the third time.

"It's got to be done!" he said desperately; and, like a hero, he picked the baby up.

She was not a mere infant, and, though backward in speech, was a very promising specimen of a two-year-old child in all other respects. The arms that were flung round the boy's neck gripped pretty forcibly, and her weight was by no means inconsiderable.

"Goo-goo!" she said; and then, quite plainly this time; "Nice!" And then she kissed him.

"Oh, hang it!" groaned Tom Merry. "The kid's getting fond of me already. I can't have that. She'll be adopting me before I know where I am, and then whose shall I be?"

He set off at a run, the baby clinging closely to his neck. He could not run very fast, of course, but it was quicker than walking, and he could think just as well while running.

Or just as badly! For the life of him he could not hit upon any plan for dealing with the child at once expeditiously and satisfactorily. There were things that could have been done if he had had time; but he hadn't two minutes to spare. There were means to get rid of his burden, too; but none of them struck him as quite the thing.

Mellish or Levison—if they had not left her where they found her, which was quite possible—would have settled the question off-hand by putting her down outside the wood, where someone must see her sooner or later. She was no more their business than anybody else's; they would have argued—not so much, for the matter of that.

But Tom Merry seldom looked at anything in the same way as Levison, the cad of the Fourth, or Mellish, little better than Levison, and even a bigger coward.

The old chapel ruins gave him an idea. No, not that of leaving the child there. She would have been even more out of the way of rescue in the chapel than in the wood, for somehow people did not care much about the ruins after dark.

But Tom Merry remembered something that might help him to get the kid into St. Jim's unperceived. To smuggle her in, almost call over, and then rush back to the study and dispose of her before anyone else knew anything else about it, seemed the one way out. If Tom Merry could help it, not even Manners and Monty Lowther would be let into the secret—let alone Jack Blake & Co., or those incorrigible New House jokers, Figgins and his chums.

A day or two before there had been a feed in the ruins, and a hamper had been left behind—quite a good-sized hamper of square shape. At a pinch it would make a cradle—anyway, it would give him a chance of getting the kid in without being caught in the act. He went hot all over as he thought of the chaff that would be his portion if he was seen by the fellows with the kid's arm clinging round his neck.

"They'd christen me Nurse Merry on the spot," he muttered. "You'll have to go into the hamper, kiddo. Hope you'll like it. Nice clean straw, you know—first chop, bang up to date, A 1 at Lloyd's, warranted the only genuine—ow!"

Perhaps the small girl thought he was talking too much, THE GEN LIBRARY—No. 347.

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for she suddenly let go of his neck with one hand, and seized his nose instead.

"That's my own special, particular, private sniffer, kid," said Tom Merry. "Hands off, if you please. Drop it! Do you hear?"

"Goo-goo!" said the kid, and pulled harder. "Nice!"

"I assure you it's not. You're utterly wrong. If you're going to persist in this sort of thing, you'll have to learn some more words. 'Nice' is a distinct terminological inexactitude for what you're doing now. But perhaps you're referring to my nasal organ. If you think that's nice, I'm glad; but I fail to see its beauty as any sort of reason for pulling it. Comprehend you?"

"Goo-goo!" said the kid, and, letting his nose go, stroked his face with a podgy little hand.

Just in time Tom Merry gained the shelter of the ruins. Thence he watched Cuts of the Fifth—a fellow of whom he had no great love—dash past, also in a hurry lest he should be late for call-over, it seemed.

Cuts had not seen him, which was a bit of luck. And the hamper was there, which was a bigger bit of luck still.

"There! What would you ask for better? Imagine it's a cradle, and there you are. Oh, I say, don't howl, there's a good kid! You really mustn't howl! It will simply rot up everything if you do."

For the kid seemed on the point of howling. She had puckered up her face, and her little hands smacked at Tom Merry. He felt desperate—fairly desperate. He stooped and kissed her.

And somehow that did the trick. She smiled, and said "Goo-goo!" in a cooing, comfortable sort of way. Her vocabulary was very limited, but she varied expression to help it out.

Out of Tom Merry's pockets came a length of string, and little Miss Nameless was tied down into the hamper to avoid danger of the lid coming off and her falling out. She submitted even to that. Tom Merry began to look upon her as quite a heroine.

He put his arms round the hamper, and ran as hard as he could, thus burdened, hoping that the jolting would not cause a vocal performance.

It seemed that the kid liked it. He could hear her "Goo-goo!" now and then from inside.

Tom Merry had not looked at his watch again because he knew perfectly well that if he did reach Big Hall in time for call-over, he would only manage it by the skin of his teeth.

His mind was made up what to do afterwards. Dame Taggles—that was the dodge. The stout old lady of the tackshop had a very soft spot in her heart for Tom Merry, and she would not refuse to take charge of the kid till next day. And next day, perhaps, the kid's mother would turn up. Anyway, there would be time to think over things and settle on the best course.

Into the deserted quad Tom Merry dashed, and across it to the School House, and through the corridors to the study of the Terrible Three in the Shell passage. He saw no one on the way; they were all in Big Hall, he supposed. But someone saw him, and noted his burden.

Under the table he thrust the hamper.

"Don't howl, kid, for goodness' sake!" he said, and then bolted.

CHAPTER 2.

A Surprise for Someone:

"LEVISON!" rapped out Mr. Railton.

"Adsum!"

But it wouldn't have been "Adsum" if the House-master had been a little quicker over the earlier names, for Levison had only just sneaked in. It was he who had seen Tom Merry with the hamper.

"Lumley-Lumley!"

"Adsum!"

"Merry!"

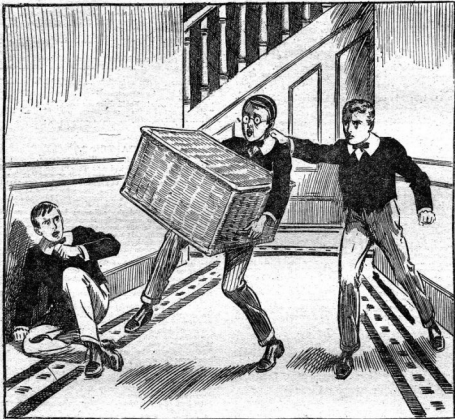
"Adsum!"

Tom Merry was just in time. But he lacked Levison's talent for sneaking in, and Mr. Railton frowned, for he knew that a moment before the place from which the response came had been vacant.

He said nothing at the time; he simply went on with the roll-call. But when the last name had been answered to and the fellows had begun to file out, he spoke sharply:

"Merry, I want you!"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom cheerfully, though his heart sank. None of his chums were near, as it chanced. If only he could have whispered to them to leave the hamper under the table alone! But probably they wouldn't have obeyed, even if he had; the very word "hamper" would have filled them with curiosity.



Skimpole came rushing along the corridor, the hamper in his arms, and collided with Manners and Lowther. "Here, hold up, you ass!" said Manners, collaring him. "I have it!" shouted Skimpole excitedly. "I found it outside Cutts's study!" (See Chapter 4.)

"I hope Railton won't keep me long," he thought. "You were not in your place when call-over began, Merry," said the Housemaster. "In fact, you were late!"

"No, sir; not late. I was in time to answer to my name."
 "That is not sufficient. I cannot have call-over reduced to a mere scramble. It has had a tendency of late to degenerate into that. I allow some latitude. One boy once in a while may be allowed to join the rest after the roll has been started upon, but when several take advantage of this in one evening the thing is going too far."

It wasn't like Mr. Railton to be unjust, Tom Merry thought. But it did seem a little bit thick that he should be made the scapegoat when admittedly several others had erred in like fashion.

The Housemaster's next few words enlightened him as to the wherefore.

"This is the third time this week you have narrowly escaped missing the call-over, Merry."

"Yes, sir; that's right. I was hoping you hadn't noticed it, sir."

Mr. Railton laughed. He was the best of good fellows, and he and Tom Merry were excellent friends.

"I am in the habit of noticing rather more than you boys give me credit for, Merry," he said. "By the way, what progress are you making with your chess studies?"

It was kindly meant. Reproof having been administered, the Housemaster turned at once to another subject.

Now, Tom Merry was really keen on chess, and at another time would have been only too glad to stay talking about the

game, even though prep should suffer. He wasn't particularly keen on prep, by the way.

"Haven't done much lately, sir," he said, feeling very fidgety.

"Don't drop it altogether. Chess is a fine game, and something more than a game. An intellectual exercise. And you have good brains, Merry, if you care to use them."

Tom Merry felt as if his brains were in an addled condition. That hamper under the table—and at any moment Manners and Lowther might find it—or the kid might start howling.

"Yes, sir; I mean no, sir," he answered vaguely. "I mean thank you, sir. It's a ripping good game, of course, and I like it no end, but—er—er—"

"I came across a problem this afternoon that I think you might profitably work out," said Mr. Railton, failing to observe the boy's fidgety state. "Now where is it? Oh, yes—in my pocket-book. Now, see here!"

He spread a newspaper clipping on the table before him, and evidently expected Tom Merry's earnest attention to the problem thereon.

But earnest attention was more than Tom Merry was capable of giving at that precise moment.

"Yes, sir," he said. "White to play, and mate in ten moves. If you'll let me take it, sir, I—I'll do my best, sir!" He bolted, with the chess problem in his hand.

Mr. Railton looked after him. It was not like Tom Merry to be rude. But neither was it like the Housemaster to judge harshly, and he concluded that there was some reason for the

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boy's hurry, though that scarcely excused a breach of good manners.

The study was empty. Tom Merry went on hands and knees and felt under the table for the hamper. By this time dusk had come on, and he could see nothing.

If he could not see, he could feel, however.

But he could not feel the hamper, because the hamper wasn't there.

"Then the blade of a bat fell heavily upon the seat of his trousers, and he jumped up, banging his head against the table.

"You idiot!" he roared, wrathfully regarding Monty Lowther, who had stolen quietly into the room.

"Don't get your wool off, Tommy!" said Lowther soothingly. "Couldn't help it, you know. Nobody could have helped it, you know."

"Ass!" snapped Tom Merry. "Duffer! Frabjous donkey! Look here, have you seen a hamper?"

"A what?" asked Lowther, his ears pricking up at that magic word.

"A hamper, burber! Are you deaf?"

"Thought you were stony-broke, old man."

"So I am. What's that got to do with it, anyhow?"

"Well, hampers into stony-broke don't go, and carry nothing. But I suppose it was from Huckleberry Heath. Harrah for Miss Priscilla Fawcett!"

"Oh, hang Miss Priscilla! No, I don't mean that. Hang you! Hang—"

"What's the row?" asked the voice of Manners.

Monty Lowther struck a match and lighted the gas.

"This chap's lost a giddy hamper," he said, "and he seems to have a rumsey idea that he'll get it back by slanging me."

"Oh, you puffler! You utter ass!" hooted Tom Merry.

"If you only understood! But you're so fat-headed; you're so—so—so—"

"Ring off, Tommy!" said Manners. "I agree with all you say about the futile Lowther; but what's the use of it? Where's the novelty of it? Tell a straight tale, and don't go out of your way to—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Tom Merry. "Which is the most extraordinary jackass of you two I never have been able to decide; but—"

"You said a hamper!" struck in Lowther.

"A hamper?" cried Manners, his spirits rising at once.

"What's in it? I say, where is it? Good old Tommy! It's just in time, for our larder's very much like the renowned Mother Hubbard's, and—"

"Drop it! There's no grub in it!"

"But you said a hamper!" repeated Monty Lowther, in plaintive accents.

"Of course I did! I said a hamper, and I mean a hamper. Can't your feeble mind imagine anything but grub in a hamper?"

"No, it can't!" Monty answered frankly. "So we know it's an empty hamper. And I don't call an empty hamper a hamper at all."

"It isn't empty!" snapped Tom Merry.

"If a hamper isn't empty, it must—"

"Oh, ring off, Lowther, ring off!" struck in Manners. "Let somebody with a little sense—"

"Precious little!" murmured Monty.

"Have a word. Where did you put the hamper, Tommy?"

"Under the table. Why don't you own up, you asses? You've collared it, of course."

"Give you my word I haven't," said Manners. "I haven't been in here since tea."

"Nor yet me," Lowther said.

Tom Merry did not doubt them, of course.

"Well, then," he said, "some ratter must have loused it. I guess Blake & Co. It can't have been Figgins's lot, because they couldn't have been across."

"It's no great odds who's boned it as long as it's empty," said Lowther cheerfully.

"But it isn't empty—don't I keep telling you so?"

"If there's no grub in it, what is there in it? Nothing that matters much surely!" Manners returned.

"Oh, doesn't it matter? You'd think so if you were me, I'll bet! Look here, you fellows, I must get that hamper back!"

"Don't worry, Tommy!" said Manners. "If it hasn't any grub in it, nobody will want the thing."

"There are other things besides grub. You fellows are as bad as Fatty Wynn!"

Lowther's curiosity was aroused now.

"What is there in it, old man?" he asked.

Tom Merry hesitated. He had not meant to tell anybody but Dame Taggles—not even these two staunch chums, who shared all his secrets. The thing seemed so absurd.

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But there was no use in trying to conceal it any longer. That hamper would have to be found, and if Manners and Lowther were to help him to find it they would have to be told beforehand what to expect.

"A kid—a baby-girl!" he blurted out.

"I say, Tommy, are you—er—off it at all?" asked Lowther, tapping his forehead.

Manners, taking Tom Merry's evident seriousness into consideration, was more ready of belief. He rocked with laughter.

"What can you see to guffaw at, you absolute lunatic?" snapped his chum.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, drop it, do! You'll drive me crazy!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It's the biggest wheeze out, old man. What a—what a—what a lovely surprise for somebody!"

CHAPTER 3.

Another Mysterious Disappearance.

ERNEST LEVISON had seen Tom Merry rush in with that hamper, and had naturally concluded that it was of the ordinary run of hampers—that is to say, that it contained such things as cause the schoolboy's mouth to water yearningly. It was a big hamper, too; Levison noticed that.

He thought about it during call-over; but, likely enough, nothing would have come of his thinking if temptation had not assailed him in the form of a chance to secure the hamper unsuspected. It was not wholly greed that stirred him, but quite as much spite against Tom Merry & Co., who had no love for Levison and Mellish, and had often let them know it.

Perhaps it was an accident that Levison found himself in the Shell corridor, and perhaps it wasn't. It was, anyway, quite an accident that he should find the door of the Terrible Three's study ajar, and no one inside.

He peered into the dusk. Then he stole inside, and looked round for the hamper.

That it was not visible at a glance did not surprise him. Grub was too precious to be left at the mercy of any chance depredator in such careless fashion.

He looked into the cupboard. It was not there.

He looked under the table, and there it was!

He dragged it out.

"Jolly heavy!" he murmured, with satisfaction, and gazed over the thought of devouring what Tom Merry had meant for his own and his chums' delectation.

According to the code of St. Jim's, what Levison intended was theft. When the Terrible Three bagged a hamper that belonged to Figgins & Co., or to Jack Blake and his crowd, the proceeding was a joke, because the fellows concerned were all the best of good friends at heart, whatever feuds they might carry on.

When Figgins & Co., or the fellows in No. 6 of the Fourth Form studied, retaliated in kind, that was no more than might be expected. But Levison and Mellish were on another footing altogether. Briefly, one may call a friend's grub, just as one may be rude to a friend. —But to collar the grub of a chap who bars you is to lay yourself open to a very unpleasant charge.

The coast was clear. Levison whipped up the hamper and bolted. Once in the Fourth Form corridor he did not mind so much. If anyone saw him, they would suppose the hamper his own property; and, in any case, he meant to issue a good many invitations to partake of its contents, because to do that would help to shield him against the vengeance of the rightful owners. Those who shared the spoils must back him up more or less when the hour of settlement came.

"I'll ask Blake and that crew, and Kangaroo and Glyn and Dane," he muttered. "Four and three's seven, and the three in our own den's ten, though I'm not so dead sure Lumley-Lumley will have anything to do with it. Oh, there's that ass Skinsple, too, and Reilly!"

He had reached No. 9 by this time, and no one had seen him.

Then he found himself getting doubtful as to the policy of all those invitations. After all, why shouldn't he keep the grub for the use of himself and Mellish? He had not been seen, and it ought to be easy enough to get rid of the hamper once the thing was unpacked.

He put it on the table, and opened the door of the cupboard.

There was plenty of room in the cupboard. Mellish and Levison both chanced to be short of cash, and they were not on good terms with Lumley-Lumley, who always had plenty.

Levison had his knife out to cut the strings, when the door opened again.

He gave a guilty start; but it was only Mellish.

"Hallo! Why don't you light the gas?" asked the newcomer. "It's blind man's holiday in here. I say, a hamper!"

"It's not too dark for you to see that, then!" returned Levison.

"Nather not! I say, when did it come?"
"Well, it didn't exactly come—not in the way you mean. In fact, it isn't mine. At least, it wasn't a few minutes ago!"

Mellish had lighted the gas. There was rather an uneasy look on his face as he turned to the table again.

"Whose is it?" he asked, with a whining note in his voice.
"You've got me into a good many rows, you know, Levison. I don't want to get into any more!"

"Oh, crawl out, if you like!" returned Levison roughly.
"After all, you aren't asked to do anything but eat the grub. I've taken all the risk, as per usual!"

Mellish turned that over in his mind. He did not quite like the aspect of affairs; but greed overcame fear in him.
"Let's see what there is inside, old man," he said wheedlingly.

He wasn't sure how far that request committed him; but, as Levison knew perfectly well, he would back out when the pinch came if he saw a chance, so it did not matter.

Levison cut the strings, and threw up the lid.

"My hat!" he gasped.
"Oh, Jerusalem! A kid!" spluttered Mellish.

The baby-girl was fast asleep, one podgy, dimpled hand against her cheek, the other clenched into a fist.

"What—what— Oh, I say, Mellish, am I dreaming? It can't be! Who ever heard of such a thing!"

"If you are dreaming, I am, too! Unless it's snakes or elephants, or— or walruses you see. What I see is a golden-haired kid. Where on earth did you get this hamper, Levison?"

Levison stared stupidly, his lower jaw dropped, his eyes protruding. He felt as though some enchantment had been worked upon him.

"It is a kid," he muttered, and touched the child's face gingerly with one finger, as if to make sure that it was real.

She still slept on.

"Where did you get it from?" repeated Mellish.

"Out of Tom Merry's den," answered Levison, continuing to stare at the child.

"Oh, rats! Tell me another! What would Tom Merry be doing with a kid in a hamper?"

"How should I know? He had it there, anyhow. What should I be doing with a kid in a hamper, if you come to that?"

"He, he, he! Don't know, I'm sure. You've queer tastes, Levison. Well, so long!"

"Here, where are you off to?" demanded Levison roughly, and got between him and the door.

"I'm going. I suppose I can go if I like? This den isn't a giddy nursery! I'll come back when you've got rid of that brat!"

"You're not going—not until you've helped me out of this beastly hole! You were all serene when you reckoned there was grub in the hamper!"

"Well," returned Mellish nastily, though his voice was a trifle shaky, too, for he did not like the look in his study-mate's eyes. "I'm not a giddy cannibal! I don't eat babies, so that's off!"

"It may be, but you're not!"

Mellish summoned all his courage. It did not amount to much; but the notion of being found in the study with a baby in a kidnaped baby, he supposed—was more than he could bear. Why, the fellows would never let him hear the last of it!

Levison had got into this mess; let Levison get out of it, as best he could.

He tried to push past.

But Levison, furious at this attempt to leave him in the lurch, was not going to have that. Up came his right, and buffed Mellish on the nose.

"You beast! Stop it, will you?" whined the snark, holding both hands to his face. "I'll call the fellows—I'll tell Tom Merry—I'll—"

Then the kid woke up, and began to howl, and at this moment Lumley-Lumley walked in.

"Squabbling again?" he said. "Hallo! My sainted grandmother! Well, if this isn't carrying the thing a bit too far! I've heard of politicians robbing hen-roosts, but I never thought St. Jim's chaps would come down to robbing nurseries!"

Levison had rushed to the table, and was wildly trying to soothe the baby.

"Don't howl, kid!" he muttered. "We shall have the whole blessed House in here if you do! Oh, dry up! Hush-a-by—hush-a-by, then! Diddums, then? Oh, drop it, you nasty little animal, or I'll muzzle you!"

Mellish, seizing the opportunity, slipped out.

Lumley-Lumley elbowed Levison aside.

"Chuck it!" he said. "You don't know the way to treat a kid. I'm not much in the nursemaid line myself, but I reckon I can do a trifle better than that. Would 'ums muzzle you, then, pretty pretty! Would 'ums, then? Smile at 'ums smile, then? That's right! See here, kiddies, how's this for high?"

He dangled his gold watch in front of the small girl's eyes. She grabbed at it, and ceased to howl.

"Where's that rotter Mellish?" growled Levison, swinging round.

For once he felt quite grateful to Lumley-Lumley.

"Slid—banked—evacuated—absquatulated! What's he always do in a crisis? Did 'ums, then—did 'ums! Pretty, pretty tucker! That's right, kid—smile!"

The baby was doing more than that. She crowed and chuckled with delight.

A great idea occurred to Levison. Since this chap seemed to take to the kid so amazingly, let him have it. He was quite welcome to it.

Levison followed Mellish.

A moment later Lumley-Lumley looked round, and found himself alone.

He understood quite well that Levison had bolted. He knew quite well that Levison and Mellish were both capable of denying any knowledge of the kid, and leaving him to make the best of the situation.

To wait for them to come back was hopeless. They would not return till something had been done.

But what was to be done?

Get rid of the kid—that was the only thing! Anything was better than letting it stay in No. 9.

Fortunately for him, the baby had dozed off again. Lumley-Lumley had withdrawn the watch, fearful that the kid would start howling when he did so, and much relieved when, instead of giving voice, she closed her eyes again.

So much relieved was he that he forgot to put the time-piece back into his pocket. He had slipped out the guard in order to dangle the watch, and now, in his agitation, he let watch, chain, guard, and all drop into the hamper, and never gave them a thought until later.

He closed the lid down half regretfully, for he felt that, in other circumstances, he could have liked that kid. A grin stole over his face as a notion crossed his mind.

The kid must be passed on. But to whom?

Cutts—that was the man! Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth. Lumley-Lumley did not like Cutts. From the point of view of the baby's welfare, Cutts was scarcely the best fellow to choose.

But Lumley-Lumley really hadn't time to think about the kid's welfare; but, after all, Cutts was not such a monster that he would ill-treat it.

So Cutts it should be. But first it would be well to make sure that the transferee was possible. Lumley-Lumley tiptoed through the corridors, dreading lest the new boots he wore should creak, and reached Cutts's study without seeing anyone.

The study was vacant. The adventurer hurried back.

He had closed the door of No. 9. He was surprised to find it ajar. He had left the gas burning. He was surprised to find it out, and the room in darkness, except for a feeble gleam in the grate.

By this time his astonishment was all used up, and it did not surprise him a bit to find that hamper, baby, and all had disappeared.

What made him feel for his watch at that moment he could not have explained; the action was probably, more or less, mechanical.

It pulled him up sharply, however, for the watch was not there.

"Why—oh, hang it all! Oh, confound it! I must have dropped it into the hamper. And the blessed thing's got my monogram on the back of it. What on earth shall I do?" he groaned.

CHAPTER 4.

Looking for the Kid.

"If you two will stop giggling like a pair of hyenas—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Monty Lowther in unison.

"If you two don't stop that hideous row, I'll—"

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy, you'll be the death of me!" spluttered Manners, holding his sides.

"It's the funniest thing I've ever heard of!" guffawed Lowther.

"Pity the kid's gone. I should have liked to snaphot Tom Merry dangleing the sweet infant!"

"Have you laid in a supply of pep, Tommy?"

"Shall I fetch a footbath, old man? The kid will have to be washed, you know. I do hope you're used to bething

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kids. I've half a mind to fetch Skimmy in." Perhaps some of his old professors tell the right way to do it."

"Oh, do be serious, you fellows!" groaned Tom Merry. "If you were in my boots—and it might just as well have been either of you—or both of you—"

"Not likely!" said Manners decidedly.

"I'm not fainy!" Monty Lowther announced.

"A kid! Oh, my hat!"

"A kid! I say, wonder what Railton will think of it? Where do you mean to keep it, old chap? I shouldn't think he'll let you have it in your study."

"There's nothing in the rules against keeping kids in a study!" said Manners, laughing till the tears ran down his face.

But that did not comfort Tom Merry a bit. He sat down, and his face wore a most wibogone expression.

"You'll send me off my crumpet," he said, putting his hands to his ears. "Don't you see that this thing's serious? The kid was left in Rylcombe Wood—deserted by somebody, I suppose. I'd only a minute or two to spare, and I couldn't think what to do except to bring it here, and take it to Dame Taggie after call-over. Of course, I couldn't come in with the poor young beggar on my arm."

Manners and Lowther cackled again at the mental picture thus conjured up.

"So I rushed for the ruins, and shoved her into that hamper we emptied there the other day. You chaps may grin all you please; but I tell you I like that kid. She's no end of a well-plucked kid. It must have jolted her horribly, for I ran; and she never let out a single yell. She's a knock-out kid, I tell you!"

"He's set on keeping her," murmured Manners to Lowther.

Tom Merry flung a Greek-Latin-English lexicon at his head. Manners ducked, and the heavy tome brought a framed portrait of crum crashing to the floor.

The mild, spectacled face of Skimpole appeared at the door. "Excuse me," he said, "but I imagined that I heard such a sound as might reasonably be apprehended to be due to the concussion of a falling body with the floor. Is—er—anything wrong?"

"Everything's wrong!" snapped Tom Merry.

"That is sufficiently comprehensive, Merry, but scarcely explanatory," answered Skimpole, meekly. "If you will enlighten me as to the precise—"

"Tom Merry's lost a kid!" spluttered Manners, unable to keep in the joke longer.

"A—er—what did you say, Manners? It may have been an articular deception, but it certainly seemed to my intelligence—"

"You haven't any!" Tom Merry growled.

"That you said 'kid.' Do I understand you aright that Tom Merry has purchased a young goat, and that—"

"Oh, ring off! Get out! Hook it! I'm fed up. I can't stand any more. You're the limit. You're the last straw that breaks the camel's—"

"Manners said kid, not camel. He meant, I apprehend, either a young animal of the caprine species—to the introduction of which I am perfectly certain Mr. Railton would offer objections, or alternatively—but that seems impossible—a youthful member of the human race," said Skimpole, quite unperturbed, beaming through his glasses, and endeavouring, as was his way, to get at the scientific truth.

Tom Merry pushed past him.

"I'm going to look for the kid," he said. "You chaps can do as you like. But I reckoned I could depend on you two when I was in a hole."

That went to their hearts.

"Buzz off, Skimmy," said Monty Lowther. "We're going to help Tom Merry to look for the kid."

"I wish that I understood," answered Skimpole, putting a skinny hand to his massive forehead. "It is ever my desire to understand. But I really fail to grasp the wherefore of all this—"

"It's a kid, don't I tell you?" bawled Manners into his ear. "Not a young goat—a baby. Tom Merry found it all alone in Rylcombe Wood, and smuggled it in in a hamper, and left the hamper here while he rushed down to call over, and somebody's bagged the hamper. Now, do you understand, fathead!"

"Dear me! Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "What an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances! I will assist you in your search. The pursuit of science is not incompatible with a feeling heart. I really feel extremely for the poor child thus torn from its home and all it holds dear."

"Ass! The kid's all serene, I'll bet. It's Tom Merry you ought to pity," said Lowther.

"And you'd better pity him when he isn't there, because being missed isn't much in Tommy's line," added Manners. "I propose to do something more practical than offer

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sympathy," answered Skimpole firmly. "I will assist in the search. I will perambulate the house, inquiring whether—"

"Anybody's seen a giddy baby? Yes, I should think you'd better, if you jolly well want Tom Merry to jolly well slay you!" said Monty Lowther grimly.

"Then what—that would you suggest, Lowther?"

"Put your head in a bag, and keep it there! If you must help, inquire for a hamper, not for a baby. I expect this blessed silly business is bound to be known to everybody inside ten minutes; but we don't want Tom to say it was through us it got out."

Skimpole marched off full of determination.

"That ass isn't to be trusted," said Lowther.

"Oh, what's the odds?" replied Manners. "The thing can't be kept dark now. Whoever bagged the hamper is bound to tell the yarn."

"That's not so certain," said Lowther acutely. "Depends upon who it was. Bagging a hamper is a lark or a crime, according to who does the bagging and who owns the hamper."

"You're not so big an idiot as you look, Monty. It isn't Blake & Co. then, or we should have heard of it before now. It might be the rotters in No. 9—"

"What might be the rotters in No. 9?" spoke a resentful voice, and Lumley-Lumley appeared.

"I didn't mean you. There are only two rotters in No. 9, and they are Levison and Mellish," explained Manners.

"Thanks," said the millionaire's son, a trifle drily. "And what is it that you think they may have done?"

"Bagged a hamper," answered Lowther.

"And what was in the hamper that you think they may have bagged?" asked Lumley-Lumley in a tone that Manners thought curious.

"Oh, what is there usually in a hamper?" returned Monty Lowther, both to give his chum's indiscretion away.

The answer was surprising.

"Not what there was in this one, I reckon."

"Why, what do you know about it?"

"What was there in it?"

"He knows something, Manners. It really was these rotters, then?"

"Come inside," said Lumley-Lumley, and they went with him into their own den.

"Well?"

"Cough it up!"

Lumley-Lumley seemed in no hurry. As a matter of fact, he was still a trifle uncertain as to whether he should tell everything.

"My watch and chain!" he blurted out at length.

"Oh, rats!"

"Tell us another! What do you reckon Tom Merry would be doing with your watch and chain?"

"Also a kid," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Then it was those two, for I know you wouldn't bone a hamper. I say, what have they done with it?" cried Lowther.

"I don't know in the least," Lumley-Lumley answered.

"Oh, don't be so beastly mysterious! Where's the kid now?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"But you said—"

"I didn't say that I knew where it was. But wherever it is, my watch and chain's with it."

"Look here, Monty, is he mad or am I?" asked Manners wildly.

"Both of you a bit touched, I guess. I say, Lumley-Lumley, do explain, there's a decent chap!"

Thus adjured, Lumley-Lumley explained. But they were really no forwarder when he had done so.

They knew that it was Levison who had sneaked the hamper, and that was one against Levison. But vengeance on him could wait.

They knew that the kid had been in Study No. 9. But its sojourn there had been but brief, and where it was now they were not a bit nearer knowing.

"Well, we'd better scoot around a bit and look for it," said Manners.

"I'll help," volunteered Lumley-Lumley.

"Good!"

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had visited the study in the Fourth Form corridor which held Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby.

He poked his head in at the door, trying to look unconcerned.

"I say, you fellows, have you seen a hamper?"

"Severel, dear boy, an' 'twust to see many moah," answered the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!" said Tom Merry irritably.

Arthur Augustus drew himself up to his full height, and surveyed the leader of the Shell through his monocle.

"Tom Merwyn, I regard that as an insult," he began. "I must ask you to retract—"

"Oh, ring off! Blake, Herries, have any of you seen a hamper? I'm not japing. This is a serious matter."

"A hamper generally is," answered Herries, grinning.

"I insist upon an apology," Tom Merwyn said.

"What's in the hamper?" demanded Blake.

"You shouldn't let your hampers go wandering about alone," said Digby, shaking his head. "It isn't safe. There's an awful lot of suspicious characters in this house. D'Arcy, now, for all he looks such an ass—"

"Drop it, Dig! Tom Merwyn, will you—"

Tom Merry slammed the door and went. He was tolerably sure that these four had not seen the hamper. They would have opened it before now, and they would never have been able to keep silence about so rich a joke as the discovery of a baby inside it.

In the corridor Tom Merry halted. He scarcely knew what to do next. It was clearly impossible to go all round the School House asking fellows if they had seen his hamper.

Besides, it seemed unnecessary. If anyone had discovered the kid, the whole House would know within five minutes, he supposed. Which was an additional reason for recovering it as early as possible, but didn't in the least help to suggest a method of recovering it.

Up came Lowther, Manners, and Lumley-Lumley.

"Haven't I found it, I suppose?" asked Lowther.

"Do I look as if I found it?" snapped his chum.

"Well, we've got a clue, anyway," Manners struck in.

"What's the good of a clue? What I want it—no, I don't want the kid, either. I only want to be sure the poor little beggar's safe. I wish I'd never seen her. What are you grinning at, you duffers?"

His aspect was so fierce and wild, so unlike the good-tempered Tom Merry of every day, that Manners, desirous to turn his wrath elsewhere, said hurriedly:

"It was Levison, or Mellish, or both of them, that walked off with the hamper."

"Here, hold on! You're going too fast!" broke in Lumley-Lumley. "I never said so."

"I don't care what you said. Your face gives you away," answered Tom Merry. "I'm going to see those two."

"They're not in there," said Lumley-Lumley.

But he was wrong. They were.

It had occurred to Levison that Lumley-Lumley was pretty certain to get rid of the hamper in some way, and he had sneaked back to ascertain whether this had been done.

The same thought had dawned upon the great mind of Percy Mellish, and he also had sneaked back.

He was a moment before Levison, and on the latter's arrival found himself cornered. Levison had not come back in at all a nice temper; and, though he had little relish for standing up to anyone who could use his fists, he knew himself able to thrash Mellish.

So it chanced that he was taking it out of that sweet youth when Tom Merry came in. He had got Mellish down, set astride him, and was clouting him alternately on the left and on the right side of the head.

Tom Merry caught him by the collar, dragged him off, flung him down, and seized a hockey-stick. It was not that Tom Merry loved Mellish so much, but that he disliked Levison even more.

"Here, hold on!" cried Manners, following his chum in.

"That rotter will sing out and rouse the whole House!"

The hockey-stick dropped, but not upon Levison's body. Tom Merry had no special wish to have the whole show aroused just then.

As that moment the voice of Skimpole was heard, lifted high in protest.

"Don't, I implore you!" cried Skimpole. "You know not what harm you may do by such reckless conduct! You may even destroy a precious human life."

"That," remarked Monty Lowther to Manners, "sounds rather like giving the game away, don't you think? But old Skimpy can always be depended upon to make a giddy hash of things."

Skimpole came rushing along the corridor, the hamper in his arms, and collided with the two.

"Here, hold up, you ass!" said Manners, collaring him.

"I have it—I have it," Tom Merry! I found it outside Cutta's study!" shouted Skimpole.

But Tom Merry scarcely looked as pleased as he had expected.

"Yes, and we shall have everybody here in a minute!" he growled. "Why can't you behave like a reasonable person, instead of a howling, raving, roaring, blithering jackass?"

"My dear Merry, your natural history is sadly at fault," panted Skimpole, relieved now of his burden. "Jackasses do not howl, rave, or roar, surely! I make the correction with all diffidence."

"Oh, go to Bath!" growled Tom Merry. "Here they

come! Make way, you fellows! Let me get to our den, and we'll bar them out. It's no business of theirs, hang them!"

But it was too late. The juniors of the School House were flooding the corridors. Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Digby and Herries, Noble and Glyn and Dase, these and many more came. Tom Merry fled before them, and Lowther and Manners loyally tried to hold them back; but it was of no avail. Their curiosity was aroused. They wanted to know, and the questions flew fast.

The secret had passed into the keeping of those who were not to be trusted, too. Levison saw his chance to vent his spite, and howled:

"There's a beastly baby in the hamper! Tom Merry's adopted it, or kidnapped it, or something!"

"That's wrong—at least, Tom Merry may have adopted it, but it was you who kidnapped it—out of his den!" yelled Mellish.

The secret was out, and to keep the hamper lid down any longer served no useful purpose. Tom Merry put the hamper on the table and wrenched up the lid. The child inside, awakened by the noise, tried to sit up. The many strange faces frightened her, and her face puckered up as if she meant to cry. Her rescuer—in fact Tom Merry had earned that title—recognised the danger of this.

"Oh, don't howl, there's a good kid!" he protested, his face scarlet.

"Shure, Tommy, she'll be good if ye kiss her!" spoke a voice that could only have been Reilly's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had, somehow, managed to get into the front rank. He stood now, eyeglass in eye, looking down at the child with the air of a connoisseur in infants.

"Weally, Tom Merwyn," he said, "I congratulate you on your taste! Weally, dear boy, I couldn't have chosen a prettier kid myself. Golden hair and blue eyes, and quite the sweetest expression. Doesn't seem to be inclined to wail, either. Yass, I congrat—"

"If you say another word, Gussy, I'll skin you!"

"But weally, Tom Merwyn—"

"Do you suppose I chose the kid, you duffer? Perhaps you imagine me selecting it out of a crowd? I don't want the kid. I found it left all by itself in Rylcombe Wood, and what was I to do? I know what I'll jolly well do if such a thing ever happens to me again—I'll leave it there!"

The assembled crowd roared with laughter at this. Tom Merry's plight struck them as very comical indeed. Here was he, the cock of the Shell, the junior captain of the School House, the fellow who had proved himself over and over again pluckier and cooler and more resourceful than any of them, in the humiliating position of a nursemaid!

Much of the laughter was honest and hearty, only a little of it spiteful, for Tom Merry had a score of friends for every enemy he possessed, and the friends were of the right sort, the enemies the wrong.

But even his friends could not resist the opportunity thus given them of taking a rise out of him.

"Seems to me," said Kangaroo, "that you've rather jumped at conclusions, old man. My word, I wouldn't have brought the kid away—not likely! I expect its poor mother's hunting all through the wood for it now, and going half mad because she can't find it."

The colour faded from Tom Merry's face, and only the healthy outdoor tan that overspread it prevented its showing white.

"I say, though, I never thought of that," he said. "I took it for granted the kid had been deserted. It was deserted, I'm jolly sure. It must have been. There wasn't anybody near. But—my hat! This is a desperate case!"

"What do you mean to do, old man?" asked Lowther.

"I'm going to find Dame Taggles and persuade her to take the kid in. I can't stand it here any longer. And then I'm going down into the village to see if I can find out anything about the mother. Perhaps after all she didn't mean to desert it, and, anyway, she's got to be found."

"That's the programme," answered Manners. "We'll come with you, old chap!"

"No, you won't. Somebody's got to stay here and look after the kid!"

And before they could protest against this arrangement Tom Merry had gone. At Taggles's lodge, however, a great disappointment awaited him. Mrs. Taggles had been called away from St. Jim's to nurse a sick sister, and Taggles could not say when she would be back. This was a sad blow to the captain of the Shell, and he sat out on his walk to Rylcombe village in an almost desperate frame of mind.

ANSWERS

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THE NEXT WEDNESDAY—"SCOUTS TO THE FORE!" A Most Excellent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merrivale & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Merry Makes Inquiries.

"HALLO, Grimes! Just the chap I wanted to see, you are!"

Whistling merrily, basket on arm, Joe Grimes came along. He pulled up short at Tom Merry's salutation.

It was only a brief time that Grimes had spent as a St. Jim's boy. He owed that to Lumley-Lumley. To the same fellow he owed his release from a life that had proved very irksome to him. St. Jim's had not suited Grimes. He felt that he was wasting time there. He had been happy enough in his work for Sands, the grocer; he was miserable when, instead of carrying heavy baskets and weighing sugar and cleaning currants, he had to tackle Latin irregular verbs and arithmetical problems that made his head ache. But the friends he had made at St. Jim's did not forget him, and by that much he had gained, at least. He would persist in addressing them formally; he could not bring himself to leave out the "Master"; but there was nothing he would not have done for Lumley-Lumley, the Terrible Three, Jack Blake & Co., and the rest of those who had stood by him in his time of trouble, when others had called him "chief."

"I'm glad, Master Merry," he said simply. "An' if I can 'elp you any way, I'll be as 'appy as anythink. But ain't it prop time up at the school just now? Oh, I ain't forgot! If there was anything in this world as I 'ated with all my 'eart it was that there prep!"

Tom Merry laughed gaily. Somehow he felt sure that Joe Grimes was going to help him.

"Yes, I ought to be at prep, old man," he said. "But I'm cutting it for once. Can't help it. I'm in a beastly hole, and that's why I'm so glad to see you."

"I've got a bit saved up, if it's money, Master Merry," Joe replied. "An' you're welcome to every copper of it."

"It ain't money, Grimes. I'm hard up; but it isn't that. See here; do you know of anybody who's lost a baby?"

"Lost a what, Master Merry?"

In his astonishment Grimes dropped his basket, and his lower jaw. He stooped to pick up the basket; but when he straightened himself up again his lower jaw still hung, and the look of amazement on his face would have made it clear that he knew nothing about the babe in the wood—if the look could have been seen in the gloom.

"A baby, Grimes. Because I've found one."

"You've found a baby, Master Merry! But—but—"

"Better hear the story, and then perhaps you'll be able to help me. You know everybody in Rylcombe, of course."

Joe Grimes glanced round him. Rylcombe was not a brilliantly-illuminated place after dark. The St. Jim's boy and the grocer's lad had met between two lamps, and might have passed without recognising each other but for the fact that Tom Merry had known at once that cheerful whistle.

"I thought I heard somebody," said Joe Grimes, in low tones. "You don't want a yarn like this to get all over the place, Master Merry, I'm sure."

"You're right, Grimes. I certainly don't! But I can't hear a sound of anybody."

Between the path on which the two had met and the road were half a dozen tall, massive old trees. On the other side of the patch was a garden, with a big house at the back of it. Except for the lights that twinkled here and there both in front and rear, they might have been out on a country road.

Tom Merry listened, but could hear nothing. His companion, after a moment or two, also expressed himself as believing that he had been mistaken.

But Joe Grimes really had heard something, and most of what Tom Merry proceeded to tell him came to the ears of Figgins & Co.

Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn had been out to tea that evening, with special leave from their Housemaster to absent themselves from call-over. An aunt of Figgins was staying at the big house behind the garden, hence the invitation to Figgins and his two special chums.

Those three were not eavesdroppers. But when, quite accidentally, they heard Tom Merry's words—"A baby, Grimes. Because I've found one!"—it is to be wondered at they nudged each other, and stood stockstill, scarcely daring to breathe, lest they should miss anything of so rich a joke as this!

They missed a word here and there, for, naturally, Tom Merry did not about his story; but they heard enough to put them pretty completely in possession of the facts. Again and again the sharp elbows of Figgins jerked into the ribs of Kerr on one side or Fatty Wynn on the other; and once Kerr groaned, and Joe Grimes broke in on the story with, "What's that row?"

"Sounded like a pig grunting," said his companion.

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"All right, Tom Merry! That's one up against you!" hissed Fatty Wynn. "Call me a pig, would you, you—you—you blessed nursemaid!"

"Be quiet, ass!" whispered Figgins. "He didn't know you were there. And it did sound uncommonly like a pig!"

The story was finished—so much of it as Tom Merry thought to tell, anyway. What had chanced to the kid after it was once inside the walls of the School House at St. Jim's could not matter to Joe Grimes, or provide any clue to the child's antecedents.

Joe Grimes put down his basket. He scratched his head. He thought hard.

Back in the gloom of the shrubby Figgins & Co. stood still, scarcely breathing. They were thinking hard too.

And Tom Merry, waiting anxiously for the result of the grocer's boy's cogitations, was thinking hardest of all.

"Look 'ere, Master Merry," said Joe at length, "I ain't sayin' that it's got anything to do with the case; but some'ow I can't 'elp thinkin' as it may 'ave. There's a Rylcombe chap named Allan—Bert Allen—as went up to Lannon an' got spliced there two or three years ago. I've 'eard as 'e's often 'avin' rows with 'is missis—'e lifts 'is elbow a bit too often, you know. Well, 'e's at 'ome now—I mean 'e ain't at 'ome, 'cos then 'e'd be in Lannon—but 'e's 'ere, an' 'e's 'ere, an' 'e's 'ere, an' 'e's 'ere, not as I've 'eard of. S'pose 'e's quarrelled with 'er an' left 'er. 'E's just the sort as might. An' she might 'ave come down 'ere after 'im, an' 'e 'ow'd make it up, so she ups an' leaves the kid in the wood—an' does a bunk—oh! Mightn't that be it? Till this mornin' I never thought but what 'e was on 'ollerday; 'e 'as bin down 'ere once or twice without 'er. I ain't never clapped eyes on 'er; but I've 'eard she's a smart, pretty young woman, an' a deal too good for the likes of Bert Allen."

"It sounds quite possible," said Tom Merry, with a deep breath of relief. "Of course it's mostly 'suppose, but I can't help thinkin' it may be right. Where's this fellow to be found, Grimes?"

"At one of the pubs," answered Joe Grimes. "An' most likely 'arf screwed by this time. Shall you go an' look for 'im? I dunno as that'll answer very well. If 'e's 'ad a row with 'is missis, 'e 'ow'd want to bother about the kid. I shouldn't wonder a bit if 'e told you you was welcome to keep 'er."

"Crums! I'll make him sit up if he has the cheek to talk to me like that!" said Tom Merry grimly.

And Figgins and Kerr and Wynn nudged one another. This was getting even more interesting.

"I don't see what you can do, Master Merry, if 'e sticks it out as it ain't 'is kid, an' 'e don't know nothin' about it," replied Joe Grimes doubtfully.

"I'm bound to do something," Tom Merry said. "We can't possibly keep the kid at St. Jim's, you know—not even for one night. Why, she'd have to be washed and put to bed and all that. And who's going to do it?"

"Tell you what, I reckon I could 'elp you a bit there," answered the grocer's boy. "I know a decent woman who'd take 'er in for a night, an' look after 'er proper. Look 'ere, I'll go an' fix it up with 'er, shall I? Then I'll come back along, an' an' wait under the wall till you bring the kid out, an' there you are—as right as ninepence!"

"Will you do that for me, Grimes? My word, you are a brick!" said Tom Merry gratefully.

"I'd do a 'eap more than that for you, Master Merry," was the grave reply of the grocer's boy.

"He's spoiling all the fun," whispered Figgins in Kerr's ear.

"Ye-es, I suppose so. But it's jolly decent of him. Grimes is the right sort," answered Kerr.

The two moved away together towards the main street of the village; and, after a moment's hesitation, the three followed. They were not due at the New House for half an hour or so yet, for they had found the tea-party anything but lively, and had left early. It seemed worth while to see whether anything happened to Tom Merry in his quest.

It was a tremendous relief to Tom's mind to feel that someone upon whom the baby had a claim was near at hand. For the kid's sake, he would have wished that the someone had not been a quarrelsome father with a habit of too frequent elbow-lifting; but that could not be helped.

"'Ere we are," said Joe Grimes, nodding towards a cottage next door to a public-house. "An' that's the pub as Bert Allen mostly uses. 'E'd be in there now, I wouldn't wonder. Are you comin' in with me, Master Merry?"

"Oh, no fear! I'll leave you to explain, Joe—that is, if you don't mind! It's awfully good of you!"



AN AEROPLANE GUN IN ACTION.

The army of our brave Allies, the French, is well equipped with guns specially constructed for repelling attacks by aircraft. Our picture shows the devastating effect of a well-aimed shell upon a German Zeppelin airship engaged in its dastardly work of bomb-dropping.



"That's all right!" answered Joe Grimes; and tapped at the door of the cottage.

Figgins & Co. had drawn near; but now they halted and screened themselves from observation inside the gate of a carpenter's yard. Just opposite them was a pump, with a stone trough.

"Let's cut back. I don't believe anything's going to happen, and it's beastly parky here!" grumbled Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, dry up!" answered Figgins. "Anything may happen. You never can tell with a chap like old Tom Merry. And

this is such a spiffing joke that it ought to be enough to keep a chap warm—let alone your fat, old man."

"What's my fat got to do with it, idiot?" asked Fatty Wynn, shivering.

"That ought to keep you warm, if the joke doesn't. The joke's enough for me—oh, Kerr! Tom Merry with a baby to take care of! Oh, my hat! I wish I could laugh!"

"What's hindering you?" growled Kerr.

He did not regard the joke as quite so rich a one as Figgins did. Something in Joe Grimes's readiness to serve Tom

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"SCOUTS TO THE FORE!"

A Magnificent New, Long, London-Jacket, Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Merry had touched him, and perhaps the thought of the helpless child left alone in the wood had played its part too. Tom Merry had been an awful ass to bring the kid away, of course. But somehow, as Kerr reflected, when Tom Merry was an ass there was always more than mere folly in what he did—and in this there seemed to Kerr something fine, in spite of its foolishness.

Tom Merry paced up and down between the pump and the public-house. He thought Joe Grimes was rather a long time on his errand, and was beginning to feel afraid that the woman would not consent to take in the kid.

Someone came out of the public-house, walking a trifle unsteadily.

"I say, Bert, you ain't leavin' us yet, are you?" shouted a fellow from within.

"Come back, Allen! There's a good three hours afore clostin'-time!" yelled another.

Tom Merry took a step or two forward. Relieved at the prospect of getting the kid out of the School House, he had made up his mind to leave further inquiry till the morrow. There would be more time then, and he could tackle this fellow Allen quietly, and find out whether Joe Grimes's conjecture was correct. After all, it was only a guess.

Now he changed his mind all in a moment. He could not let this chance pass.

"I say, your name's Allen, isn't it?" he asked politely.

"What's that got to do with you?" growled the young man.

CHAPTER 6.

Figgins & Co. to the Rescue.

It was not a promising opening, and Tom Merry hardly knew what to say next. But he had not expected any great measure of civility from Mr. Bert Allen, so he was not particularly disappointed on that score.

"Only that if it is I've got something to say to you," he replied.

"Oh, have you? But what if I don't care about listenin'! I've no particular love for you St. Jim's swells. Many's the fight I've had with some of 'em in my younger days. But that was before your time, cock-sparrer. I don't know you."

"It isn't at all necessary that you should. Look here, I don't quite know how to put it—"

"Don't put it at all, then. Hook it! I tell you I've got no use for you or any of your crowd."

"But there's something I've got to say to you," answered Tom Merry resolutely. "You've a child, haven't you? A baby girl?"

"That's no business of yours, I reckon."

"But it is, as it happens. Have you seen your wife and child to-day?"

Mr. Bert Allen swore and spat. He was never going to have anything more to do with his wife, he said, with much unnecessary emphasis and many unprintable words. As for the kid, he didn't care what became of it—not he! Let her take it. Perhaps when she had to earn a living for it and herself, too, she would find out what was what.

Then he caught Tom Merry by the arm, and, breathing beer into his face, demanded to know what he meant by it.

Tom Merry wrenched himself free.

"Keep your hands off!" he said. "I've asked you a plain question. Have you seen your wife and child to-day?"

One of Allen's boon companions came lurching out of the public-house. Allen had had too much beer; but this fellow was evidently in a far worse condition than he was.

"Whasser row, Bert?" he inquired.

"Here's a cock-sparrer from St. Jim's askin' me silly questions about my private affairs," replied Allen.

"Hit him on the cocoanut!" bellowed the other.

Tom Merry was sorry now that he had acted on impulse and spoken to Allen. He had not bargained for explaining himself to two or three Rykcombe loafers, and he had no intention of doing so.

"That's enough!" he said. "As you can't answer a civil question nicely I'll say no more—except that you haven't heard the last of this."

"Oh, you ain't goin' to back out of it like that!" said Mr. Bert Allen.

"No, no, likely!" mumbled his friend.

Tom Merry wished that Joe Grimes would reappear. Instead, however, two more sweet specimens came rolling out of the public-house.

"I've nothing further to say to you now!" snapped the St. Jim's boy. "You're not in a fit condition to be talked to."

If this was correct in the case of Mr. Bert Allen—as it was—it applied with still greater force to the other three. Allen had been treating them, and they were of the type that

connects free drinks with no limit. As long as anyone would go on paying for them they would go on guzzling.

"Give 'em a thick ear, Bert!" suggested one.

"Clout his silly young head!" said another.

"Duckinimer trough!" suggested the first line of reinforcements.

"Oh, chusek it!" said Allen. "I dare say the kid meant no harm, an' four to one's a bit longish odds."

It was the first sign of grace Tom Merry had seen in the fellow, and he built hopes upon it. Allen had, at least, some sense of fair play.

The others, it appeared, had none.

"If 'e don't out 'is stick this mianit 'e'll get ducked, for sure!" said one of them.

"That's the ticket! Hook it, Jimmy-kid, or we'll duck you!" chimed in another.

"Leave him alone!" growled Allen. "It's no concern of yours!"

But the drink had got into the heads of all three, and it inflamed their bitter feeling against St. Jim's—a feeling always apt to exist in the worst characters of a town or village near a big school.

If it had not been for Grimes, Tom Merry would have departed. There was neither profit nor glory to be gained in a scuffle with these fellows, and the odds were heavy against him. But he could not go till the grocer's boy came out.

He clenched his fists, and awaited the threatened attack.

It came. Perhaps it would not have come if one fellow had not pushed another forward, so that he stumbled against Tom Merry, trading on his toes. But that did it.

Tom Merry's left shot out, and took on the jaw of the pusher. But the pusher flung his arms around the boy, and the other two crowded in to help.

"Come on, Bert!" cried one.

"I won't have nothing to do with it," returned Allen sulkily. But he made no movement to help the schoolboy.

They were close to the pump. They picked up Tom Merry bodily, and stumbled with him up to the trough. He got an arm free, and beated one of them hard on the nose.

But they were too strong for him. In another moment he would have been ducked. Then—

"Rescue, St. Jim's!" cried the welcome voice of Figgins, and the New House three charged in.

Right and left Figgins hit out. Kerr clutched one of the loafers, and, with a scientific trip, put him on the ground. Fatty Wynn had another by the leg, and heaved his hardest, striving to upset him into the trough.

Biff!

Tom Merry was up. Down went one of the assailants. Two were now on the ground; the third was in danger of toppling over.

"Help, you chaps!" puffed Fatty Wynn.

Figg and Tom Merry dashed to his aid.

Splash!

"One in the trough!" cried Figgins. "Now for the other two!"

He collared a loafer who was just struggling up, and Fatty Wynn plumped himself down on the third. "It's all right, you fellows," said Fatty. "I can hold him down till you're ready for him."

"Ow, ow, ow! I'm drownin'!" shrieked the fellow in the trough.

"Jolly good job too!" returned Figgins unfeelingly.

"Heave ho, you chaps!"

He and Kerr and Tom Merry all heaved, and the second loafer was shot on top of the first.

Though it's a beastly shame to put such objects in clean water, that's meant for horses to drink," remarked Kerr.

"Ready for my prisoner?" inquired Fatty Wynn cheerfully.

Allen, who had stood by till that moment, now disappeared suddenly, just as Joe Grimes came out of the cottage.

Tom Merry and the New House trio seized the third man by arms and legs, and damped him, squalling, into the trough from which the other two had just scrambled.

"Look out!" cried Joe Grimes. "'Ere's the bobby comin'!"

Down the road towards the school the four bolted, and Joe Grimes followed them at a slower pace. It was not because they held the Rykcombe constable in special dread that they ran; but if Tom Merry had been recognised by him there might be awkward questions to answer at St. Jim's, and the pass which Figgins & Co. had would not cover a row in Rykcombe High Street.

But Tom Merry soon pulled up.

"I must wait for Grimes," he said. "Don't mind me, you fellows. I'm no end obliged to you for coming to the rescue, of course. Do the same for you another time."

"Oh, we don't mind waitin'!" returned Fatty Wynn obligingly.

Figgins nudged him.

"Ass!" he hissed, as Tom Merry turned and walked to meet the grocer's boy. "He thinks we don't know anything about the secret; and, of course, he doesn't want us to hear what he has to say to Grimes."

"May as well tell him," said Kerr.

"Not yet. We may have some more fun out of this first."

"Tell you what," said Fatty Wynn, "I'm beastly hungry. I don't want to say anything against your folks, Figgis; but this bread-and-butter and little cakes—things that go about three to a good-sized mouthful, aren't much good to me."

"It wasn't just what you'd call a filling tea, was it?" rejoined Figgins. "I was sorry for you two chaps. Of course, I didn't mind myself, being naturally a small eater—"

"I'm going back to buy a pound or two of biscuits," said Fatty Wynn, whose snail always ran to the practical.

His practical mind was on the biscuits as he trotted back, passing Tom Merry and Joe Grimes, who were deep in talk, without being noticed by them. As he passed he heard a few words. They were:

"I'll bring the kid out at a quarter to nine, then, just by the corner of the quad wall."

Tom Merry was the speaker. Wynn heard the answer, too—a brief one.

"I'll be there," said Joe Grimes.

Tom Merry started at a run after the others. Fatty Wynn bolted into a shop, breathlessly ordered two pounds of sweet biscuits, came out hugging the bag to his breast, and ran after his chums. But he could not resist the temptation to sample the biscuits, and that slowed down his pace, so that, in spite of the fact that he ran by fits and starts, he did not catch them up until the lights of St. Jim's were close ahead. Then he noticed that Figgins and Kerr had no companion.

"Where's Tom Merry?" he asked, with his mouth full of biscuit.

"He hasn't a pass. He's hopped in over the wall," answered Figgins.

"Did you say anything to him?"

"Do you suppose we walked along like people struck dumb?"

"I mean about—"

"Fatty, you're suffering from fatty degeneration of the brain—if you've got one—or something of the sort. Of course, I didn't say anything to him about the kid. I'm keeping that up my sleeve," answered Figgins.

"He'll ought to save Tom Merry a bit of bother, that," said Kerr.

"Eh? I don't catch on."

"Keeping the kid up your sleeve, old man."

"Suppose you call that a joke?"

"If you like," returned Kerr. "The whole thing's a joke, in a way; and yet—well, do you know, I think it shows up old Merry as a real decent sort of son."

"Didn't we know that before?" snapped Figgins.

CHAPTER 7.

Wally Looks In.

"MY word, we have had a time of it!" was the greeting of Manners to Tom Merry.

"Pleased to hear you've been enjoying yourselves," he answered.

"Enjoying ourselves!" snorted Monty Lowther. "Look here, old man, next time you're going to smuggle a kid in, you just give me warning beforehand, that's all. I'll go into the sun; I'll go across to the New House; I—I—I'll bunk! But there's one thing I won't do, and that is stay here and play nursemaid."

"Has she been much trouble?" inquired Tom Merry, glancing at the kid. "She's good enough now, though she looks a bit sticky."

The babe was asleep. Her face was smeared, and there were crumbs around her mouth, but she smiled contentedly. Tom Merry knelt on the hearthrug by the hamper, and looked at her. He was thinking about Allen and the young wife with whom Allen had quarrelled. It did not seem possible that the fellow should really care nothing about the child. There must be some good in him. And the mother—where was she?

"I say, you fellows," Tom said, looking up suddenly, what have you been giving her?"

"Well, she's sampled pretty nearly everything," answered Manners. "She doesn't care about marmalade, by the way. She put that out again jolly quick. But she's a whale on jam. And she hasn't any rooted objection to blonster paste. She ate one sardine, and wanted another; but I wasn't sure whether they weren't a bit too greasy for her. Of course, she's young yet. But I must say that for a mere kid she's got a number one appetite."

"Blonster past? Sardines? Oh, you utter asses! Did you want to poison the kid?"

"Yes," answered Monty Lowther, scowling darkly. But, of course, he did not quite mean it.

"What were you to do?" asked Manners. "She was hungry; we could tell that because when we gave her grub she stopped howling. Why didn't you lay in a supply of skilly, or pap, or whatever it is kids eat? What made you bunk off and stay away all that time?"

"Ought to be looked up for a lunatic!" growled Lowther.

"Well, she doesn't seem to have taken much harm," said Tom Merry. "If she ached in the—er—middle she'd be howling again, I suppose. By the way, did she howl much?"

"By the way!" echoed Monty Lowther bitterly. "That's all he cares!"

"Howl much?" echoed Manners. "I should say so! Why, Lowther had to tear the tablecloth off and muffle the door with it so that no one could hear, while I fed her, and tried to stop her awful row."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Did any of the other chaps come along?" he asked.

"What do you mean come along?" repeated Manners. "What do you think? They've been coming along all the evening, but we barred them out. I told Gussy he could come in if he liked to nurse the kid."

"What did Gussy say?"

"Gussy was rude—distinctly rude. I say, old man, if it wasn't that we thought the kid had had enough shifting about already, we'd have passed her on to somebody else. But it seemed a bit thick to do that. She's not a bad little beggar—when she doesn't howl."

Again Tom Merry grinned. Evidently the baby had found a way to the heart of Manners, though Lowther still remained hostile.

"It's all right," Tom Merry said. "I've fixed up for her to be taken in down the village."

"Let's take her now," answered Monty Lowther, with alacrity. He glanced at his watch. "Prep time's up. Of course we shall have to sneak over the wall, but any risk is worth taking to get rid of the little image. I tell you, she nearly drove me crazy. I thought every minute Kildare or Rusden or somebody would be along."

"Grimes is going to fetch her pretty soon. It's no good risking too much," Tom Merry answered. "There's been a row in the village already."

He proceeded to tell them about Mr. Bert Allen. Just as he had finished the handle of the door turned, and he made an instant rush for the hearthrug, intent on getting the hamper under the table before anyone could come in.

Lowther had taken the precaution to put a chair-back under the handle, and, though the legs of the chair grated horribly on the floor, making all three fear that the baby would be awakened, the door only opened an inch or two.

"Who's there?" asked Tom Merry.

"It's me," answered Wally D'Arcy's voice.

"Well, out! You can't come in here just now."

"Why can't I come in? It's important, really, Tom Merry! Is it because you've got a be—"

"Oh, drop it!" hissed Tom Merry, and moved the chair. Since Wally knew so much, there was nothing to be gained by keeping him out.

The fags' leader stepped inside, and closed the door behind him with unwonted caution. He was inky and rough-headed, as usual, but there was a solemn look on his face that was by no means usual.

"I say, you fellows, you know I'm not a sneak, don't you?" he began.

"Oh, rather not!" replied the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"And if I tell you this, it's only because I think I ought to. It isn't because I don't like Crooke, though I don't. And he's just been treating me to ginger-pop—only I can't see how that ought to make me shut up."

"You're not likely to have found out anything shady about Crooke that we don't know already," growled Monty Lowther.

"I don't know so much," said Manners thoughtfully. "Crooke has new kinds of shadiness now and then."

"I guess so," replied Wally, looking wise. "And this is one of them. I say, you've got a baby in here, haven't you?"

"Who told you?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Curly Gibson. He heard Blake and those chaps talking about it."

"Oh, hang it; the yarn will be all over the house now!"

"Of course it will," replied Wally cheerfully. "Bound to be, you know. I should think it is already. All our lot know it. I say, let's have a look at the kid, will you?"

"Is that what you came for?" asked Tom Merry sharply.

"No. Didn't I say it was about Crooke? But, of course, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 347—

I should like to see the kid. And it's all mixed up together."

The hamper was dragged from under the table, and the kid, still asleep, revealed to D'Arcy minor.

His attitude rather surprised them. They wouldn't have suspected Wally of taking any interest in babies.

He touched her cheek very gently.

"I say," he remarked, "she's a real nice kid, though grubby. You fellows don't know how to look after a baby, I can see."

"You can have her, Wally," answered Monty Lowther. "Gussy's struck with her, too. You'd better adopt her between you. I tell you straight, this study's got no use for her. If she stays, I go!"

"Oh, no thanks!" Wally replied hastily, and shut down the lid. "I wouldn't deprive you, Lowther. You chaps don't know who she belongs to, do you?"

"We've got a glimmering of a notion," Tom Merry answered. "Not to Crooke, anyhow."

"No. But Crooke's mixed up in it. Has he seen her, do you know?"

"Not that I know of," replied Tom Merry, and looked at the other two. Both shook their heads.

"That's rummy. Was there a paper or anything with her?"

"We didn't see one. But there was a safety-pin fastened to her frock, as if something might have been there," said Tom Merry, "if I hadn't been in such a hurry I expect I should have noticed it. But then, if I hadn't been in such a hurry I should never have brought the kid in."

"Crooke's got that paper," was Wally's unexpected reply. They stared at him in amazement.

"How do you know?" asked Manners.

"Seen it—I was in his study just now. And I can tell you part of what's on the paper. You needn't think I'm slinking round trying to read other chaps' letters; it was quite an accident."

"Oh, we know that, Wally! What did the paper say?"

"Oh, something about a broken-hearted young mother leaving her child to the mercy of the world—that's all I can remember," said Wally, rather shamefacedly.

Tom Merry slapped his thigh.

"That makes it as certain as anything can be that it is Allen's kid," he said; "though, of course, there wasn't much doubt about that before. What a sweep Crooke is! He must have taken the hamper up to Cutis's den, after Levison had collared it and taken it to No. 9, and Lumley-Lumley had been as good to leave his watch in it."

Wally was puzzled. He did not know the story of the quick passing-on of the hamper. Until that moment the various stages had not been clear to the Terrible Three; perhaps even now they did not fully understand how it had all happened.

"I say, Tom Merry, aren't you going to see Crooke?" Wally asked.

"Later on," answered Tom Merry, in meaning tones. "At present I've other fish to fry. It's about time we met Grimes, you fellows."

"I'm not going down with that blessed hamper," said Monty Lowther, with decision. "Half the chaps in the House know what's in it now, and they'd be streaming after us like a pack of hounds after a fox if they get only half a glimpse."

"All right. You can stay here," Tom Merry answered shortly.

"No; that's not what I mean. I don't want to back out. But we'll have to shift the kid to something else. Look here! Why not your cricket-bag, old man? It's big enough, and easier to carry than a hamper."

"It would smother her," objected Manners.

"But it's only for a few minutes, till we get her to the wall," argued his chum.

"I'll take the bag out if you like," volunteered the heroic Wally.

Tom Merry clapped him on the back with a force that nearly sent him sprawling.

"You're a brick, Wally!" he said. "The fellows won't smell a rat that way—not so big a one as they would if they saw any of us. But you'll have to be jolly careful. You've no business in the quad at this time of night, you know; and I don't want to get you into a row."

"Rows! Oh, I'm always in rows," returned Wally, with a reckless sniff.

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"Shove her in, Tom Merry. Where am I to take her to?"

The cricket-bag had been brought out and emptied. Manners now put a greatcoat inside it, and the baby was carefully laid upon this, still sleeping.

"I don't know about shutting it," said Tom Merry doubtfully.

"I say, I can't carry it open, you know!" protested Wally.

"Look here; you're not to carry it any farther than the door," Tom Merry told him. "It won't do, on second thoughts; I can't have a fag taking risks like that for me. I'm no end obliged to you, Wally; but don't go farther than the door. We won't be half a tick after you."

"All serene!" Wally answered, and clicked the bag shut.

"I say, she's a good old lump!"

He started off, staggering. Halfway down the corridor Curly Gibson met him.

"What's that, Wally—tuck!" he asked eagerly.

"No. Get out of the way, Curly; I'm in a hurry."

"Oh, hold on! What is it—straight!"

Wally could not resist the temptation to tell. He put his mouth to his chum's ears and whispered:

"Tom Merry's baby!"

"Oh, great pip! What a lark! Here, I'll help you!" — Curly caught hold of one handle, and they made good speed. By a lucky chance, they met no one. But the jolting woke the baby, and she began to howl.

"Oh, ease off, kid, do!" muttered Wally desperately.

"We'll be at the door in a minute," said Curly more hopefully. "What a row she makes, though! We'll have the whole house after us in a couple of ticks. Here they come—some of them!"

But the footsteps behind were only those of the Terrible Three. They had heard the muffled howling, and were in desperate haste to get the kid safely off the premises.

Someone else had heard—Mr. Raitton, to wit. But they did not know that.

CHAPTER 8.

A Narrow Squeak.

TOM MERRY and Manners each caught a handle of the bag, and Lowther followed them. The two fags had been told to come no farther than the door. But they could not bear to be out of anything funny that was going, and they also stole silently across the quad, in the wake of the Terrible Three.

"I hope old Grimes will be there!" said Manners fervently.

"Oh, we can depend upon him!" Tom Merry answered.

From the New House, keeping in the shadows, stole other figures. There were three of them; but two kept well behind the first, who was the tallest of the trio.

The adventurer had reached the corner of the quadrangle. The kid had now ceased to howl. Tom Merry opened the bag hastily. He was half afraid that she might have been suffocated.

But she quickly proved that nothing so dreadful had happened. As he stooped over her, she reached up and caught

him by the nose in a grip of which one would not have imagined so young a child capable. And as she pulled she howled.

Evidently the bag had not suited her views at all. She howled angrily, stormily, refusing to be comforted.

"He isn't there!" said Monty Lowther, dropping from the wall.

"Oh, hang it!" muttered Tom Merry, releasing his nose by gentle force. "What ever shall we do if he fails us? Do be quiet, kid! Hush-a-bye, then, hush-a-bye! Yes, I'll take you up if you want to be taken up, but do stop howling, for goodness' sake!"

He lifted the baby out of the bag, and she ceased to make the night hideous with her noise.

That was a relief; but the non-appearance of Joe Grimes put the adventurers in a very ticklish position. Half St. Jim's at least must have heard the howling; and if the kid broke out again detection was almost a certainty.

If only Joe Grimes would come!

"Goo-goo!" said the kid, and cussed Tom Merry's face with a hot, sticky hand.

"If Grimes doesn't come in a minute, I—I don't know what I shall do!" he groaned.

"I shall bunk!" said Lowther frankly.

FOR NEXT WEEK:

SCOUTS TO THE FORE!

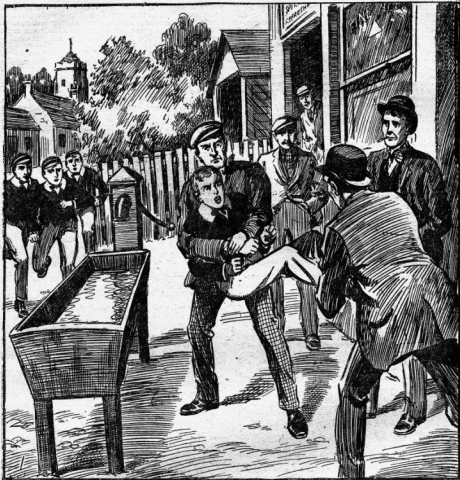
Another Splendid Long, Complete Story of the Chums of St. Jim's.

—By—

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Order in Advance.

PRICE ONE PENNY.



Tom Merry was picked bodily up, and the ruffians stumbled with him to the trough. But this was as far as they got. "Rescue St. Jim's!" shouted the welcome voice of Figgins as he and the New House Three charged in. (See Chapter 6.)

"Goo-goo! Nice!" cooed the kid, and grabbed Tom Merry's nose again.

"Hanged if it is!" he spluttered.
 "Anything but, I should say!" remarked Manners.
 "Tommy, we've been in a hole or two before, but I don't think we've ever been in a more awful one than this!"

Out of the gloom came a chuckle.
 "What was that?" demanded Tom Merry. "Was it you, Lowther? If you can see anything to chuckle about—"
 "I can't!" broke in Lowther, half in sorrow and half in anger. "This is more exciting than a funeral, but it isn't nearly as cheerful. That chap Grimes—"

"He's coming, I do believe!" whispered Manners excitedly.
 The chuckle sounded again. It came from Wally D'Arcy, close up against the wall only a few yards away, with Curly Gibson by his side.

Yes, there were certainly footsteps. Someone was coming along the road. Someone was also coming across the quad. A low whistle sounded on the other side of the wall.

Tom Merry thrust the baby into Lowther's unwilling arms.
 "Catch hold of her a moment!" he said. "I shall have to get on the top of the wall so as to lift her down safely."
 "Here, I say!" gasped Lowther. "I can't— Here,

Manners, for goodness' sake take this little image! I don't like babies! I don't know how to hold babies! I—I—"
 "Merry!" spoke an awful voice.

At the sound of it Tom Merry dropped from the wall and gazed wildly through the gloom at a gowned figure.

It was all up!
 This was almost too bitter to be borne. In the very moment when relief had arrived, they had been caught out. What would St. Jim's say when he heard? Even if he had got rid of the kid in time, the joke would have been a big one against him; but as it was— Oh, would he ever hear the end of it!
 "Lowther!" spoke the same awful voice.

"Ye-es, sir!" faltered the unfortunate owner of that name.
 "Oh, take the kid, Tom Merry!" he hissed. "I'm not going to be caught with it in my arms. Take it, I say, or—or—or I'll jolly well drop it!"

"What have you there, Lowther!"
 "I—I—I don't know, sir! At least, I—I— Oh, speak up, Tom Merry, you ass! You got us all into this beastly scrape. Speak up, can't you!"

"Have you all taken leave of your senses? What are you doing out here, and what is it you have in your arms, Lowther!"

At that moment, as if in answer, the baby began to howl once more. It was little to be wondered at for in his agitation Monty Lowther was holding her head downwards.

"Upon my word! It is—yes, I really believe it is a child!"

"Yes, sir; it's a baby!" said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"Don't say 'sir.' You've been had. It's old Figgins!"

Whispered a voice in his ear—the voice of Wally D'Arcy.

Doubt seized Tom Merry's mind. Could he trust Wally? Might not the youngster be wrong?

The tall figure looked like Mr. Railton. It was gowned, and it wore a mortar-board. So much could be seen in the gloom, for the many lighted windows prevented complete darkness in the quadrangle.

It spoke like Mr. Railton. But that proved nothing. Figgins & Co. had played games of this sort before, and had had plenty of practice in the art of mimicry.

Wally would not lie. But Wally might be mistaken. And to set upon his information, if he had made a mistake, might have grievous consequences.

"It is, I tell you! I saw that Wynn and Kerr were crawling up behind him," whispered Wally.

Then Tom Merry acted, changing everything.

"Rush him, Manners! It's Figgins!" he breathed in his chum's ear. He jumped, clutched the top of the wall, and pulled himself up just as Figgins went down before the fierce and unexpected onslaught of Manners.

"Now, old man—quick!" Tom Merry hissed, and Lowther passed the baby up to him, giving a tremendous sigh of relief as he got rid of her.

"Are you there, Grimes?"

"I'm here, Master Merry! Give me hold. Crikey, she don't 'arf' owl, does she? Oh, be quiet, kid! No, I'm not going to wait; off it is!"

And, with the crying child lurching in his arms, Grimes bolted for the village.

"You bounder! You frabjous ass!" cried Manners. Figgins was down, cap, gown, and all, and Manners sat astride his chest. "You awful bounder! You came as near as a toucher to busting up the whole show. Oh, you silly ass!"

"Rescue!" spluttered Figgins. "Kerr! Rescue! Fatty! Rescue!"

The two came rushing up. But out of the shadows there leaped upon them Wally D'Arcy and Curly Gibson, bent on striking a blow for School House against New House. Wally baited Kerr in the region of the watch-pocket, and Kerr went down across Figgins and Manners. Curly, ducking suddenly, stuck his head between the stout legs of Fatty Wynn, and Fatty plunged forward over his back on top of the heap.

"Get up! You're smothering me, you asses!" spluttered Figgins.

"Oh, pull him off, Tom Merry! He's breaking my back!" yelled Manners, forgetting all prudence.

Fatty Wynn squealed. Kerr said nothing, but wriggled out of the heap, and scrambled to his feet. As he straightened himself up a hand fell upon his shoulder, and held him in iron grip.

"What does this mean?" demanded an angry voice.

This time it really was Mr. Railton.

"Oh, jingo! What a bit of luck that he didn't turn up two minutes sooner!" whispered Lowther in Tom Merry's ear.

The sound of Joe Grimes's feet on the hard road, and the wailing of the child he carried, came to their ears in the momentary hush that followed.

"Get up, Fatty, you idiot! I want to get these things off before Railton sees me," whispered Figgins in Wynn's ear.

Manners was on his feet now. Fatty struggled up, putting his knee in the waistcoat of Figgins as he did so.

"Ow!" gasped Fatty.

He was trying to tear off the gown as he lay. The mortar-board was already on the ground. But, naturally, it is not the easiest thing in the world to disrobe while lying on one's back. It would need a good deal of practice; and Fatty had not time for that.

"Get up at once!" said Mr. Railton imperiously, and struck a match as he spoke.

The wind had quite dropped now. In the still air the match burned without a flicker. The Housemaster looked gravely from one to another.

"Merry—Manners—Lowther," he said—"Figgins—Kerr—Wynn! Humph! The association of such constituents is always apt to generate something in the nature of an explosion; but the quadrangle at this hour is not the place for experiments in human chemistry. What does this masquerade mean, Figgins?"

Fatty had done the thing thoroughly—or, rather, Kerr, an expert at making-up, had done it for him. It had not struck them that in the darkness cap, gown, and voice would be enough; and Kerr had taken a lot of trouble to make his chum's face look as much like Mr. Railton's as possible.

As Figgins stood before the Housemaster, he presented a

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grotesque caricature of that gentleman. But the gown he had borrowed had got split up the back in his efforts to tear it off; his collar was flying loose, and his face was smeared with dust over the grease-paint. Perhaps all this was in his favour, preventing Mr. Railton from recognising the caricature.

"I—wo—!—it was only a lark, sir," said Figgins.

"The lark is traditionally an early bird. This is not the hour—or the place—for larks. Go to your house at once, you three; you will hear more of this in the morning."

They moved away. Mr. Railton turned to the trio from his own House.

"I heard something that sounded to me exactly like a baby crying," he said. "That, indeed, was what brought me out. Can you explain it?"

They could have explained it, of course; and, equally, of course, they had no intention of doing so.

"It wouldn't be Fat—I mean, Wynn squealing, I suppose, sir?" answered Monty Lowther loudly.

"It certainly wasn't Wynn squealing!" answered Mr. Railton. "Follow me, you three!"

They followed him. Manners, last in line, picked up the cricket-bag, which had his greatest inside it.

The two fags had evidently made themselves scarce, and Tom Merry was glad of it. They had come out against his express orders; but they had done good service, and it was a stroke of luck that they should have escaped Mr. Railton's observation.

As they came under the lighted portal the Housemaster's eyes fell upon the bag.

"I think I perceive the objective of this expedition," he said gravely. "You were doubtless going to Ryecombe with design to bring back the materials of bihuonance and indigestion. That sort of thing must be stopped. Come to my study!"

They emerged from the study a few minutes later with stinging palms.

Tom Merry picked up the bag, which he had dropped outside.

"I was going to call you several things for not leaving it behind, old man," he said to Manners. "But I don't know. It was just as well you brought it. Throw him off the scent nicely."

"I wonder what he'd say if he knew what was in that bag ten minutes ago!" chuckled Lowther, whose spirits had gone up so much the instant the baby was fairly off the premises that not even a caning had availed to depress them again.

"It was a jolly narrow squeak, though!" said Manners, shuddering at the thought of what would have happened had Mr. Railton come along two minutes earlier.

And the juniors could still feel the effect of the cane when they went to bed.

CHAPTER 9.

Two Ask For Help.

FIGGINS & CO. were talking to Bert Allen outside the gate—or, rather, Figgins and Fatty Wynn were trying to keep up a conversation; Kerr was saying nothing, and Allen was looking uncomfortable. It was not these three he wanted to talk with, and he hailed Tom Merry's appearance with evident relief.

"Could I have a word or two with you alone, sir?" he asked, his manner very different from what it had been the night before.

"Oh, certainly!" answered Tom Merry; and the two walked a little way down the road together.

"Just our luck!" grumbled Fatty Wynn. "I wanted to know all about it. It's the baby, of course. I expect that Johnny's the kid's father. Why shouldn't we hear? We're mixed up in it all."

"Yes," answered Kerr drily. "We were so much mixed up in it that we very nearly hushed up old Merry's chance of getting the kid off the premises. If Railton had turned up a minute sooner! Well, it's a good thing Tom Merry's a forgiving sort of chap."

Allen, fifty yards or so away, did not seem to find it easy to make a start.

"Look 'ere," he blurted out at length. "I behaved pretty bad last night. The beer was in my 'ead, you know."

"Yes," answered Tom Merry gravely. "That sort of thing's at the bottom of all the trouble, isn't it?"

"Ow much do you know?" rejoined Allen. "I expect young Grimes told you a good deal. Fact, he said as much when I saw him this mornin'. The kid's safe, he said; but he wouldn't say where it was. He sent me to you. An'—well, there, I believe you're the right sort, an' I want you to give me a 'elvin' and to put straight the worst kind of a muddle that an unfort-nit chap—not but what it's mainly me own fault—ever got himself into."

"I don't know that it's much I can do," answered Merry. "But we can get things a bit clearer if I tell you how much I know—or, rather, believe—for I don't really know much."

"Go ahead!" said Bert Allen. "You needn't spare me, neither. I'm grateful to you for what you do; and now I've had time to think it over I can see as I've played a middin' round near."

"Well, then, you've got a good wife, and you haven't treated her nice! I believe you're really fond of her, and I am sure she is of you. And there's the kid, too, you know—a real first-rate kid, she is—you ought to knock off the drink, if only for her sake."

"An' I'll do it too!" declared Allen, his eyes moist. "It's kind of you to say that about the little 'un, sir, for as near as I can make out she gave you a fair old whack of trouble."

"Allen was evidently touched. Tom Merry saw his advantage and seized it.

"Never mind about the trouble," he said. "I like the kid no end. And, see here, Allen, I'm sure you mean what you say, and if you'll only stick to it everything will be as right as ninpence. You can't expect a girl to talk civilly to a fellow who comes home to her with too much on board night after night. I don't suppose she gives up caring about him, because women aren't like that; but she won't let him see that she cares. And, of course, she tells him what she thinks of him, and then there are rows."

"Yes, sir, that's the way of it," Allen said slowly. "But that's soon put straight, isn't it? You can do it. I knew you were a decent sort when you refused to join that crowd in trying to duck me last night."

"Ashamed of myself, I am. Ought to have helped you if I'd been 'arf a man. But that was the beer again."

"Oh, I had help, you know!"
Tom Merry nodded, as he spoke, towards Figgins & Co., who still stood by the gate, with Manners, Lowther, and Wally D'Arcy. He and Allen had turned back after walking a hundred yards or so.

"Yes, I knew them agin. Nice-spoken young gents, the long 'un an' the fat 'un; t'other don't say much."

"So that's all right. Now, what you've got to do is to find your wife and take her and the baby back to London."

"Yes; an' that's all a job," replied Bert Allen helplessly. "You can tell me where the kid is, young Grimes says. But 'oo's goin' to tell me where my missis is? I can't rightly make out the hang of it all."

"Perhaps this will help you," Tom Merry said; and he showed him the paper which he—Tom Merry—had obtained by force from Crooke's of the Shell. There is no need to set down the exact words that were contained. Wally D'Arcy's remark to Tom Merry is quite sufficient.

He was not prepared for the look of absolute terror that came over the young man's face as he read it. Not a bad-looking face, Allen's, a little rufy from drink, but with good features. The fellow looked fit for better things.

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

"If she—if she— I dunno 'ow to say it! If she left the kid there, an' wrote this 'ere letter, I—I do believe she's gone straight to 'er death! She'd never leave it else. She was fair wrapped up in that kid. She's gone an' made a 'ole in the water, that's what she's done; an' if she has, I tell you straight, I'll follow 'er!"

"Don't talk like that!" said the junior sharply. "Be a man, Allen! I don't believe your wife would do anything so foolish. She lost her head a bit; but I shouldn't wonder if by this time she's looking all over the place for the youngster. What you've got to do is to find her, and then everything can be put straight in about a dozen words."

"That's all very well! But 'ow am I to find 'er?"

"There's the police."

Allen shook his head wildly.

"She'd never forgive me. Always 'ad a 'error of anything like that, she had. An' I know no more'n the dead where she is now. Not anywhere near Rylcombe, I'll lay!"

"I don't think she'll have gone far away, because of the youngster," said Tom Merry.

"Will you 'elp me to find 'er, sir?"

"Of course I will! Glad to do anything I can. It's a half-holiday to-day, and I and my chums will have a look round. But how am I to know her even if I do see her!"

Allen's answer to that was to pull out of his breast-pocket a shabby pocket-book, and to take from inside it a portrait carefully wrapped up in tissue paper.

"I always 'ave carried it, sir," he said sheepishly. "Took the day after we was spliced. It's a pretty good one of 'er."

"Will you lend it to me?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes; but I'll 'ave to 'ave it back. An' if she's dead you'd better ask them to bury it with me, for I tell you I sha'n't be long followin' 'er!"

The poor fellow, overcome with repentance now, seemed to mean it; and Tom Merry checked the sharp words of reproach that rose to his lips.

"Look here, you go straight back to Rylcombe and start inquiries now," he said. "After dinner I'll show this to a dozen or so of my chums—all fellows I can trust—and we'll split up and search. If you find out anything, let Grimes know; if we find out anything we'll do the same. Grimes is the head officer. Understand? And if you want the youngster, he'll tell you where it is. You've only got to say I said he was to."

"I don't want to see the kid till I've found 'er mother," answered Allen. "I can't thank you properly, sir—"

"There's no need to thank me at all."

Allen started off at a run for the village. Tom Merry turned, to find Lumley-Lumley at his elbow.

"I say, old man, I wanted to speak to you," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Say on."

"I haven't got my watch and chain back yet. But I know where it is. At least, I know who's got it—Cuts. Or perhaps Crooke. They're both in it."

"I'd forgotten all about your watch," answered Tom Merry. "There oughtn't to be any difficulty, I should say. They can't hang on to it when you know they've got it."

"I wanted you to help me to prove that they have," Lumley-Lumley said, with just a touch of the old sullenness in his voice. "They're up to some trick, I'm sure. They've got a pass to go to Wayland this afternoon. I thought if we went—"

"Sorry, old man, but it's quite impos. You'll understand that when I tell you."

And Tom Merry explained, showing Lumley-Lumley the photograph he had borrowed.

There wasn't much of the outsider left about Lumley-Lumley. Perhaps there had never been so much of the outsider in him as some people thought.

"Oh, hang the watch and chain!" he said. "I'll help you in this game, of course."

CHAPTER 10.

In Wayland.

THESE was a hurried council in the study of the Terrible Three directly dinner was over. Quite a crowd was present—Figgins & Co., and Redfern & Co. from the New House, Jack Blake and his three staunch chums, Noble, Glyn, Dane, Skimpole, Lumley-Lumley, and two or three others.

And they were in dead earnest. At first, indeed, there was some disposition to jape. "Nursemaid," Tom Merry's baby; and other gibes of the like description were bandied about. But they fell flat. Tom Merry simply took no notice of them. He did not even smile, and they had seldom seen his face so grave.

"Merry means it," whispered Kangaroo to Bernard Glyn.

"Then I guess we'd better mean it, too," returned the inventor.

In simple words, and not many of them, Tom Merry told them the state of affairs, and asked them to help. And when they realised that the life's happiness of a man and woman might hang upon what they did, even the most feather-brained of them made up his mind to do his best.

The photograph was passed round, and each looked at it carefully, striving to take a mental impression of Mrs. Allen's face. The instructions to all were the same. If anyone saw her, he was to tell her that her husband was waiting for her at Rylcombe, that he was sorry, and that the baby was in good hands and quite well.

Then they split up into their various groups, which in some cases subdivided further; and Skimpole, who wanted to make an oration setting forth the correct scientific method of going to work to find a woman whom you did not know except in a photograph, found himself left alone. Whereupon Skimpole, and also went upon quest, for if he had a bumpy forehead and a habit of using dictionary words, he had also something of the knight-errant's heart.

The Terrible Three took bicycles and rode through Rylcombe, intending to search the roads and lanes on the side of the village farthest from the school. Figgins & Co. went to the wood, though Tom Merry had told them he couldn't see much use in that, as it was pretty certain that by this time the baby's mother would have discovered that the child had been taken away, and wouldn't waste her time hanging round the place where she had left it. That is if she still remained in the neighbourhood, of which they had no proof. She might have gone back to London, though, somehow, none of them thought that likely.

Figgins said sagely that you couldn't tell what a woman would do, anyway; and Kerr and Patty Wynn agreed. They

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were just as keen as any of the rest on finding Bert Allen's wife, and, as it turned out, they helped in doing so. At the School House Three passed the railway-station they saw Cutts and Crooke on the platform, and Tom Merry remembered what Lumley-Lumley had said about their having got a pass for Wayland. But he did not quite see how that fact bore upon their supposed possession of Lumley-Lumley's watch, and, in any case, he had not time to loiter about those two just then.

An hour or so later, after making a number of inquiries, which were fruitless of any effect except that of annoying the people applied to, the Three had halted for a few minutes by the fork of a road some miles from Rylcombe.

"Might almost as well chuck it," said Monty Lowther gloomily. "Talk about looking for a needle in a haystack! This is a million times worse, because if you found a needle you'd know it was the needle; but if anybody told you they'd seen Mrs. Allen, you couldn't be sure it was, and you might see her yourself and be none the forwarder. You can't tell people from a photograph. Look at the things old Manners takes."

"There wasn't any mistaking you in the last one I took. No one else could have looked such an utter ass!" retorted Manners.

"That old chap at the last house was quite rude," remarked Tom Merry. "I don't know whether it's really much good calling at houses like that."

"I don't believe it's any use at all," Lowther answered. "No, I'm not chucking it, so you needn't look fierce at me, old man. I am—"

From far down the Rylcombe road a yell interrupted him. Someone on a bicycle was scorching towards them at top speed.

"It's Lumley-Lumley," said Tom Merry. "I've got a clue, you fellows!" shouted the new-comer. He jumped from his machine beside them.

"She's at Wayland," he panted, "or at least she was within the last two or three hours."

"How do you know?" asked Manners.

"Figgins and that lot met a man in the wood who'd seen her there yesterday afternoon with the kid. He noticed that she looked a bit wild, he says; but, of course, he never guessed what was up. Well, just before dinner-time, he saw her in Wayland without the kid, and he thought she looked queerer than ever then. They asked him something, and that brought out the whole yarn, such as it is. There may not be much in it, but—"

"It's a clue, anyhow, and that's more than we've found anywhere yet," broke in Tom Merry. "Come along, you fellows. It's no good going back to Rylcombe; there isn't a train we could catch for ever so long; and this road will take us to Wayland all serene."

They mounted in haste, and rode hard.

"Where are Figgins & Co.?" asked Manners.

"They had'n't bikes, you know. I fancy they went off to get them. It was quite by chance I saw them. I was hunting alone. They told me you fellows had come over, and I thought even if I didn't run across you before I got to the fork of the roads, it would only be three or four miles further than the shortest way."

"Then for a time they spoke no more, but rode their fastest, pedalling hard uphill, free-wheeling down.

"Oh, hang it all!" Lowther's back tyre had punctured with a sound like a revolver-shot. He jumped off.

"Don't wait, you fellows!" he shouted. "I'll repair the beastly thing and come on!"

They had no intention of waiting in any case. They rode on, and a minute or two later Manners, looking round, saw Lowther a mere speck by the roadside.

Manners would have done better not to look round. The road was ratty. His front wheel slipped into a rut, and he went flying off over the head. The machine came down with a crash.

Tom Merry and Lumley-Lumley dismounted in haste and picked him up.

"Hurt, old man?" asked Tom Merry anxiously. For Manners had gone pale, and he limped when he tried to walk.

"Wrenched my ankle a bit. And the jigger's crooked—left pedal crank bent—see? You two go on; it's no good waiting for me."

"Sorry to leave you," answered Tom Merry. "But I really think we'd better get along."

Somehow these accidents seemed to make the need for haste more urgent. The two who still pedalled on felt more than ever that it might be a matter of life and death on which they rode.

"Look out!" said Lumley-Lumley sharply. "Some ass has been breaking a bottle!"

Tom Merry had glanced aside at a milestone, and the broken glass had done its work.

"Only two miles to Wayland," he said. "Ride on, old chap; I'll keep up with you if I can, and if I can't don't you wait for me."

"Going to ride it on, the rim?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Yes. It's my own jigger, and I'll smash the thing up before I give in or waste time when we're so near Wayland!"

Riding a machine with a deflated back tyre is hard work, in any case. It becomes harder when the rider has made up his mind to keep up with a comrade who labours under no such disadvantage.

Lumley-Lumley did not slacken, but Tom Merry kept pace with him. The worst passed down his face; he was jolted horribly, the vibration causing a queer, uncomfortable feeling in his calves; but he held on.

"Thank goodness for that!" he said, as they reached the top of a hill and saw Wayland in the valley below them.

He did not cease pedalling. Free-wheeling with a punctured back tyre wasn't fast enough for him. But it was easier downhill, and they were now on a main road, smoother and better kept.

Into Wayland they came side by side, and suddenly Tom Merry jumped off, for he had seen Skimpole.

That eminent scientist had drawn his attention by waving a baggy umbrella. Skimpole was probably the only fellow at St. Jim's who would have brought out with him a gamp like that. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy might carry an umbrella, but his would be a smoothly-rolled, slim article.

"Hallo, Skimpy! Seen anything?" asked the cock of the Shill hurriedly.

"I have seen her—Mrs. Allen! I am sure—well, almost sure of it. I should be quite sure but for the lamentable circumstance that I had twice accosted other individuals of the opposite sex who turned out not to be the person of whom I was in quest. One of them was quite rude to me when I said that her husband was at Rylcombe, and that the baby was safe and well. She had, it appears, no husband and no baby; and she seemed to—"

"Oh, dry up, Skimpy! I can't listen to all that now. Where is she?"

"She went this way. The other person seemed to take it as a joke. She said, 'Garn, Goggles! 'Oy yer gittin' at!' I was quite sure then she was not Mrs. Allen, of course. I am afraid my memory for faces is somewhat defective," added Skimpole meekly.

Lumley-Lumley had dismounted also, and the three turned down a side-street together, Skimpole flourishing his baggy umbrella, the other two wheeling their bicycles. To ride up might have meant missing the woman for whom they sought.

"This street goes down to the river," said Lumley-Lumley gravely; and Tom Merry nodded assent with equal gravity. The same thought had occurred to him, and he remembered what Allen had said about his wife's "making a hole in the water." He would not believe such a thing likely, and yet he could not help a feeling of dread.

They rounded a bend, and saw the river before them. And there stood Bert Allen's wife!

They had no doubt at all that it was she. Young, pretty, slim-figured, she had yet in her attitude a look of hopeless misery, as of one with whom life has gone all awry.

She stood with her back to the water, and seemed to be gazing at the front of an old, untenanted house opposite. But Tom Merry guessed that she saw nothing. Certainly she did not see them.

"Did you speak to her—tell her it was all right?" he demanded of Skimpole.

"No. As a matter of fact, Merry, my courage failed me. After my two previous misadventures, I feared lest I should be in error. As I have said, my memory for faces is somewhat defective."

Still she did not see them. The empty house was the only one past the bend; and at that moment she and the Three were the only people visible on the bank. They noticed that she was very close to the edge, but the fact that she had turned away from the river suggested that her being there was merely an accident. She could have had no intent to take her own life. The poor girl had only wandered down here in instinctive search for a place where she could be alone with her misery.

"Dear me! I did not know that Cutts and Crooke were engaged in the search, although I was aware that they travelled to Wayland by the same train that brought me," remarked Skimpole.

The two St. Jim's fellows mentioned had just emerged from a narrow lane that led down past the empty house. Tom Merry saw Crooke nudge Cutts. The Fifth-Former glanced across and perceived the Three. He said something to Cutts, and they turned back.

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At that moment a shout was heard. The woman on the bank, roused from her seeming trance of misery, looked up, shrieked, slipped back, and plunged heavily into the river!

CHAPTER 11.

Two Rescues—and a Discovery.

TOM MERRY rushed to the bank and dived straight in. He took the water clean, like the fish swimmer he was.

Two splashes followed him. Lumley-Lumley's dive was not as clean as Tom Merry's. The third splash was not a dive at all. It was a mere flounder.

Skimpole had not been guilty of that flounder, or Cutts, or Crooke. The third splash was made by Bert Allen himself.

Doubtless, it was the unexpected sight of her husband that had startled Mrs. Allen. She could hardly have been aware how very near to the bank she was.

The river ran fast, swollen by recent rains; and Tom Merry, hampered by his boots and clothes, and none the better for his hard riding, had his work cut out.

But he had plenty of self-confidence, as well as plenty of pluck, and he never doubted his ability to get Mrs. Allen safe to land. He clutched her by the collar of her coat as she rose, and, managing to get her face uppermost, struck out with his one free arm for the bank.

A hoarse scream smote his ears, and then came a gasping cry from Lumley-Lumley:

"Help, somebody! This chap can't swim! He's dragging me under!"

"Help, Cutts! Help, Crooke!" yelled Tom Merry. For the moment he could give no aid, though now, in spite of the swirling stream, he was nearing land. Welcome, indeed, was the sight of Skimpole's begoggled face and Skimpole's outstretched gamp.

Skimmy, with great presence of mind, scarcely to be looked for in so eminent a scientist, had thrown himself to earth and extended his umbrella as far out as he could reach it.

Off came the jacket of Cutts in all haste. Off came the jacket of Crooke somewhat less speedily. Crooke waited to pull off his boots also, Cutts did not.

Tom Merry clutched the umbrella. Skimpole hauled gallantly. Between them they got the young woman, now unconscious, on the bank. Then Tom Merry, half submerged still, let himself drop back, turned, and struck out hard towards where Lumley-Lumley strove bravely to save Bert Allen's life.

It was only in the first moment that Allen had struggled with his rescuer, as a non-swimmer is so apt to struggle, losing his head. Then the fellow's pluck had come back to him. But he could do nothing to help himself, and quite certainly Lumley-Lumley would not have got him ashore. Just as certainly, too, Lumley-Lumley would not have swum ashore without him.

Cutts was ahead of Tom Merry, swimming strongly and well.

"I'll take Lumley!" he gurgled.

And Tom Merry wondered why he had made that choice. Perhaps Gerald Cutts could not have explained it himself. It was not wholly, if at all, due to a desire for the easier task of the two.

And possibly Cutts's was not the easier task. For Allen, still further reassured by a cool word of advice from Tom Merry, really behaved well, while Lumley-Lumley didn't behave at all; for he was unconscious and half-drowned, and Cutts, to whom rescue work was new, had no small difficulty in getting him to land.

It was done, though, Skimmy's umbrella again aiding, and three dripping fellows stood on the bank, while a woman opened her eyes and struggled to sit up, and a boy lay like one dead a few yards away.

In a moment Bert Allen was on his knees by his wife's side, lifting her head, calling her by tender names, crying, repentant beyond words.

"Why, Bert," she said, in astonishment, "you're all well! You never—surely you never—why, you can't swim a stroke!"

"What's that matter? You were in the river. An' how was I to think about whether I could swim or not?" he answered almost fiercely.

And Tom Merry, Skimpole, and Cutts, hearing, didn't quite know whether to think him a hero or a fool. He could not possibly have been of any use; he had come near to drowning Lumley-Lumley, and yet in his thoughtless, absurd leap to the rescue he had shown himself a better man than they had thought him.

"Little Molly!" they heard her say; and they turned away, as Allen answered:

"She's all right, my darling, thanks to the young gent what saved your life."

But Mrs. Allen had no thought for Tom Merry then, either as his small daughter's rescuer or her own. Her arms were round her husband's neck, and she cried upon his wet shoulder.

Crooke was lacing up his boots again now. Cutts and Tom Merry turned their attention at once to Lumley-Lumley. Skimpole pounced suddenly upon a white object that lay on the grassy bank, and, picking it up, inspected it with the greatest curiosity.

Lumley-Lumley's eyes opened, and he smiled feebly.

"It's all right, you chaps!" he said. "I oughtn't to have been such an ass. But I got dragged under, and I swallowed about a bucketful of—oagh!"

When one has swallowed a bucketful or so of water one has to disgorge it. Lumley-Lumley had to do that, and he didn't like it a bit. It was lucky that he did not think of himself as in any way a hero, because this business scarcely fitted in with the role. But the others recognised his pluck; and Tom Merry was wondering what made Cutts's face look so queer and drawn as the Fifth-Former gazed down at the fellow he had rescued.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "Dear me! If this is not the most surprising circumstance I ever encountered! I have picked up a letter addressed to Lumley-Lumley!"

"Nothing very surprising about that," answered Tom Merry. "I suppose it fell out of his pocket."

"That could hardly be, Merry, because he would not have written to himself. And this letter, although stamped and addressed to him, has evidently not been through the post."

Crooke looked up sharply; and Cutts made a hasty step forward, then drew back, with a toss of the head that seemed to say that he threw up the whole affair. Probably he wished that he could.

"Here, I say, Skimmy, hand over! That letter belongs to me!" cried Crooke.

"Dear me! How very extraordinary—incomprehensible even—that you should be writing to Lumley-Lumley!" said the scientific one.

He made no movement to hand over the letter, but glanced questioningly at Tom Merry.

"Hand over, I say! That's my business!" said Crooke. His face had gone a greenish-yellow, and his eyes had a frightened look.

Lumley-Lumley was in no case to claim the letter.

"I think I'll take charge of it," said Tom Merry.

"No, you won't!" spluttered Crooke angrily. "It's mine, I tell you; it must have fallen out of my pocket when I pulled off my coat. It's mine, isn't it, Cutts?"

One moment Cutts hesitated; then he spoke out. His better nature was on top at that moment. It is hard to hate a fellow whom you have just rescued from drowning; and, though Cutts would not have pretended that he had run any very serious risk, the plunge to Lumley-Lumley's aid had wrought a change—it might be only a temporary change—in him.

"No," he said. "It's not. You'd better take it, Merry!"

"You can't sink out of it like that!" roared Crooke, his mean mind aflame at what he held to be betrayal by his accomplice.

"I don't want to sink out of anything. I'll answer for my share when the time comes to answer," Cutts said, and stalked away, dripping water. Crooke snatched up his jacket and ran after him.

Lumley-Lumley had finished getting rid of the river-water he had swallowed now, and he turned over and sat up, white about the gills, but undaunted.

"What was that about a letter of mine?" he asked.

"Tom Merry handed it to him. He was just about to slit it open, full of curiosity to see what could be inside, when Allen spoke:

"Mr. Merry, sir, I danno what we'd better do. I'm afraid as my missis will be entchin' her death of cold."

"I say, old man, have you any money?" whispered Tom Merry to Lumley-Lumley, who, having felt in his pocket to make sure that his cash was not at the bottom of the river, nodded.

"There's a decent temperance hotel just up the street," Tom Merry told Allen. "Come along there, and we'll see what can be done. We all want to get dry, of course; but Mrs. Allen matters most, and I don't doubt the landlady will do her best for her."

"This is Mr. Merry, the young gent what found our little Molly in the wood and took care of her, and what saved your life, Madge," Bert Allen told his wife.

She could not speak for emotion. She grasped Tom Merry's hand, and, lifting it suddenly to her lips, kissed it. Drops fell on it that were not water from the river, and the junior felt a lump in his throat as he saw how overwrought she was.

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"That's all right," he said huskily. "Molly's no end of a dear little thing Mrs. Allen. All of our chaps are quite fond of her."

And Skimpole, bowing politely, said that he was in a position to corroborate that statement.

The landlady of the temperance hotel took Mrs. Allen upstairs at once. Her husband said he could fit Bert Allen out with a change, and the three St. Jim's boys, finding that there was a train to Rykcombe within half an hour or so, decided to return by that, getting as dry as they could meanwhile before a roaring fire.

"If there's any difficulty about cash, Allen," said Tom Merry on the quiet, "just tell me."

"There ain't sir. I've got enough. Thanks all the same. But if I begin thanking you, I dunno where I'll stop."

"Then don't begin," laughed the junior. "I suppose you'll stay here to-night? It would be best, I should think, after what your wife's been through."

Allen shook his head.

"No fear, sir! She won't be 'appy till she gets the kid in 'er arms."

"Well, I'll see you to-morrow, then."

"You may count for certain as we sha'n't go back without seeing you, Mr. Merry, that you may," answered Allen.

On the way to the station Lumley-Lumley silently handed Tom Merry something that gave him quite a shock of surprise.

"A pawn-ticket!" he gasped. "My word! What next?"

"It came out of the envelope that Skimpy picked up," said the millionaire's son. "It was addressed to me in printed letters—see? And I guess it wouldn't have been posted either here or at Rykcombe. Oh, it was my watch and chain, of course; they got a good whack on them, though not as much as they were worth. Uncle always leaves a margin."

"But—you'd have had to shell out all this money to get them back?"

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"If I may venture a remark," said Skimpole, flourishing his gamp. "I should say that the proceedings of Crooke and Cutts were scarcely characterised by that nice standard of honour which—"

"Oh, ring off! You mean, in English, that it was a dirty, dishonest trick!" said Tom Merry. "What shall you do, Lumley-Lumley?"

"Nothing. Cutts saved my life," was the answer.

"Cutts wouldn't say so, I guess. Bit of a boulder, but he'd stop short of claiming all that. And Crooke didn't help, anyway."

"I don't see what I can do."

"Leave it to me. We are sure to see them at the station. If you let this slide altogether— But no; it can't be done!" answered Tom Merry firmly.

They had not a minute to spare at the station, and it was quite by luck that they chanced to hit upon the compartment in which the two conspirators were. No one else was in it.

As soon as the train had started Tom Merry slapped the pawn-ticket down on the seat in front of Crooke.

"You'll hand over the money you got on that watch and chain to Lumley-Lumley at once," he said.

Cutts was shivering, and blue with cold; but even he did not present quite so forlorn an appearance as Crooke did then.

"I—I can't!" the cad gasped. "At least, not—not all of it. I've spent a—couple of pounds."

Tom Merry looked at him in disgust. Skimpole placed a hand upon his bumpy forehead and rolled his eyes. Cutts glared. Lumley-Lumley turned away.

"What! Of Lumley-Lumley's money?"

"I—I— Of course, I meant to pay it back!" burred the cad.

"Oh, no doubt! That's why you took such precious care that he shouldn't know who addressed the envelope, isn't it? Shell out!"

"Look here, Merry!" said Cutts roughly. "I hope you don't think I'd any idea of this. I'll own I agreed to the pawning, just for a joke on Lumley; but it's the solemn truth that the money question didn't enter my head. Do you believe me?"

"It's no odds whether I do or not, Cutts. I don't think a heap of you, anyhow," Tom Merry answered. Then he remembered that Cutts had played a manful part down by the riverside, and he added hastily: "Yes, I do believe, then, but it was a low trick at the best."

"I had a grudge against Lumley-Lumley," said Cutts. "I thought it would be a bit of a score against him that he should have to go to Wayland and take the watch out of pawn, but that was all."

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, "THE PENNY POPULAR," "CHUCKLES," 10.

Every Monday. Every Friday. Every Saturday, 2.

Lumley-Lumley turned.

"You saved my life to-day, Cutts!" he said. "Will you shake hands now?"

"Rats about saving your life! But I'll shake, of course!" And they gripped hands.

"Shell out!" repeated Tom Merry to Crooke, and unwillingly the cad obeyed.

"You'll pay the rest within a week," snapped the hero of the 88th. "On that condition, and because of what Cutts did, we'll keep this affair dark. But I didn't think even you could be such a howling cad as you've proved yourself within the last twenty-four hours, Crooke!"

He swept up the money from the seat, a handful of gold and silver, and gave it to Lumley-Lumley, who pocketed it without a word.

Manners and Monty Lowther, the former a bit lame still, had just reached the gates when they got there. Crooke and Cutts had gone on ahead, but not together.

"Found her, and it's all right!" cried Tom Merry.

"Hurrah!" shouted his chums.

Cutts was passing across the quadrangle to the School House. Lumley-Lumley looked after him wistfully. He held that Cutts had saved his life, and he wished very much that he could feel that he liked his rescuer.

Perhaps Tom Merry understood. He said something in a low tone to Lumley-Lumley.

"What's that about the Ethiopian's spots and the leopard's skin, old man?" asked Manners.

"Ask me another," replied Tom Merry politely.

Mr. and Mrs. Bert Allen had not expected a crowd at the station to see them off the next morning. Neither had Tom Merry, and at first he was a little bit annoyed about it, and disposed to blame Manners and Lowther for helping the cat out of the bag.

But, after all, those who had turned up had all helped in the search, and felt that they had an interest in the young couple thus reunited—through Tom Merry, as they all declared.

Mrs. Bert Allen looked quite bright and happy, and the baby smiled gleefully at everybody, and said "Goo-goo!" and "Nee!" The other fellows wanted Tom Merry to take her up in his arms, but he could not quite see himself doing that.

Allen himself was a trifle shamefaced, but full of honest gratitude and resolution to behave better in the future.

"I've taken the pledge, sir," he said gravely, "and I'll keep it, too! If ever I'm tempted to break it, I reckon the thought of you will help me."

The young husband and wife got into the train, and the St. Jim's boys crowded round the door of the compartment.

"Weally, Tom Mewry," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his monocle to his eye. "I confess you should not let this happy occasion pass without something in the way of a speech, don't you know?"

"Oh, rats, Gussy!" replied Tom Merry.

"Wats, my friend, is a vulgah expression. Since you will not make a speech, I myself—"

But the guard's flag waved, the guard's whistle blew, the train began to move.

"Goo-goo! Nice!" said Baby Molly, and her mother held her up to Tom Merry's face.

He behaved heroically. In sight of them all, he kissed the kid!

"Three cheers for the babe in the wood!" cried Jack Blake.

"Aah!" snorted Manners. "Her mother doesn't want to hear any more about that, I guess!"

"Three cheers for Tom Merry!" shrilled Skimpole.

And the cheers rang out lustily, whether for Tom Merry or for "Tom Merry's baby," no one knew. It did not matter, anyway.

"Rough on you, old man!" said Jack Blake. "Last you'll see of the kid you meant to adopt—eh?"

"Not at all. I've promised to look them up when I'm in town," answered Tom Merry quite coolly.

"Bai Jove! And I'll go with you, dear boy, if you'll have me!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

THE END.

(Another grand, long complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled "Scouts to the Fore!" Order Early. One Penny.)

CONTRABAND OF WAR!

A Special Complete Story of an English Mechanic's Battle against a German Spy in Austria.

At the Austrian Seaport.

FRED MILDREN sat up and stared about him in a bewildered manner for a few moments, but could not understand how he came to be in his present position. Gradually, however, his scattered senses came back to him.

He had been on his way to the seaport of Trieste with an aeroplane which experts declared was going to revolutionise warfare. After having seen his 'plane made ready for disembarkation from the ship which had brought it from England, he had gone to the nearest hotel to obtain lunch. He knew little more after that; but there was one thing which was impressed upon his mind—that was that he had been set upon by three men, and stemmed by a heavy cane wielded by a swarthy stranger. It was in a hut that he now came to, and although the door was open, he could see nothing but waste land lying before him. Even at that moment a man entered with food, which he gave to Fred, but the visitor spoke no word.

For nearly a fortnight Fred was in that predicament, his food being brought to him regularly by the same man, until at last he was able to break from his bonds and escape.

His first action was to go straight to the port of Trieste where he was met by a member of the Austrian police, who informed him that a man had endeavoured to take away the aeroplane, but they—the police—had refused to allow it to be removed, as the captain had said that the man who demanded the aeroplane was not the man who had brought it from England.

Fred had left England before the war had broken out, and had heard very little of what was going on in Europe, or the chances are he would not have hesitated in his manner of disposal of the wonderful aeroplane with which he had been entrusted.

"What the dickens am I to do now?" he asked himself. "This Herr Hauptmann was to meet me as soon as the boat came alongside, and that was goodness knows how long ago! Phew! I'll be in a pretty fine fix if the beggar doesn't turn up at all!"

Mr. Speed, the inventor of the machine, had travelled to the Austrian capital by rail, and a certain Herr Hauptmann had been selected to go down from Vienna to Trieste to meet Fred and bring him with the monoplane to the city by train.

It was at Vienna that tests were to be carried out. Speed was smarting under the ingratitude of the English Government, who had refused to see the qualities of the machine. But Speed would never have allowed the 'plane to leave England had he known war was going to be declared.

And here was Fred Mildren stranded, as it were, on the quayside at Trieste, without a word of the language to help him, and without a single friend as far as he knew in the whole of the Austrian Empire.

He looked round him with a grim laugh in search of someone British among the busy multitude.

Italians, Germans, Greeks, Armenians he saw; even the ship's officers were German, but never a face that was British.

"I'll have to go to the Consul," he decided at length. "I'll get him to telegraph to the gov'nor for me. Jinty, though! The meeting opens the day after to-morrow!"

A shrill whistle, and a string of warning orders drew his attention to the boat. From her hold a huge packing-case was being slowly lifted by a derrick, a dozen men guiding it carefully past the hatch-coamings.

It was the monoplane, packed for transit, and Fred went forward to claim it.

In a few moments it was lowered to the quay, and then, as Fred glanced round in search of someone in authority, suddenly a hand fell upon his shoulder, and a pleasant voice said, in broken English:

"M'sieur Mildren, I believe, is it not so?"

Fred swung round with a sigh of relief. His eyes fell upon a tall, dark-featured man, who was gazing at him inquiringly under a pair of bushy eyebrows, while he thoughtfully stroked a long black moustache of tremendous proportions.

"Herr Hauptmann at last!" ejaculated Fred impulsively.

"I have been here every day for the last two weeks!" said the German. "Have you been captured by spies?"

He accompanied the words with a grim laugh, and Fred started.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing!"

The pleasant smile never left his features, which would have appeared almost saturnine in repose, so swarthy was the stranger's complexion. He drew out a bundle of papers as he spoke, and displayed them for Fred's inspection.

The young aero-mechanic glanced at them, recognising a letter of introduction written by Henry Speed himself, and one or two letters in English from the officials of the flying meeting introducing Herr Adolf Hauptmann to Mr. Fred Mildren.

Fred felt so relieved from his anxiety that he scarcely looked at them more than to satisfy himself that this tall stranger was his guide to Vienna.

"I'm glad to meet you, sir," he said. "And mighty glad you've come! I was beginning to think I'd have to throw myself on the care of the British Consul."

A keen, quick glance shot from the stranger's eyes, but it was gone in a moment, as, with a light laugh, he turned away, chatting gaily, directing his steps towards the big Customs House that stood back from the wide quay.

Fred Mildren could not help thinking that, for a German, as he supposed Herr Hauptmann to be, the stranger was remarkably dark in complexion, and his tall, well-knit figure didn't seem to tally in the least with Fred's notions. To him the typical Teuton should be stout and phlegmatic, with a flaxen moustache, and puffy, fat cheeks.

"Suppose he's half German and half French, with a dash of Italian thrown in," smiled Fred to himself, as he stepped out beside his guide, keeping pace with Hauptmann's long, swinging stride.

At the Customs House Herr Hauptmann soon arranged matters through a lengthy conversation with one of the officials, in which Fred managed to catch one or two words of German which he knew, showed him that things might, by no means have been all plane sailing had he been left to his own resources.

"The idiots would have made trouble!" laughed Hauptmann, as they stepped out into the afternoon sunshine again. "Aeroplanes, you see, are just now—what you call, ach! yes—contraband of war. Our turbulent neighbour across the Border would give much to be able to smuggle a 'plane or two such as yours, over for the use of the Allied armies. Here, in Austria, we have to be careful!"

"A nice job for a chap who knows no word of the language!" laughed Fred.

Never in all his life had he met with a pleasant companion, thought Fred, as, with a flow of conversation that was incessant, the tall German busied himself with the superintendence of embarking the huge packing-case on the railroad truck which was to convey it to Vienna.

The light was fading when all the details connected with their work were ended, and at last, with everything finished, Hauptmann invited Fred, with a gay smile, to dine with him.

"We have an hour and a half before we start," he said. "Come, my friend; I am hungry! What say you?"

"Hungry, sir!" answered Fred, with a laugh. "Why, I should jolly well think I am! I've eaten nothing since breakfast!"

"Then so be it. And we'll cement our friendship, and drink success to your master, Henry Speed!"

He led the way up the steps of a handsome hotel, and in a few minutes, all thought of his troubles at an end, Fred was seated before a sumptuous repast, recounting, as the stranger tactfully drew him out, the hundred-and-one trivial details of his voyage from England in charge of the 'plane, and his conviction that Speed on his new machine, designed and built by himself, would carry all before him at Vienna.

The Awakening.

A LOW, monotonous drumming sound, that seemed to throb through his temples and deaden his senses—a sound like a distant cataract—caused Fred Mildren to open his eyes stupidly.

For a moment or two he could distinguish nothing in the deep gloom which surrounded him. He realised that he was reclining in a half-sitting posture, and that, a few feet away from him, was a group of shadowy figures, their heads bent together as they whispered in eager consultation.

"Where on earth am I?" Fred wondered.

Then, in a flash, almost with amusement, he realised that

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the drumming he heard was the familiar sound of wheels, and that he was in a railway-carriage. Its light was shaded with a green shade, and the shadowy figures were those of his fellow-passengers.

"Of course," smiled Fred; "I'm on my way to Vienna! It must be the middle of the night. When did we leave Trieste? We must—"

A sudden wave of astonishment swept through him. When had they left Trieste?

As clear as light he remembered—the dinner-table in the hotel, Hauptmann's witty conversation, the coffee they had drank together.

And after that—

After that was an utter and absolute blank! In vain Fred directed his confused thoughts back to what had happened at their merry little table. He remembered perfectly every corner, every incident, every breezy remark almost of his companion—everything, indeed, to that last cup of black coffee! And then, for him, the world seemed to have stopped moving!

"What the blazing thunder!" gasped Fred, in utter bewilderment. "I remember Hauptmann saying 'Success to the British representative!' I remember sitting down. I'm hanged if I can remember one second after that!"

From that moment Fred Milder's mind was an utter blank. Yet, here he was in a bumping, rumbling railway carriage, racing through the night to Vienna. And how he had got there, or when, was an utter and absolute mystery.

He peered through the shaded gloom of the railway carriage. Perhaps Herr Hauptmann was one of the group of figures in the far corner?

"Herr Hauptmann!" he called.

In a flash the four men sprang round. For one instant Fred felt that they were staring at him in eager astonishment. The next, one of them uttered a low, curt warning, and, simultaneously, the remaining three rose, crept silently and swiftly out into the corridor, and vanished.

The man who had spoken stepped quickly across the compartment, and bent over him, and Fred saw that it was Hauptmann himself.

"Ach, Mistaire Milder, you wake at last, hein? Himmel, I thought you would sleep till morning!"

"But what on earth has happened?"

"Happened!" The German broke into a sympathetic laugh. "Happened, mein friend! So! You do not remember—hein? Why, after dinner, you suddenly turned white, and next moment scared me greatly by fainting clean away. There was a doctor in the train. He said that you had fainted from sheer exhaustion, and would be quite well again after a sleep. How feel you now—hein?"

"Fainted from exhaustion!" said Fred in puzzled tones. "Why, I—I feel pretty fit!"

Then he experienced a strange half-numbed sensation in his limbs, and he felt weak and slack, but beyond that he was perfectly well.

He looked up into the dark face of the big man, and suddenly a dawning suspicion flashed across his mind.

Had he been drugged!

In an instant Fred's thoughts went back to the dinner-table and the coffee. Who was this Herr Hauptmann—this man who spoke German and mixed his English with odd ejaculations in French and Italian, and sometimes a language which Fred had never heard?

Had he wilfully drugged Fred Milder? If so, why?

Hauptmann was quick to notice the dawning suspicion in Fred's eyes. A quick, angry gleam shot into his own, only to vanish as swiftly as it came, and he turned away with a careless gesture.

"We are nearing Vienna, my friend," he said. "Come, a little brandy will do you good!"

He busied himself over his travelling valise, and Fred followed him with his eyes. As he did so he caught a glimpse of a dark, evil-looking face, pressed close to the corridor window, peering into the carriage below the half-drawn blinds!

It was gone in a flash. But, brief as had been Fred's glance, it had warned him of some hidden danger. He sat up, straightened himself in his seat, and gathered all his strength together.

"Herr Hauptmann," he said quietly, "who are your three friends? Those that were in the carriage just now? Why are they travelling with us?"

Fred spoke the words coolly, almost indifferently, but their effect on Hauptmann was marked. The brandy he was pouring into a meal cup shook in his hand, and the golden fluid spilled, and splashed over the carriage cushions.

Fred interpreted the signs clearly enough. Hauptmann had not realised that Fred had seen the three men. He did not

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know that he had sat with his eyes open for several minutes before he spoke.

The German turned with a forced laugh, extending the cup towards Fred.

"Friends! Himmel, I have no friends, save you. They are mere travellers. Just looked in for a chat. Come, drink, my friend!"

"Travellers! Dropped in for a chat at two o'clock in the morning! Likely!" thought Fred.

He took the cup from Herr Hauptmann's hands, and then, very coolly, he emptied its contents on the floor.

"No, thank you!" he said calmly. "You see, I might—or—faint again! That would never do, would it?"

Hauptmann could not fail to notice the meaning pause. His black brows drew down into a frown, his eyes flamed with sudden anger, and his swarthy cheeks reddened.

But, before he could reply, suddenly a shrill scream sounded from the engine whistle, and the next moment the brakes ground down on the wheels with a dull roar.

For one instant Hauptmann stood regarding Fred, a strange mixture of doubt and anger in his eyes. The next an oath, uttered in a language that Fred knew was German, broke from his lips, and he sprang to the carriage window.

For a minute or so he hung far out into the night. The next the train was brought to a standstill, and he turned back into the carriage, and strode to the corridor entrance.

"I shall be back in one moment!" he said curtly, and was gone.

Fred Milder sprang to his feet. All his suspicions crystallised in a flash into one grim conviction.

Something was wrong. Hauptmann was tricking him! But how or why he could not think!

He darted to the corridor side of the carriage, and tugged at the handle of the door. It was locked! Hauptmann had locked it!

With set teeth and grim jaw, Fred sprang to the window and looked out. Ahead a gleaming red eye showed where a signal stood at danger, and, silhouetted against the light of the engine furnace, he could see the figure of the guard as he hung, watching the signal from the brake-van.

Fred glanced to the rear of the train. He was occupying the very last carriage of all, and directly next to it was secured the tremendous bulk of the monoplane's travelling crate.

And then suddenly below him, in the pitch blackness of the night, the light flashed for a moment from the carriage windows upon the stooping form of a man, and then upon another and another!

They were running, crouched down, towards the end of the train. For a moment or two Fred watched in breathless excitement. Then suddenly the train began to move, gathering speed with every yard.

A cry of mingled rage and surprise broke from Fred Milder's lips as he looked.

The train was going on, but the monoplane was being left behind! Those dark figures in the night had uncoupled the lorry!

For one instant Fred Milder knew not whether to shout for assistance. One glance showed him that there was no other means of communicating with the guard. Then, in a flash, he had taken his decision.

Not waiting to collect his travelling traps, he tore at the door-handle.

It was locked!

But the train was gathering speed at every moment. Already the truck was fifty yards behind. There was no time to lose! Even now the risk was tremendous!

Fred Milder, his teeth set, his eyes alight with anger and excitement, heled himself to the sill of the carriage window. He flung one leg over, and then the other, and lowered himself, clinging by his hands, to the footboard below.

Then, with up-flung arms, and a half-breathed prayer upon his lips, he leaped out and forward into the blackness!

On the Frontier—The Carpathian Heights.

HOW long Fred Milder lay beside the railway metals he never knew.

His fall had stunned him, and as he woke, slowly to returning consciousness, he wondered for some time where he was. Then, as gradual recollection returned to him, he sat up. To his relief, he was uninjured, though sorely bruised, from his desperate leap.

"Thank Heaven, I'm not hurt! The blackguards! What can be their object in stealing the plane, I wonder!"

There seemed no answer to the riddle at that moment, and Fred struggled to his feet and looked about him. On either side of the railway rose steep, precipitous slopes, and, far above him, the fitful moonlight fell upon towering mountain peaks capped with snow.

In a valley many feet below a cluster of twinkling lights

marked some distant village. All round him were rocks and boulders strewn upon the slopes of the mountain-sides. But of the monoplane and the men who had stolen her there was no sign!

Fred set his teeth grimly. His duty was plain and clear. For some reason Hauptmann and his friends had deliberately stolen the monoplane, and Fred must spare no effort, however desperate, to recover it.

But beyond this Fred could not help feeling that there lay some grimmer, more sinister, interpretation of his night's adventure.

"I'll track the blackguards somehow," he ejaculated, under his breath. "They've gone back along the line, pushing the truck. I expect. It's not likely they've gone on down to the village. I'll try back first, anyhow."

A glance at his watch as the moon crept for a moment from behind the clouds showed him that it was three o'clock. It would not be light until nearly-six, and he stepped out along the railway track, stumbling over the sleepers in his eager haste.

For half an hour Fred kept on, and then, suddenly, he distinguished a shadowy bulk by the side of the railway.

"The truck?" he ejaculated, as he recognised its outlines.

"By Harry, they've overturned it! Which way now?"

He turned from the overturned carriage truck, which lay clear of any passing train, its wheels in the air, and peered upwards.

It seemed impossible that the big crate could have been carried up those precipitous slopes which formed either side of the lonely mountain pass!

"They must have left some sign, some track," muttered Fred grimly, as he began to search along the ground.

For half an hour his efforts were unrewarded, and then, suddenly, on the opposite side of the railroad from the overturned truck, he came upon the imprint of an unshod hoof in the loose gravel of the ballasting.

"By gum! Mules! That explains it! They've carted it off by mules!"

For an instant he stood lost in wonderment, and then suddenly a cry broke from him, and he sprang forward.

A vagrant moonbeam had shown him a path, no more than a mountain track, which curved round the base of a huge boulder, and he sprang forward.

Imbedded in the loose soil were the prints of wheels, the marks of human feet, and the tracks of mules.

"By Harry, they've gone this way! Now, what on earth's their game? Phew! It's evidently been carefully planned. The mules and the cart must have been tampered with. Those in charge of it stopped the train by tampering with the signal, and Hauptmann and his friends, no doubt, jumped out and unoccupied the lorry! By Jove, it's clear enough! But what on earth's their object?"

As these thoughts flashed through his mind Fred stumbled forward along the steep path in eager haste. He could scarcely see the track before him, save when the moon came for a second or two from behind the clouds.

But there was no doubt in his mind that he had stumbled on the right trail. Upwards, winding in among the boulders, zigzagging across the mountain-side, the path led him for more than a mile, until the lights in the valley far below showed but fitfully through the gathering distance.

Then suddenly Fred checked in his onward progress, his heart beating with excitement, every nerve strained, his eyes peering through the blackness above him.

For one instant the moon had shown between two scurrying clouds, and in that instant it had revealed to him a solitary figure, perched high upon a pinnacle of rock far above his head.

"Phew! A Scout on watch!"

Even as the thought flashed through his mind Fred sank down in the shadow of a big boulder, and crouched, panting, waiting for the moon to give him another glimpse.

It came. A fitful burst of light showed the figure again. The man's back was towards him, and Fred regarded him intently. He was dressed in a loose, flowing cloak, wide, hairy breeches stuffed into top-boots, and he carried a long rifle slung across his shoulder.

"My hat! He looks a regular brigand! Phew! I wonder if he is!"

The momentary feeling of uneasiness that swept over him was pardonable enough. But Fred did not allow it to shake his resolution. No sooner had the darkness swept over him again than he crept forward once more. Step by step he went, feeling his way along the rough track, still climbing with every turn of the mountain path.

Then at last he reached its summit. It was with difficulty that Fred restrained the cry that almost broke from him, for never in the wildest flights of his imagination could he have dreamt of such a picture as was revealed suddenly to his gaze as he peered through a cleft between two gigantic boulders that marked the crest of the mountain!

Before him was a long plateau, smooth and level as a billiard-table, an ideal starting place for a flight, as Fred saw at a glance. And in the centre of this plateau, half revealed by the faint glow of three or four lanterns, was a group of men, wild, uncouth figures, clad in garments which might have come from the stage of some brigand melodrama.

To one side stood the empty monoplane crate, and, working under the curtly-uttered orders of Hauptmann himself, as he bent over a plan spread on the ground beside a lantern, half a dozen of the men were rapidly bolting the plane together.

For a full minute Fred Mildren stared at the strange scene before him, and then slowly some glimmering of the truth began to dawn upon him.

The German War! The pictures with which every Londoner was familiar, the wild soldiery of the Austrian armies. The long cloaks and baggy breeches, the little round, flat cap! In a flash Fred knew the truth. He was gazing upon an outpost of the Austrian Army!

It was plain what Hauptmann's object had been. Fred recalled his remark about contraband of war, and the eagerness with which an aeroplane would be welcomed by any one of the combatants.

Then, as Fred's confused thoughts took shape, he realised in a flash the serious nature of his predicament. Should Spood's monoplane fall into their hands, it would be used against England—his country!

Fred knew little enough of international politics, but he knew that at that very hour Europe's peace was strained to the very breaking point. One false step, one mischance such as this even, and the spark would reach the powder.

With grim, set jaw and burning eyes Fred watched the wild scene before him. On the far side of the plateau, perched upon boulders, two or three men stood sentinel, all eagerly watching in the same direction, evidently expecting to be disturbed, if disturbance came, from one point of the compass alone.

"At least, that gives me a chance," thought Fred grimly. "Now, how to tackle Hauptmann?"

His eyes turned to his late guide, who was obviously the leader of the party, and treated by them with marked deference and respect.

"So you are German, you blackguard!" thought Fred. "Now, here goes!"

Even as he half rose from his posture a heavy hand fell suddenly upon his shoulder, gripping him as in a band of steel, and a single hoarse shout of warning rang in his ears.

It was the sentry on the pinnacle above him. Fred had forgotten him.

With a cry of anger, Fred sought to struggle free from his captor. But already half a dozen of the wild, brigand-like figures had dashed to their comrade's assistance. A dozen hands darted out, snatching and tearing at Fred's clothing, and in scarce half a minute Fred was dragged, panting and breathless, into the circle of light from the upraised lanterns.

A perfect babel of tongues speaking in a language unknown to Fred greeted his appearance. For a moment, as he regarded their furious countenances, he thought he would be torn limb from limb.

Then suddenly the shouting died away, and Herr Hauptmann himself stepped forward with upraised hand, his eyes blazing with fury as he glared down upon the sudden disturber of their secrecy.

Destroying the 'Plane.

FOR a full minute Herr Hauptmann stared down into Fred's eyes, which met his as steadily and fiercely as his own.

Then he made a sign to his companions, and gave a curt order in some language that set them feverishly to work again.

"So," he said, addressing Fred, "it was a pity, it seems, my friend, that you did not drink that cup of brandy."

"It was drugged, like the coffee," answered Fred coolly. The other nodded, his eyes burning in sombre anger, as he stood apparently revolving the situation in his mind.

"Do you know in what danger you stand?" he said at last. "It would have been better for you, my young friend, if you had remained in the train."

"No doubt," answered Fred quietly. "But you forget, Herr Hauptmann, that I hold a trust—a trust which I shall discharge with honour, whatever it may cost me. Perhaps I regard a trust as more sacred a thing than others do."

A savage curse broke from the other's lips.

(Continued on page 111. of cover.)

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OUR GRAND NEW WAR SERIAL.



READ THIS FIRST.

Paul Satorys, the rightful heir to the throne of Istan, lives quietly in England as a private gentleman until he hears that his place in Istan has been usurped by an adventurer named Jem Stanton, who is the exact double of Satorys. Worse than this, Stanton has deceived Grace Lang, Satorys' fiancée, out to Istan with him. Grace, however, discovers the deception and escapes from the usurper. She falls into the hands of a tribe of natives, who make her their queen, and call her Nada. Satorys himself is subsequently captured by the natives and brought before the queen, who, however, he does not recognise owing to her veil. Nada offers to help him, and Paul leads her native troops against Istan. He is defeated, however, but saves himself by donning the uniform of an Istan officer, and mixing with the Istan Army. With his faithful followers, Peter Mardyke and Anton, he enters the city, and gets into conversation with an Istan officer. He learns that Germany has declared war on England, and that the troops of Istan are going to England to help the German invading forces. Paul Satorys, with Peter Mardyke and Anton, succeed in reaching England with the Istan troops undetected. Staking all on a bold coup, Satorys then declares himself to the army as the rightful king, and calls upon his troops to follow him over to the side of the British in a body. The men of Istan are won over, Stanton, the impostor, flees, and Satorys comes to his own again. At the head of his army, Satorys attacks the German position. The British troops co-operate with the men of Istan, and the German divisions are annihilated. The Allies depart for France, and a fierce war rages in Europe. Satorys receives a sabre wound in an engagement, and he and Peter Mardyke are harboured by a French dame. German officers enter the house, and their position is rendered desperate, when a troop of light French cavalry comes to the rescue, and the Germans are cut down. The officer in charge of the French cavalry—Captain Durand—ascertains that Satorys is capable of riding a horse, and states his intention of returning to his headquarters. He gives a brisk order to a soldier standing at the door on guard, and then quickly approaches Satorys and lays his hand on his arm.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Dash to the Rescue.

"We will start now. The country is occupied by the enemy, and I have but a small force. The Germans are massed at Louvain, five miles from here, and now that I have succeeded in my task I am retiring to our headquarters. We have done our best for our brave ally. The news came that you had been cut off, and the land has been scoured until to-day without success."

Satorys was as much puzzled as Peter, but he said no more until the force was moving off, the farm being abandoned, and Madame Briand being taken away to safety.

"I seem to have met you before, monsieur," said Satorys.

The officer smiled.

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A Bid for a Throne.

A Thrilling War Story.

By CLIVE R. FENN.

"It is possible." He turned in his saddle, and looked hard at Satorys. "Maybe it is well that you should know. I can rely on your silence and that of this brave sailor." It seemed to me that my work lay here, and I left Istan—"

"You are—" Satorys stopped too amazed to continue.

"Yes, I am Nada, as I was called down there. Why not? I am not the first to act like this. I left Istan, gained the coast; the rest was simple, for of late my life has been hard, and I was ready. But it is not only Nada who speaks to you, but the girl you looked upon as a friend."

Satorys was too astonished at what he heard to reply.

"I saw that Peter recognised me. This shall be our secret, Paul. I learned of your escape, and of how the army from Istan declared for you, and there was nothing more for me to do away there after you had left. Besides, I wished to warn you, for Stanton is once more back in Europe scheming, plotting to get back the power of which he was deprived. He found Istan out of the question, for the news had reached the capital before he did, and his attempt came to nothing, though there was much trouble. But now Istan awaits your return, and the people will receive you as their rightful king."

"I do not know what to say," said Satorys. "You are Grace Lang, whom I had given up as dead."

"Yes; I was saved by the blacks, who thought I was a mysterious being, and when you were brought before me I thought it wiser to hide my real identity, for while Stanton lives I am not free; and he lives and is a danger, for he is listened to by the powerful enemy who is overrunning Europe." The speaker held out her hand to Satorys. "That is all. Remember that to you and to the rest of the world I am merely Jacques Durand, captain, and your friend to the death if you will have my friendship."

"My friend—yes," said Satorys huskily. "So it shall be."

"Thank you!"

"But I hate the idea of this."

Durand shook his head.

"I have decided. There is no more to be said."

Ere nightfall the little party came into touch with a strong force of the Allies occupying an entrenched position. There was no question, Satorys found, of his being able to regain his own men, and he maintained his incognito, and learning still more of the marvellous exploit of the girl who, as Nada, had once before saved his life.

"Tell me more," he said that night as he stood watching the faint lights miles distant which betokened the presence of the foe.

Durand smiled.

"There is nothing more to tell. I could never have got away from Istan as a woman. Therefore I escaped as a man, reaching France, where I enlisted in the French army, and—there it is—nothing else—only there was always the hope that I should find you, be of assistance to you, for you have an enemy in Stanton, who will never rest until he has his revenge."

"He is intriguing still with the Germans?"

"Not a doubt of that; but his day of reckoning will come."

Satorys did not rest. He could not. He was pacing up and down as the dawn appeared, and, simultaneously with the coming of the morning, there was the roar of artillery from across the valley where the foe lay.

The French officers had received Satorys with enthusiasm,

taking him to be a British officer, and he had naturally slipped into his place in the fighting-line, while Peter was ever at his side.

During the hours that followed, Satorys forgot all else but duty, and in his post as second in command of a battalion of infantry there was plenty to do, for the French guns had replied to the challenge of the foe, and, under cover of the artillery, the riflemen dashed forward to take up fresh positions and continue the withering fire which was decimating the foe.

It was like that for hour after hour, the shrill shriek of shells filling the air, then the thunderous roar of the heavier guns—proud Germany's message of defiance to the world. And as night came on swiftly, a mist—a blood-red mist as it seemed—crept up from the lower ground, shutting out the misery and horror of the scene.

Then, as Satorys dashed forward, rallying his depleted force, he saw that something was amiss on the right wing, for in the dying light there was a sudden grey wave—a wave of German infantry charging forward, sweeping upon the weakened French flank, driving it back, closing in, irresistible by sheer weight of numbers: the old German form of warfare—men nothing—they were cheap—the end all.

"Forward!"
The cry from a young officer galvanised the French soldiers who were dashing on under the leadership of Satorys; but the cry did not come from him, but from Durand.

A thrill of enthusiasm then, followed by a sense of hopelessness, confusion, a broken line, and the Germans swept on, cutting off a scattered body of the French, charging anew, and then halting as the French commanders had succeeded in swinging round to the new front and checking the relentless advance.

It was all darkness then. Something mad and well-nigh indistinguishable—ridiculous horses racing past frenzied with fear—and Satorys turned, saw someone stagger and fall, and darted to the wounded man's side.

"Durand!"
"Yes; but it's nothing."
Durand rose with the other's assistance, just as they were surrounded by German soldiers.

"We are done, sir."
It was Peter who spoke. Satorys stamped his foot with rage as a burly Teuton gripped his arm, while another jerked the sword from his hand. The three friends were surrounded by scores. Ahead of them the place looked like the land of some fantastic legend, a strange, shadowy effect, the light of torches flashing on masses of grey-clad men who were moving across the country, while a dozen paces away the smoke-clouds wreathed themselves into bizarre shapes, partially concealing the grimness of the scene.

Prisoners.

For a time the shock of the defeat drove everything else from Satorys' mind. He would have attempted escape, declined to submit without a struggle; but as this thought flashed through his mind he told himself that it would have been sheer madness to have resisted. The French flank had been enveloped under cover of the night by a force ten times its superior in numbers, and though now it was clear enough the foe was checked, for the rattle of rifle-firing was incessant, the Germans had scored a success, their toll of prisoners being considerable.

And then there was Durand! Not for anything in the world would Satorys have avoided capture, for it was plain to him that Durand could not have got away.

The three companions were disarmed, and ordered to take their places in the line. Then the march was commenced—a march into captivity—Durand leaning heavily on his friend's arm, while Peter walked just behind, muttering dark threats of what he intended to do sometime when he was free.

To Satorys there was something that suggested grim humour in the fate which had separated him from the brave fellows of Istan, who were proving themselves of such tremendous assistance to the Allies; but he forgot the humour of the experience during the days which ensued, and he was led into captivity, their course being apparently north, though it was next door to impossible to know exactly where he was.

The escort was a strong one, and night and day the prisoners were guarded far too well for escape to be considered. The march went on day after day through a desolate, flat country, marshy, sparsely populated, the villages where halts were called untouched as yet by the war, but looking miserably poor, the countryfolk who were seen appearing listless and pathetic in the extreme.

There were strong bodies of German troops at every halting-place.

"They've got enough men," said Satorys; "but they'll be beaten yet, with the whole world against them."

One of the soldiers prodded the speaker with the butt of his rifle and sharply ordered him to be silent.

"I suppose," said Durand, as they saw ahead of them towards the end of one day's long and arduous march the frowning walls of a fortress, "they are interning their prisoners there. It would be one of the strongholds on the Dutch frontier."

Satorys would, maybe, have taken his imprisonment less calmly had he known who it was awaiting them in the grim building which was serving as base for another line of defence by the foe.

He looked round him as he was marched into a vast courtyard between soldiers with fixed bayonets. Evidently there were numerous victims of the war shut up here, and the arrival of the fresh consignment was watched from a balcony by the commandant, a typical Prussian officer, black-moustached and forbidding of mien. He moved away from his post of observation and spoke to a man who also had been looking on.

"Your idea is a mistaken one," he said gruffly. "Come, we will have supper, and afterwards, if you choose, you shall examine the prisoners to make sure."

Stanton, for the second man was none other than the individual who had posed as King of Istan, gave a shrug of his shoulders as he accompanied the commandant to his room.

"You know the man who accompanied the officer," he said, as he sat at table facing the German officer. "This man Paul Satorys is missing from his command. He is not one to run away. He is dead or a prisoner. That is why I am here. If he is a prisoner, he can be made to do our bidding, and turn the Istan force from this alliance."

"It is a poor chance," said the other grimly. "From all accounts the Istan troops are putting in as good work as any. It has been a misfortune for our cause that we lost them. Since you came here with orders from Berlin, it has seemed to me, sir, that if this Paul Satorys is missing, you might return to the front, and make good the mistake."

Stanton shook his head. A coward at heart, he had no mind to expose himself to the risk of again tempting Fortune in the way proposed.

"No; that would be useless!" he said quickly. "It would be impossible to get back, for the Istan officers would turn against me now. As I put the matter before your chiefs, the only chance is to work through Satorys."

"And suppose he is dead?"
"I feel certain he is not dead."

There was a nod from the commandant.
"Let us look at the fresh batch," he said gruffly. "Though it seems to me out of the question to think that the man who is recognised now as King of Istan would have permitted himself to be taken prisoner. He would have his guard."

Stanton did not reply. He longed for revenge on his rival, and, as a man who had been reckoned the ally of the German Empire, he was now in a position which he did not dislike, for he had been given honorary rank in the German Army. Istan would not have him. His essay to re-establish himself in the country had signally failed, and he had fled to Europe to present himself at the German headquarters, and be well received, despite the failure of his former project.

As he accompanied the commandant on the tour of inspection, he was thinking hard, passing in review the circumstances which had compassed his downfall. He knew that Satorys had the game in his hands. Since the night when his rival had thrown off the mask, and taken him off his guard, Stanton had lived with the idea of vengeance, a remote idea of late, but since he had joined the German staff it had taken fresh shape.

Satorys, according to all accounts, and the Secret Service of the Germans, which was thorough in the extreme, had lost touch with his own men, and there was no mention of him in the reports which had reached the German forces.

That the other was dead was not a theory Stanton could accept. Then his enemy must be a prisoner at one or other of the places where the victims of the war were interned.

The commandant smiled in his moustache as he accompanied Stanton on the round. Personally, he had no high opinion of the man to whom he had been ordered to show every courtesy, but he hid his feelings.

Stanton stopped short at the open door of one of the large, bare rooms, where the prisoners were confined. His eye roved over the inmates. He gave a start. Hardly had he hoped for such good fortune. He was almost content now to play a subordinate part as a privileged spectator of the war into which Germany had flung Europe.

But now his eyes gleamed with hatred. Standing a few paces from him, he saw the man whom he had despoiled of his inheritance, and who had been too many for him. The look of rage faded from his face. He touched the commandant on the arm.

"There is our man," he said, with suppressed excitement. "He is in our hands!"

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There was a nod from the Prussian officer.

"In this matter I am under your orders. What are you going to do?"

Neither noticed the young officer Durand, who was watching them keenly.

"I shall show him that his game is up!"

"If he doesn't know that much, he is a fool!" growled the commandant. "If I had my way, I should shoot him out of hand!"

Durand was speaking in a low tone to Satorys.

"Don't look round. Stanton is here. He is evidently high in favour with the German authorities. Be on your guard."

Satorys did not reply, did not even turn his head. As Stanton advanced towards him, he had made up his mind. A prisoner, he could do nothing for his friends the British. It was a time for cunning if he were still to be of use, and as Durand glided away to stand with Peter in the dusk of the big room, where other prisoners were squatting disconsolately on the floor, Satorys waited his time.

"So we meet once more, sir?"

Stanton's tone was almost friendly; but Satorys saw the hatred lurking beneath the other's mask of good humour.

"You are surprised to see me, of course, but war has its swift changes, and so you have found. I have been waiting this time, Paul Satorys, and you will realise that your last card has been played."

Peter squirmed as he heard Satorys' remark.

"Yes, I know, and maybe it is best. I recognise your great ability, sir, and I am beaten. What is it you wish of me?"

Stanton smiled.

"I am glad to see that you take so sensible a view of the matter," he said. "It is wise to know when one is beaten. There are many things which I wish to speak to you about, but here it is impossible. If you are minded to do as I wish, every courtesy shall be shown you and your friends."

Stanton did not see the other's recoil of disgust. He saw in Satorys a beaten man.

The latter thanked him gravely, and Stanton turned to the commandant. Instructions were given at once, and Satorys and his two companions were conducted to a well-furnished room, where Stanton left them, promising to return very soon.

A Battle of Wits.

"I never thought you would come to being civil to that chap, sir," said Peter. "I don't like it at all!"

"The only thing, Peter," said Satorys. "I may be a prisoner, but I am not done yet, and if by fooling that contemptible scoundrel, we can obtain information as to what the Germans are doing before we escape, it will be all the better for England."

Peter slapped his leg.

"And I never thought of that, sir!" he cried.

But Satorys had thought, and thought long over the situation. He saw that Stanton was still the same weak, vain man, one to be easily hoodwinked, and had not long to wait for a proof of this, for Stanton, delighted now to have his enemy, as he thought, in his grasp, took no time in showing Satorys a species of courtesy which, though transparently insincere, he imagined, took in the other completely.

Satorys was asked to dinner the following evening, with the commandant and the man he so cordially despised. Satorys leaned back in his chair, seeming well pleased with the course of events, and as the German officer was called away, Stanton rose from his chair, and began to walk excitedly up and down.

"It is for us to do a deal," he said.

He stood by the open hearth in which a wood fire was burning, for the autumn nights were cold in the North, and blew out a cloud of smoke from his cigar.

Do a deal!

Satorys could have choked the words in the scoundrel's throat, but instead he merely bowed his head, turning round in his chair. He knew but too well that behind this plausible talker with his oily ways and his low-grade thoughts was the power of the German Army, for the chiefs of the German Empire still laid store by the opportunities their former ally might have to help them.

"Yes," Stanton went on, with a laugh. "How things change! We have fought for this Kingdom of Istan, and now it is seemingly for neither of us, since you are here a prisoner, and the army turned against me. But Germany is great, and will prevail in the end, and his Majesty the Emperor has received me a friend."

Satorys nodded his head once more. Through the haze of smoke he saw in imagination the burning villages of a peaceful country, the gaunt spectre of desolation, women homeless, children orphaned, for such was the German way,

and as he dwelt on these things a fierce rage held him, though he concealed what he felt. He reasoned that he was there to assist the cause of the British Empire, no matter what happened to himself, for the cause of the British Empire was likewise the cause of liberty and truth, and the crushing for ever of the vile tyranny of the hypocrites of Berlin.

"It is wonderful to me all this, to find you reasonable at last. I may tell you that I am in the inner councils of the German authorities, and am in a position to assist you to high honour even if when peace is proclaimed by his Germanic Majesty Istan does fall to my share. But you will not let that thought discourage you. By throwing in your lot with us as you are doing, you will not be forgotten." Stanton went back to his chair, and, raising his glass, drained it at a draught. "No, decidedly you will not be forgotten. You are doing wisely, sir, in trusting to me. Ah, it makes me smile when I think of the past, of what I was, and of what I am now. But to business. It will be possible so to place the Istan divisions that whether they return to the German allegiance or not our cause will be assisted materially."

"Quite possible," said Satorys, quietly.

Stanton poured out more wine and drank it.

"That is good," he said. "I believe you are to be trusted, sir, and if we send you back to the troops, you will scrupulously obey our orders! It will pay you in the end. All Europe, ah, and the world, will be under the domination of Berlin. You have only to serve the great Emperor well and you will have nothing to fear." He leaned forward, gazing keenly into Satorys' half-averted face. "I know I can trust you, and I will, for you are a man after all—a man who sees where wisdom lies—and we can forget the past and our fight for a throne. Thrones will soon be at the disposal of the Emperor, and we shall be remembered if we serve him well."

To Satorys the speaker seemed like an evil spirit as he glared at the man whom he thought he was tricking.

"I have been trusted, and you are my friend at last,"

Stanton went on. "I know what is happening. England thinks she will win. Faugh! It makes me laugh! There is no chance for her. In a few short weeks the Emperor will be in London. It will be no question of a raid this time. He will enter the City as master, as he will be master—master of the world. People have said it was absurd this declaration of war at once on France and Russia as well as England, but his Majesty knew what he was doing, and his preparations are made."

Satorys gave a sign of understanding, and Stanton, now fully launched, did not think of stopping.

The British Fleet! He snapped his fingers. "What use will they be? They do not know—do not realise. They watch their coasts, and think they are safe. Are they safe? There is something which they do not know over in England—something which, as it is called, and rightly. But I know, and you—you who are now my friend, you shall know, too, for you have decided wisely at last."

Stanton lit another cigar, and emptied his glass again.

"It is more than I could have hoped. You are a brave man, and we meet strangely after many adventures. You like myself are now the enemy of England. Her downfall is decreed. Her cities will be laid waste by the German host."

"Do you mean that?"

Satorys was momentarily taken off his guard, but fortunately for him, Stanton did not notice the change. He was speaking with the feverish eagerness of a man who is devoured by the wonder of an idea, and he went on in a nervous, tense way to explain, while Satorys listened, asking himself whether it was not all a dream.

"I may tell you," said Stanton, "because you are one of us. England, the country which you and I, the sensible men we are, have abandoned to her well-merited fate, is doomed as surely as there will be a morrow's sun. All that has happened so far is but child's play to what is to come by the will of the mighty Emperor who lives to make Germany chief in the world, mistress supreme of the land and sea. There have been reverses, and England imagines she will win. Let her wait. The life-blood will be choked out of her, her power will cease to be; India, the rest of the Empire, will be the property of the man who is to rule the world. By then the German armies will be at Paris exacting a terrible reckoning for the resistance which has been shown."

He sat back. For a moment Satorys was content to think the words were only the mad ravings of a maniac, but the next remark of Stanton showed him his mistake.

"It will be very soon," he said. "The world will be staggered. There has long been talk of a tunnel. Germany has made it—that is all."

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand serial next Wednesday.)

CONTRABAND OF WAR!

(Continued from page 21.)

"Trust! Honour!" he sneered. "Listen! War knows no code of morals nor honour, you young fool!"

"You have stolen a British aeroplane!"

"Indeed! And who will stay our hands, even though we turn them to robbing you of your precious trust? You? Pah! See here! In five minutes from now, I—yes, I—shall be flying in your machine across the frontier to my own country. This mountain is on the very borderland!"

One glance at the plane showed Fred that Hauptmann's words were true. In five minutes all would be ready, and he would be gone. Even now one of his men was filling the petrol-tank.

Suddenly an idea flashed through Fred's mind. He did not pause to consider the risk he dared. Hauptmann had turned to follow his glance, and his captor had for the moment relaxed his grip on Fred's shoulder.

In an instant, with a jerk, Fred Mildren tore himself free. Without a cry of warning he leapt clear past Hauptmann, straight for the monoplane's side.

One of the men was holding a spluttering flare for the other to see as he poured the contents of the second can of petrol into the tank.

In a flash Fred had snatched the flare from the astonished fellow's hand. The next moment he had dashed it against the tank inlet, shivering the thing to atoms.

For an instant the astonished soldiers drew back, agast. The next, with a great volley of oaths, they leapt forward.

Too late! A thin, blue flame rose and flickered above the tank, as the burning oil mixed with the petrol vapour.

And then a dull, prolonged roar rang out, a sheet of purple fire, flecked with blazing flame, leapt high into the air, and in one instant, as the boiling petrol poured over its sides, the whole monoplane burst into flames.

For a second or two it seemed that the furious soldiers would have flung themselves upon Fred Mildren and torn him limb from limb. Then, high above the babel of cries and yells, Hauptmann's voice rang out commandingly as he ordered his men to rescue the machine from destruction.

Gallantly enough they flung their long cloaks over the blazing fabric, tearing at its wings in a desperate effort to save it from the flames.

The task was hopeless. They might as well have attempted to extinguish the blazing petrol itself.

Yet for a quarter of an hour they strove desperately, even flung earth over the blazing mass. Fred Mildren watched the scene grimly. In the general excitement even he was forgotten.

Then suddenly, in the midst of the wild pademonium, a single cry of warning rang out. It was followed by the crack of a rifle.

A hoarse shout from Hauptmann answered it, and the soldiers sprang back, snatching wildly at their rifles.

And then, as Fred watched the scene in complete bewilderment, suddenly from among the boulders below, a wave of blue uniforms swept upwards, and a dozen bayoneted rifles gleamed in the light of the conflagration.

For a moment it seemed that a battle would open under Fred's astonished eyes. But Hauptmann's cool head realised the odds against him. Even as the new-comers struggled up the hillside, he gave a stentorian order to his men, and instantly they turned and retreated, leaping and clambering down the far side of the mountain with the sure step of born mountaineers.

In a couple of minutes they were gone, and, as the leader of the new-comers reached the circle of light, it was plain that pursuit was useless.

The whole thing happened with the rapidity of lightning, and, in complete bewilderment, Fred turned to the new arrivals. One glance at their blue uniforms told him that they were French; and then a hand fell upon his shoulder, and he was roughly seized and held a prisoner, while an officer lifted one of the fallen lanterns and peered questioningly into his face.

The mellow sunshine of another evening was gliding and purpling the distant mountain peaks when Fred Mildren sat in a comfortable chair in the officers' quarters of a French frontier post, with Henry Speed and a stout gentleman at his side.

Fred had already told his story. But the wonderment it caused his listeners was nothing to the amazement which

filled Fred as he heard from Speed's lips the full story of the daring plot of which he himself had formed the centre.

The German gentleman at his side was the real Herr Hauptmann, who should have met him at Trieste. The other was Prince Cecka, who had but lately learnt to fly at Vienna, and who was now, of course, fighting for his country.

Herr Hauptmann had become acquainted with him in the flying circle in which he mixed, and when the prince had met him the night before in Graz on his way to Trieste, it was scarcely to be wondered at that the German, suspecting nothing, should have accepted an invitation to dine.

Of that dinner he now remembered as little as did Fred of his. He had been drugged exactly as Fred had been drugged, and had no doubt been carried to his hotel in a state of apparent intoxication.

Cecka had possessed himself of all Hauptmann's papers, and had met Fred, passing himself off as Hauptmann. The remainder of Fred's adventure has been shown.

The sudden blaze when Fred had fired the petrol had drawn the attention of a French outpost situated on a plateau a little below, and which Cecka's sentinels had been set to watch.

The French had immediately assembled, and, as has been seen, instantly made a dash for the plateau. They had been too late to do more than arrest Fred, an error which was speedily righted on the arrival of Mr. Speed five hours after the officer of the detachment telegraphed the news of his capture to Trieste.

It was clear that Prince Cecka had full knowledge of Fred's arrival, a not very surprising fact considering how well known he was, and what numerous friends he possessed in Continental flying circles.

It was evidently he who had planned the whole daring scheme, and, had it not been for Fred, another five minutes would have seen his triumph.

As it was, not a single one of the robbers could be captured. The frontier lay less than a mile to the southward of the little plateau in the mountains; and, once across it, they were safe—a fact which Cecka had fully calculated upon in arranging for their rendezvous at that spot with the stolen plane.

Hidden in those deserted mountains, his men had been able to prepare everything, even to providing a light mail-wagon with which to carry the crate from the railway lines. It was only the glare of the burning plane which had betrayed them at the last moment.

THE END.

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A SENTRY'S DUTY.

Pat the Irishman was walking past a gun factory with a bottle of whisky beneath his arm, when he was challenged by a sentry.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Pat and whisky" was the reply.

"Advance, Pat! Halt, whisky!" the sentry promptly ordered.—Sent in by Miss J. Lawday, Dartford.

THE GENERAL UTILITY MAN.

A candidate for assistance at a Salvation Army refuge, being asked to state his occupation, replied that he was a "picker." The official failing to understand the reference, asked for an explanation.

"It's like this, guv'nor," replied the man. "In July I picks strawberries, in August I picks peas, in winter I picks pockets, and for the rest of the year I picks oakum."—Sent in by E. McDonald, Liverpool.

SHE KEPT A SHOP.

"Grandma, give me a penny to give to a poor old woman with one eye."

"Well, Willie, here it is. Only I hope you are not being imposed upon."

"Oh, no!" said Willie, pocketing the money. "She gives me two oranges in exchange!"—Sent in by B. Davis, Birmingham.

REPRESENTED.

A member of Parliament was once passing the new War Office building in Whitehall, when his companion, a Scotsman, pointing to the emblematical devices engraved over the door, indicated the Scottish thistle, the English lion, and the Irish harp.

"Where is the emblem of Wales?" he asked.

"Oh," replied the M.P., "I expect there is a leak in the roof."—Sent in by Trevor Bayton, Glamorgan.

RIGHT EVERY TIME.

Father: "Well, Tommy, what did the teacher say to-day?"

Tommy: "He asked me what was my head for?"

Father: "Oh! And what did you say?"

Tommy: "For keeping on my collar."

Father: "And is that all he had to say?"

Tommy: "No, father. He said, 'Boy, your work is all wrong.'"

Father: "And what did you answer to that?"

Tommy: "My father did it."—Sent in by A. Hardman, Manchester.

KNEW HIS PLACE.

A youth of weak intellect, known as "Daft" Jimmy, used to frequent a large pond near a Midland town during the skating season for the purpose of affixing skates. The first hard frost found Jimmy at his accustomed post. Presently two ladies arrived.

"Will the ice bear, Jimmy?" asked one.

"Dunno, ma'am."

"Go on and try it, there's a good fellow, and I will give you sixpence."

Jimmy doffed his cap, and answered:

"'Scuse me, ma'am, I might be daft, but I knows me manners. Ladies first."—Sent in by Arthur Walton, Bradford.

HINTS TO EMIGRANTS.

Brewers should to Malta go,
Fools to the rocks of Scilly;
Quakers should seek the Friendly Is-les,
Parriers go to Chile,
Bachelors to the United States,
Old maids to the Isle of Man;
Gardeners should fly to Botany,
Shoeblocks to Japan,
And little crying babies
That nightly spoil our rest,
Should be sent to Babylon,
To Lapland, or to Brest.

—Sent in by F. Bogoed, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

NOT SHARP ENOUGH.

A noted wag met an Irishman in the street one day, and thought he would be funny at his expense:

"Hallo, Pat!" he said, "I'll give you eightpence for a shilling."

"Will ye, now?" said Pat.

"Yes," he replied.

Pat handed over the shilling, and received eightpence in return.

"Eight in pence," explained the wag. "Not bad, is it?"

"No," answered Pat. "But the shilling is!"—Sent in by Leslie Barnes, Birmingham.

THOUGHTFUL WILLIE.

Willie: "Pa, are you going to buy me a drum?"

Pa: "No, I don't think so."

Willie: "Why, pa?"

Pa: "Because I am afraid the noise will disturb me too much."

Willie: "No, it won't, dad. I'll only play it when you are asleep."—Sent in by Miss F. Davies, Selop.

HIS LITTLE MISTAKE.

An Irish soldier at shooting practice was continually missing the target.

"What in the world are you firing at, my man?" exclaimed the instructor, who was standing near a freshly-tarred fence some distance from the target.

"I'm firing at the gate, your honour," was the reply.

"What gate, you fool?" demanded the instructor.

"The tar-gate, your honour," replied Pat, with simplicity.
—Sent in by Arthur Sullivan, Aberley, S.E.

"A LITTLE LEARNING"

A certain man had such a large family that he was obliged to read a list of his children's names before every meal to ascertain whether all were present.

One day before dinner he started as usual to read out the names.

"Arthur!" he began.

"Ere!"

"Arry!"

"Eee!"

"Eebet!"

Herbert (who had been studying an English and Latin dictionary): "Adsum!"

His father looked up in surprise.

"Oh, you've 'ad some, 'ave yer? Well, you can just git down from the table!"—Sent in by J. Fitzgerald, Gillingham.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

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