# "THE KING'S PARDON!"

## OR, TALBOT'S RETURN TO ST. JIM'S.

**By Martin Clifford.**


– Complete Stories for ALL, and Every Story a GEM. –

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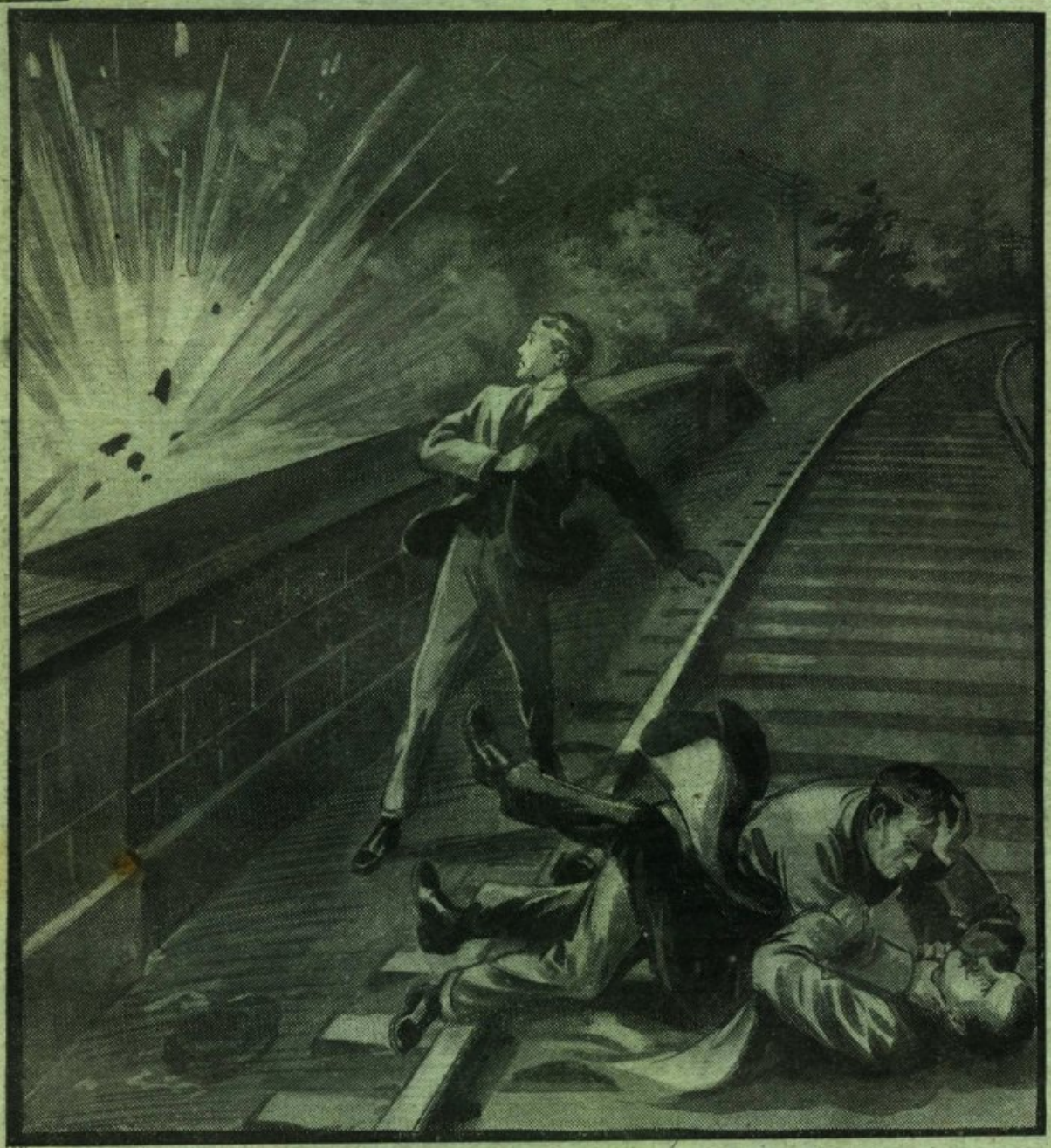

## TALBOT'S GREAT DEED OF VALOUR!

*(A thrilling incident in the finest complete school tale ever published.)*

# THIS WEEK'S CHAT.

## The Editor's Personal Column.

**For Next Wednesday—**

**"WORKING HIS WAY!"**

**By Martin Clifford.**

In next week's grand long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. Talbot is given a situation in the New House rendered vacant by the discharge of one of the servants. Mr. Ratcliff does not fail to let poor Talbot know that he considers he should be anywhere but where he is, and this leads a certain junior in the School House to perform an action which places Talbot in a very awkward position. Figgins & Co. also get into hot water by the friendly attitude they adopt towards the Toff, and, needless to say, their liking for their House-master does not increase. Lord Eastwood, however, makes Talbot an offer which brings a happy ending to

**"WORKING HIS WAY!"**

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### REPLIES IN BRIEF.

George W. Hancox (Birmingham).—Skimpole is still at St. Jim's. The other matter you mention is an arrangement which cannot be altered.

George Vowles (Weymouth).—Your request has been granted. Many thanks for interesting letter.

M. N. W. (Manchester).—I was delighted to receive your cheery letter. Best wishes.

W. Moull (Sheffield).—Kildare is probably the finest athlete at St. Jim's. Glad you liked Mr. Clifford's yarn in the 3d. Library.

Louis M. Hower (Balham).—Many thanks for your letter. Your notice shall be inserted in due course.

S. H. (London).—Tom Merry is a better boxer than Figgins. Cousin Ethel is very partial to both juniors, but perhaps more so to Figgins than the other.

A. M. (Leigh).—Knox of the Sixth is seventeen. Tom Merry's study is probably the most classical in the Shell.

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### DEEDS OF DARING.

At the present time it may not be out of place to recall to the minds of my readers some of the stirring deeds of days gone by—deeds which characterised those who performed them not only as patriotic men, but as true heroes. The annals of warfare tell of many noble actions, not merely of fierce daring in the destruction of the enemy, but of courage and endurance in the saving of life.

#### Captain Peel's Gallantry.

During the Crimean War a gallant deed was performed by Captain William Peel, the commander of one of the British warships, whose men had landed to take part in the fighting on shore. Captain Peel and his men were sent to a certain place where the guns were keeping up a constant fire upon the enemy's position. Suddenly the ammunition was found to have given out, but a number of men at once volunteered to go and bring the ammunition to the battery.

The danger was considerable, but at last the boxes of powder and shot arrived. While the men were unpacking them a large shell was dropped into their midst from the enemy's lines. The fuse was burning, and the whole battery looked like being blown to pieces. The men paused in their work, and looked at the shell as though fascinated, expecting every second that it would burst and destroy them.

But Captain Peel was a man of remarkable presence of mind. Without a moment's hesitation or a thought of his own safety, he seized the shell, and ran with it to the side of the battery. In an instant his comrades shouted, "The fuse is burning! Look out! The shell will burst!" But Captain Peel continued to run with the shell away from where the others were standing, and, raising it high above his head, hurled it over the earthworks that protected the guns.

Scarcely had the shell left his hands when it burst with a terrific crash. A moment later, and the brave captain would have sacrificed his own life in the effort to save his men; but his courage, energy, and presence of mind saved the whole band of men who were unloading the ammunition and serving the guns.

For this gallant deed Captain Peel was awarded the coveted Victoria Cross.

THE EDITOR.

*(Another "Deed of Daring" in next Wednesday's issue of "The Gem" Library. Order early.)*

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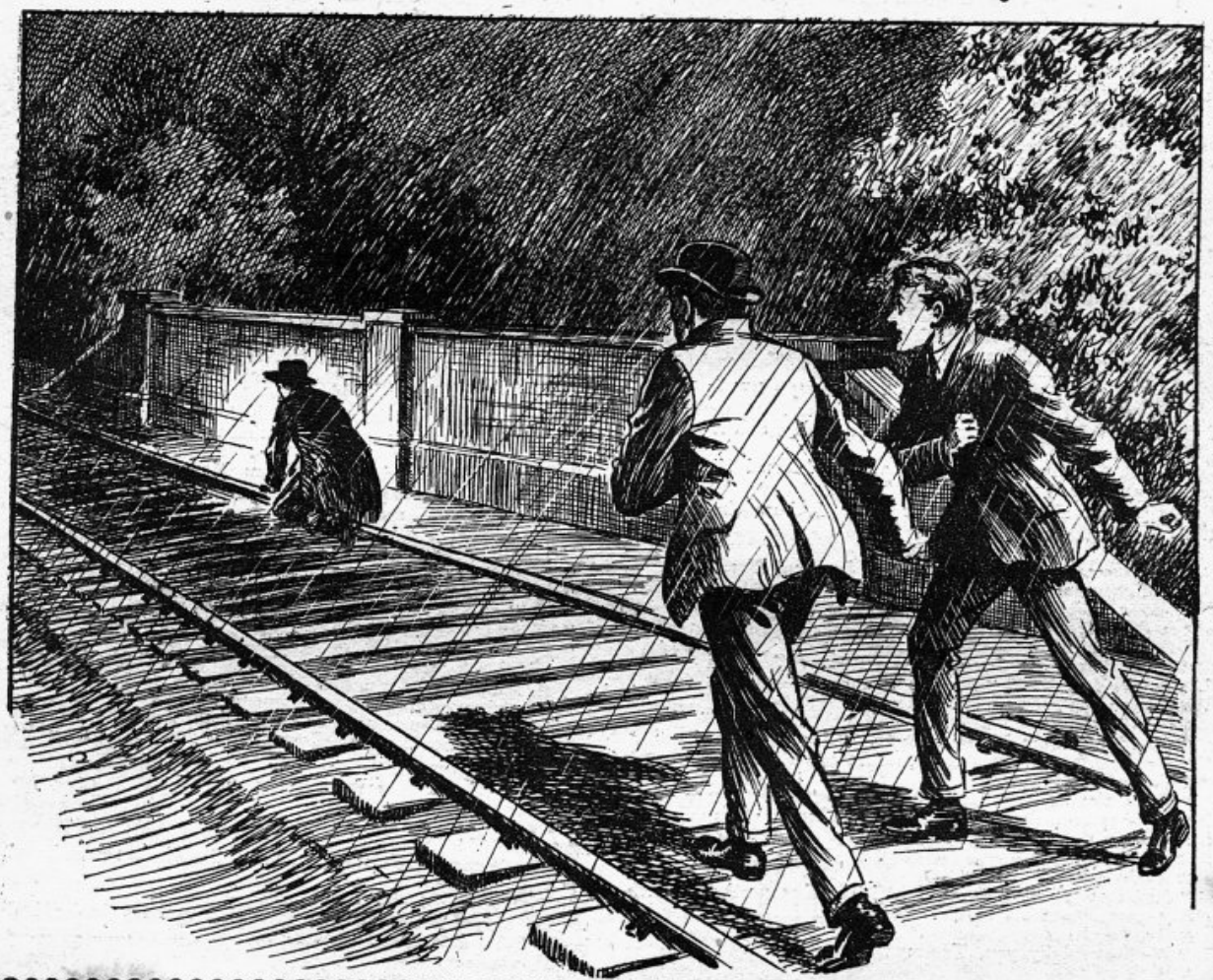
COMPLETE STORIES FOR ALL, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

# THE KING'S PARDON!

A Grand Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. and their chum Talbot of the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

## By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



The detective and the Toff crept along the lines, cautiously and silently, behind the German as he crouched over the track. He was fixing some object to the rails. "It's a bomb!" muttered Talbot. (See Chapter 15.)

### CHAPTER 1.
### A Visitor for Tom Merry.

"MASTER MERRY!"

"Hallo, Toby!"

"Genelman to see you, sir!"

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

It was really rather an awkward moment for a "genelman" to see Tom Merry, for a little celebration was going on in Tom Merry's study at St. Jim's. That famous apartment in the Shell passage in the School House was crowded—not to say crammed. It was an important occasion.

There was good news from the "front." Tom Merry's uncle, who was with General French's army, had distinguished himself by capturing several German guns. Naturally Tom Merry and his chums were celebrating the event. And naturally the celebration took the form of a feed, to which all their friends were invited. And as the name of their friends was legion, the capacity of the study was taxed to its utmost.

The Terrible Three were there—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy had come along from Study No. 6. Figgins & Co. had come from the New House. Kangaroo, the Australian, had come with his friends. Reilly, of the Fourth, had brought several fellows. In fact, Monty Lowther remarked that a "Standing Room Only" notice was required.

There certainly wasn't much room, but the feed was ample,

Next Wednesday:
"WORKING HIS WAY!" AND "A BID FOR A THRONE!"

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and that compensated for other deficiencies. Fellows sat where they could—on the chairs or the tables, or in the window or on the coal-locker. Those who could not sit stood up. There was an overflow meeting, so to speak, in the passage.

And then Toby, the School House page, put his shock head in at the doorway—with some difficulty, as there were three or four fellows wedged there—and announced that a "genelman" wished to see Tom Merry.

"Have him up," said Monty Lowther hospitably. "He's come at the right time, whoever he is. Make room somehow."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pewwaps it's somebody from the Wah Office, you know, who can tell us all about it."

"Blest if I see how he's to get in!" said Tom Merry, laughing, with a glance over the crowded study. "Perhaps I'd better go down."

"Rats! We can't spare the founder of the feast!" said Blake. "Who is it, anyway? Didn't he give you a name, Toby?"

"'Ere's his card, sir."

"Hand it over, ass!"

Toby was holding a card between his finger and thumb. Monty Lowther gave him a frown of the greatest severity.

"Toby!" he rapped out.

"Yessir!" said Toby.

"Where's the salver?"

"The which, sir?"

"The silver salver!" said Lowther majestically. "What do you mean by bringing up a card in that fashion to the nephew of a distinguished general who has just been capturing guns and things? I am surprised at you, Toby!"

"Oh, cheese it, Monty!" said Tom Merry as he took the card. "My only hat!" he added, as he glanced at it.

"Nothing wrong?" asked Lowther.

"N-n-no! But——"

"Bai Jove! I twust it isn't a beast with a bill at a time like this?" said Arthur Augustus anxiously. "Fortunately I have had a fivah fwom my patah, deah boy, and if——"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Thanks, it isn't that. Look at it! Blessed if I know what the man can want with me!"

The juniors all looked at the card. It bore the inscription:

"J. D. FOXE,
C. I. D., Scotland Yard."

"Well, my only hat!" said Monty Lowther, with a whistle. "A giddy policeman!"

"A detective!" said Manners.

"Great Scott!"

"What have you been doing, Tommy?" asked Monty Lowther solemnly. "This is a surprise—quite a shock! What have you been up to?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ass!" said Tom Merry warmly. "I can't imagine what the man wants. Are you sure that he asked for me, Toby?"

"Yessir."

"Have him up here," said Manners. "I don't care what Tommy has been doing; we'll stand by him. The minion of the law is not going to ravish away the founder of the feast!"

"Wathah not!"

"Just imagine Tommy going off like Eugene Aram, with giddy gyves upon his wrists!" murmured Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll stand by you, Tommy!"

"Back up!"

"Fatheads!" shouted Tom Merry wrathfully. "It must be some mistake or other! The man can't possibly want anything with me. Where is he, Toby?"

"Waitin' in the passage, sir," said Toby, with a grin.

"Well, show him in. Make room for him to come in, you fellows, if you can," said Tom Merry. "You can all hear what he's got to say."

"Keep your pecker up. We'll stand by you!" chuckled Blake. "All I want to know is, what have you been up to?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here he comes!"

The juniors crowded back to give Mr. Foxe admission to the study. All eyes were turned upon him as he came in. He was a little man, quietly dressed, with a very square jaw, that told of a very determined character. He had grey eyes, that looked like steel. He seemed a little surprised to find the study crammed with fellows, and it was not very easy for him to get in.

"Master Merry?" he said inquiringly.

"Here I am," said Tom. "Give Mr. Foxe a seat, somebody."

"Pway accept my chah, Mr. Foxe!"

"Thank you, I will stand," said Mr. Foxe. "I am sorry. I seem to have called at a somewhat awkward moment—ahem!"

"Oh, don't mench!" said Tom politely. "But I really can't guess what you want to see me for, Mr. Foxe."

"If it is anything pwivate, deah boy, we will wetire at once!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Not at all," said Mr. Foxe. "I simply desire to ask Master Merry a few questions, and if he is unable to answer them, perhaps some of you other young gentlemen may be able to do so."

"Bai Jove!"

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry. "Any old thing!"

"Of course, I am here simply in pursuance of my duty," explained Mr. Foxe. "Any assistance you can render me you are bound to give, to aid the execution of the law. I have reason to believe that you can help me in securing a notorious criminal."

"Wha-a-at!"

"All fight, Tommy," murmured Blake. "He's not after you, after all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A notorious criminal!" repeated Tom Merry, puzzled. "I—I'm afraid I can't help you, Mr. Foxe. We—we haven't any here, you know."

Mr. Foxe smiled.

"You have been very well acquainted with the person I mention," he said. "The question is whether you know his present whereabouts, and I think it probable you do."

"My hat!"

The study was in a buzz of excitement now. Mr. Foxe's statement astounded the juniors. Several fellows had come along the passage to look in, among them Levison of the Fourth, who was all ears now. Levison was always keenly interested in everybody's business but his own, and anything "up against" Tom Merry & Co. was especially welcome to him. The cad of the Fourth did not mean to miss this.

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy," sighed Monty Lowther, "what ever have you been doing? What bad, wicked acquaintances have you been making while your kind uncles weren't looking after you?"

"Shut up, fathead!" said Tom Merry. "Mr. Foxe, you're making a mistake. I haven't any notorious criminals on my visiting-list, really."

"The person I refer to is a boy of your own age," explained Mr. Foxe. "He was once here, at this school——"

"What!"

"Where he was known by the name of Talbot."

"Oh!"

"Talbot!"

"My hat!"

"And I ask you," said Mr. Foxe grimly, "whether you can give me any information likely to help me to lay hands upon that boy criminal, known among his associates as 'The Toff,' and known in this school as Reginald Talbot?"

Mr. Foxe's words were followed by a dead silence.

## CHAPTER 2.
### The Toff in Peril.

TALBOT!

Well enough the juniors of St. Jim's remembered the name.

Talbot of the Shell!

Only a few short weeks before that strange junior had been at St. Jim's, and since he had left there had been no word from him.

A strange story was Talbot's.

During his short stay at the old school he had won golden opinions from all. He had chummed with Tom Merry & Co., they had liked him immensely. A splendid cricketer, a good all-round sportsman, a splendid fellow in every way, they had believed him—till the crash came.

And they still remembered the crash—how it had come out that Talbot, whom they had believed the soul of honour, was in reality a boy cracksman, the leader of a dangerous gang, and how he had come to St. Jim's, deceiving the Head, deceiving everybody, to carry on his nefarious calling there.

Yet their friendly feelings towards Talbot had not changed. For the discovery had been made that the unhappy boy had repented of his many misdeeds.

Born and bred among criminals, he had had no chance in his earlier days; he had used his great talents in the cause of crime, knowing no better.

At St. Jim's a change had come over him. The influence of Tom Merry & Co., the associations of the good old school, had worked a complete change in his character—had opened his eyes to the reality of things.

Had he chosen to carry on his scheme, he could have done so successfully, keeping up the deception without danger to himself.

But he had repented, and he had reformed, with the result that his old associates, baffled in their nefarious work, had turned upon him and betrayed him.

It was because he had thrown aside the evil past, and determined to stand or fall honest and honourable, that he had suffered.

While Hookey and the rest of the rascally gang went to prison Talbot had disappeared.

But his old chums remembered him with affection and regret. For he had given proofs of his repentance; they knew that his reform was sincere. By turning to honesty he had brought ruin upon himself. Yet he had never faltered for a moment in his new path. They knew that he had gone abroad, there to begin a new life; but that was all they knew of him. No word of news came from the fellow who had been the most popular junior at St. Jim's, and who was now an outcast.

The discovery that the detective from Scotland Yard was in search of old Talbot was a terrible shock to the juniors.

They had supposed that his repentance, and his suffering for it, had cleared up the past, and that he would be given a chance in the future. They realised now that the law did not take cognisance of such things. Talbot had repented, he had made restitution, thousands of pounds' worth of loot had been restored to the rightful owners by his means, and he had gone forth into the world penniless. But what he had done in the past remained to be paid for. The law was not satisfied.

The silence in Tom Merry's study lasted several minutes. The juniors could not speak. Utter dismay had fallen upon all of them.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first to find his voice. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and turned it upon Mr. Foxe with burning indignation.

"Do you weally mean to say, sir, that you are lookin' for old Talbot?" he exclaimed heatedly.

"Exactly."

"But it is wotten—uttahly wotten——"

"'Tain't playing the game!" exclaimed Figgins warmly. "Why, don't you know——"

"Look here, Mr. Foxe——"

Mr. Foxe raised his hand.

"Please remember that I am carrying out the instructions of my superiors, and that I have my duty to do," he said. "Now, Master Merry——"

"But you don't seem to understand, Mr. Foxe," said Tom Merry, as calmly as he could. "I know that Talbot was brought up among criminals. I—I suppose he wasn't an honest chap before he came here. But after he came here it was all different. You must know all about the matter. He handed back everything that was taken in the robberies in this district. Then he was betrayed by his old pals because he wouldn't help them to rob this school."

"I am aware of it, Master Merry."

"Well, then, when a chap has repented and reformed, and given proof of it, and made restitution, what do the police want with him?" Tom Merry exclaimed warmly.

Mr. Foxe smiled.

"He has to stand his trial for many things in his youthful career, Master Merry. I have no doubt that the matters you mention will count in his favour when he is tried, and he will be dealt with mercifully. But he must be arrested and tried. He will be sent to a reformatory, in all probability, not to prison."

"What is the use of a reformatory to a chap who's reformed, and proved it?" Tom Merry demanded.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That is not for you or for me to judge," replied Mr. Foxe. "You are old enough to know that the law must be administered. The boy disappeared from this school before the police were called in to take the burglars into custody, on the night when the discovery was made. He has naturally been searched for since, but in vain. Now, however, that he is known to have returned here——"

"Returned here!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes; now that is known, I have come to take him into custody," said Mr. Foxe. "I want you to tell me if you have seen him, and where and when, and you will kindly do so immediately, Master Merry, as my time is valuable."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"I don't know anything about him, or where he may be," he replied, "and if I did, I wouldn't say a word to hurt him."

"Hear, hear!"

"I hadn't any idea that he had come back," said Tom. "It's news to me. I've seen nothing of him, and heard nothing from him. But if I did, I should treat him as a pal!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Foxe looked searchingly at the captain of the Shell.

"I do not like to doubt your word, Master Merry," he said drily. "But there is proof that the Toff, alias Talbot, has come back to this neighbourhood, if not to this school. He has been seen and recognised."

"I know nothing at all about that."

"The natural assumption is that he has come here to communicate with some of you young gentlemen who still have friendly feelings towards him," said Mr. Foxe. "He is probably in need of assistance, especially if he is keeping to honest paths. It is very surprising if no one here has heard from him."

Mr. Foxe looked round with a keen glance at the crowd of faces in the study.

But there was only surprise and dismay to be read in them. Nobody there knew anything about Talbot or his return.

"We can't tell you anything," said Blake shortly. "I don't know that we would, if we could—but we can't, and that settles it."

"No one here has seen anything of him?" asked Mr. Foxe, looking keenly from face to face.

"No one," said Manners.

"Wathah not!"

The detective looked disappointed. Evidently he had hoped to obtain information regarding Talbot from Tom Merry or some of his friends.

"Very well, I accept your assurance, of course," he said. "Undoubtedly, however, the boy has come back here with some object, and perhaps the headmaster may be able to afford me some help. Pray excuse me for having troubled you."

And Mr. Foxe left the study.

There was a buzz in the room after he had gone. Mr. Foxe's statement had fallen like a bombshell into the merry meeting.

Old Talbot had come back, and the police were hunting for him. It seemed too terrible to be true. Not only had the unfortunate lad lost everything by his steadfast adherence to his new resolutions, but he was to lose his liberty, too. For the law was not to be denied. Justice demanded a victim, and repentance did not count. Repentance, reform, were not sufficient to destroy the wretched past, the debt to justice had to be paid.

Before Mr. Foxe's arrival the meeting in Tom Merry's study had been very cheery. But the cheeriness had departed now. Mr. Foxe's mission at St. Jim's had been quite sufficient to banish it. Even Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House, ceased to regard the good things on the table with enthusiasm. All the fellows were thinking about Talbot, and all of them were dismayed and anxious.

"How utterly rotten!" said Monty Lowther. "Talbot turned out to be such a thoroughly decent sort at the finish, and even before that, we can't forget that he risked his life for young Wally."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "He saved my minah's life, and wisked his own—and only a weally decent fellow would have done it!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Somebody said once that the law was an ass," Manners remarked. "That somebody was right. The law is an awful ass."

"And old Talbot's come back here!" said Tom Merry, in wonder. "Queer that we haven't heard anything from him. He must know that he's got some pals here who'd stand by him if he wanted help."

"Only he was proud as Lucifer, and he wouldn't take help," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "Old Foxe can think he's come back for help, but I know him better than that. That isn't what he's come back for."

"All the same, he's probably stony," remarked Figgins.

"I know we'd all jolly well help him if we could, Foxe or no Foxe," said Tom Merry indignantly. "As for giving information against him—rats!"

"Yaas, wathah—wats!"

The celebration was over.

Mr. Foxe had quite spoiled that happy occasion. Under the circumstances, the juniors felt that they could not celebrate.

The meeting broke up much earlier than they had intended.

Tom Merry was wearing a very thoughtful and worried look. His friendship for Talbot of the Shell was deep and sincere; he had never forgotten him. When the Terrible Three remained alone in the study Manners and Lowther fixed an inquiring look on their chum. They could guess what was coming.

"Well?" said Monty Lowther.

"Well?" murmured Manners.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "you know what I'm thinking of. If old Talbot's come back to this quarter we want to see him. He was our pal, and we agreed that we'd always look on him as a pal, in spite of—of everything. I don't want to make light of what he had been; I know how rotten it all was. But we ought to remember he was the son of a cracksman, brought up to the bizney, and the first time he found himself among decent people he chucked up the whole game, and suffered for it. After that it would be mean to be down on him. I know he's a decent chap, and I know he's my friend. And if I can help him I'm going to."

"Hear, hear!" murmured the Co.

"If he's back in this neighbourhood, kids, he very likely wants to see us," said Tom. "Well, he can't come to the school without giving himself away. But we may meet him outside somewhere, and if we do——"

"We'll give him a tip about Foxe!" chuckled Lowther.

"Exactly! Now, who says a walk?"

"Walk!" said Manners and Lowther together.

And the Terrible Three sauntered out of the School House and crossed the quad, and walked out of the gates of St. Jim's. From which it might easily have been guessed that Mr. Foxe was not likely to receive much assistance from the chums of the Shell.

## CHAPTER 3.

### Levison Wishes to be Useful.

LEVISON of the Fourth tapped Mr. Foxe's arm as the gentleman from Scotland Yard came away from Tom Merry's study.

Mr. Foxe paused, and looked down at him.

The thin face and cunning, greenish eyes of Levison of the Fourth did not make a particularly good impression upon Mr. Foxe. But that experienced gentleman was ready to make use of any material that came to hand.

"You wish to speak to me?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Foxe," said Levison. "Step in here, will you. I don't want the fellows to see. They would be down on me at once."

Mr. Foxe obligingly followed the cad of the Fourth into an empty Form-room.

"I heard all you had to say in Tom Merry's study," Levison explained.

"And you can give me some information?" the detective asked eagerly. "You have seen something of the Toff—I mean Talbot?"

"No, I haven't, so far. I thought he was abroad," said Levison. "Is it quite certain that he has been seen in this neighbourhood."

"Quite!"

"Then I think I may have some information to give you later. You see, he can only have come back here to have something to say to Tom Merry and his friends. They were always very thick, and finding out that Talbot was a thief hasn't made any difference to them," said Levison, with a bitter sneer. "They're not particular. I suspected him all along, from the very beginning. Long before it all came out I guessed that he was a shady character, and denounced him, and all the fellows sent me to Coventry for my pains."

Mr. Foxe looked curiously at the cad of the Fourth.

"You did not like Talbot?" he asked.

"I hated him."

"Because he was a bad character?"

"Ye-es," muttered Levison. As a matter of fact, Levison had disliked Talbot for his good qualities, not for his bad ones, but he did not feel inclined to confide that to Mr. Foxe. But the Scotland Yard detective was accustomed to reading character, and in a couple of minutes he understood Levison of the Fourth pretty clearly.

"And you suspected him?" asked Mr. Foxe.

"Yes, and denounced him, as I said, but he was awfully deep; he knew how to make himself popular. Even after it all came out, and they had to admit that I was right about him, they were more down on me than ever," said Levison. "It made them ratty to find that I was in the right, after all."

Mr. Foxe smiled.

"But I haven't forgotten him," said Levison, gritting his teeth. "If I get a chance I'll make him pay for it. Now he's come back here, if he has come back, he's sure to get into communication with Tom Merry and the rest. And you can rely upon it that they won't say a word to you about it."

"It is their duty to help me," said Mr. Foxe.

Levison sneered.

"Very likely; but that won't make any difference to them, you'll see. If they come across him they'll help him, and keep it dark."

The detective frowned.

"That would be a very serious step for the young gentlemen to take," he said. "It would be against the law."

Levison snapped his fingers.

"That's all they care about that," he said. "Look here, Mr. Foxe, I'm quite willing to help you if I can. I know my—my duty."

"Exactly! It is everyone's duty to help in the execution of the law," said Mr. Foxe, not very warmly, however. "If you can give me any information at any time I shall be much obliged. What is your name?"

"Levison. I'm in the Fourth Form here. If I find anything else, where can I see you or write to you?" asked the cad of the Fourth.

"I shall be staying for a few days in Rylcombe, at the Rylcombe Arms."

"Good! I'll keep my eyes open."

Mr. Foxe hesitated for a moment. Levison was willing to help him, and Tom Merry was unwilling, yet he could not help liking Tom Merry, and feeling a vague dislike and distrust towards Levison. But he stifled his natural antipathy towards the cad of the Fourth and nodded. He reflected that detectives of the Criminal Investigation Department could not afford to be too particular as to the kind of tools they used. If Talbot did communicate with Tom Merry & Co., as was very probable, a spy in the school itself would be the surest means of making a discovery. And here was a spy, apparently designed by Nature for such business, offering his services for nothing. Mr. Foxe felt that he could not afford to throw away such an auxiliary.

"Very well," he said. "I shall be glad to hear from you, if you have anything to tell me."

"Only don't let the fellows know," said Levison uneasily. "They'd be down on me like a ton of bricks if they knew."

"I understand," said Mr. Foxe drily.

And he left the Form-room.

Levison grinned, with a catlike gleam in his eyes. It seemed that at last his chance had come for repaying, with interest, all the slights and humiliations he had suffered with regard to Talbot of the Shell. As for the contempt he had not failed to read in Mr. Foxe's eyes, that did not worry him at all, so long as he served his end. Levison of the Fourth was not unused to contempt.

Mr. Foxe made his way to the Head's house, and sent in his card, and was admitted to the presence of Dr. Holmes. The Head of St. Jim's received him with his usual courtesy. He had met Mr. Foxe before, in connection with the arrest and trial of the burglars who had broken into the school on the night Talbot had gone. The good old Head looked very grave, however, when the gentleman from Scotland Yard stated his business.

"You—you are looking for that unhappy boy, Mr. Foxe?" he exclaimed, in considerable agitation.

"I have orders to take him into custody, sir."

"But—but surely I should have thought the authorities might have allowed this matter to pass into oblivion," said the Head. "That boy, Mr. Foxe, had really a noble nature, in spite of the unhappy results of his early training. He was brought up infamously, among infamous associates, but at the first opportunity he turned from wrong to right. It was because of his stubborn honesty that his old associates betrayed him. You are aware of that."

"All that will count in his favour, sir," said Mr. Foxe. "But he must take his trial. I am certain that he will be dealt with mercifully."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"But he is living an honest life now, Mr. Foxe."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly!"

"Then you are in communication with him, sir?"

The kind old gentleman did not see the trap. But he shook his head.

"No; but I am convinced of it," he said. "I do not conceal from you, Mr. Foxe, that I helped him to leave the country."

Mr. Foxe smiled grimly.

"I will take that as a confidence, sir," he said. "I recommend you not to make the statement in public. You were taking the law into your own hands. However, no harm is done if the boy is now arrested. You can tell me where he is."

"I cannot. I had one letter from him after his arrival in Germany."

"In Germany!" repeated Mr. Foxe.

"Yes; he went there immediately, and I have not heard

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**A sudden flash of light came from the gloom, to fall full on Talbot's face. Then he heard a voice with a German accent exclaiming in surprise. Well Talbot knew that voice. "Karl Elberfelt!" he muttered. "You spy—what are you doing in England?"** (*See Chapter* 12.)

from him since. He told me he had obtained work there in a commercial house. His knowledge of German was very good, but he would not tell me his address in case I should be asked questions about him. I suppose the poor lad foresaw something like this," the Head added, with a sigh.

"But he cannot be in Germany now," remarked Mr. Foxe; "since the outbreak of the war he must have left that country."

"I suppose so. I sincerely trust he is not in want. But in want or plenty, I am convinced that he will remain rigidly honest."

"As a matter of fact, sir," said Mr. Foxe abruptly, "it is known that he is in England; he has been seen in this neighbourhood. You were not aware of it?"

The Head started.

"No, I was quite unaware of it, Mr. Foxe," he said.

"Then you cannot tell me where he is?"

"Certainly not."

"It is very important that he should be found as soon as possible," said Mr. Foxe. "I am assured that he will be dealt with leniently, in consideration of the fact that he prevented a robbery at this school. But he must, of course, go before the magistrates in the usual way, and it is my duty to take him into custody. I am sorry that you cannot give me any hint as to where to look for him."

Dr. Holmes looked deeply distressed. He had a very affectionate remembrance of Talbot of the Shell.

"I cannot say I am sorry, Mr. Foxe," said the Head frankly. "I sincerely trust that the unfortunate boy will not be found. You will excuse my saying so. I am sorry—deeply sorry—that he has ventured back into danger. I know you are only doing your duty, Mr. Foxe, but—but my sympathies are all with that unhappy boy, and I make no secret of it!"

Mr. Foxe smiled slightly as he rose to his feet. He was evidently a good-natured man, though hard as iron in the pursuit of his professional duty.

"I quite understand your feelings in the matter, sir," he said. "However, I have my duty to do, and I trust I shall be able to take the son of Captain Crow, the cracksman, back to London with me, a prisoner. Good-afternoon!"

And Mr. Foxe took his leave, leaving the Head of St. Jim's in a decidedly worried frame of mind.

"The unhappy boy!" murmured the Head, when Mr. Foxe was gone. "The unfortunate, reckless lad! Why has he come back? I—I suppose it would be wrong, from the point of view of the law, yet if I saw him, I—I really think that I should feel bound to aid him. Whatever he has been in the past, I am convinced that a more honest and upright lad does not exist, and I cannot forget that he saved me from heavy loss!"

And it was quite some time before the Head could settle down quietly again, even to the entrancing study of Æschylus.

## CHAPTER 4.
### Chums Yet.

"TALBOT!"

Tom Merry muttered the name softly.

And Lowther and Manners repeated it in a whisper.

It was Talbot!

The Terrible Three had hoped to see something of their old pal when they left the school—they had hoped it, but they had not expected it. And here he was, in full view, ten minutes after they had sauntered out of the gates of St. Jim's.

Talbot did not see them.

The well-knit, handsome lad looked his old self. There were some lines on his boyish face that told of trouble, that was all. In his early days no one could have been more careless and happy than the "Toff," but he had evidently found the path of honesty a thorny one.

For with honesty came hard work and want for the lad who had to begin at the bottom of the ladder and fight his way upward.

The schoolboy cracksman who could make a fortune in a single night by the lucky cracking of a "crib" had left St. Jim's almost penniless, grimly refusing to keep a single shilling that was not honestly and justly his own. He had youth, strength, health, and determination, and he was determined to take his chance. He was clever, too, and his education was good. There was a place in the world, surely, for such a lad.

But he had found the battle hard. No more luxuries, no more idleness, no more careless flinging about of money for the Toff. Hard work and a clear conscience instead. And he knew that the change was for the better.

He stood on the hillside, looking down on the old school.

The three chums of the Shell caught sight of him there as they came along the lane.

But Talbot's eyes were not turned upon them. He was looking towards St. Jim's, the grey old building glowing in the sunset. On the playing-fields the first eleven could be seen engaged in a footer match with a team from Abbotsford. In the quiet of the countryside the shouts from the football-ground came faintly over the hill.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Well done, Kildare!"

"Bravo!"

There was a strange emotion in Talbot's handsome face as he looked upon the old school, which had been the only home he had ever known.

Tom Merry, as he looked up at him from the lane, saw the tears that glistened in his eyes, and he started, with something like a lump in his own throat.

Talbot had always been as hard as nails—never one of the "blubbing" sort; but there were tears in his eyes now as he looked down on the old school. Tom Merry thought that he could understand the emotions that were struggling in the breast of the strange and wayward youth.

"Poor old Talbot!" he muttered. "Poor old kid! What a rotten shame that he can't come back to St. Jim's!"

"Rotten!" muttered Lowther. "Let's speak to him, anyway!"

"Talbot!" called out Tom Merry.

Talbot started.

He looked down the hillside, and caught sight of the Terrible Three. His handsome face flushed crimson for a moment, and then the colour fled, leaving him deadly pale. He made a movement as if to retreat as the Terrible Three came quickly towards him.

"Talbot, old man, hold on!"

The Toff hesitated.

Tom Merry reached him first, and held out his hand. Talbot gave him a strange look.

"Tom Merry, I—I did not expect to see you!"

"Give us your fist, old chap!"

"My fist! You know what I am——"

"Yes, I know what you are—one of the best and straightest fellows breathing!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I know that! Give us your fist!"

Talbot shook hands with him.

"You are jolly good to me!" he muttered. "Now—now that you know my history, I wonder that I've got the cheek to look you in the face!"

"Oh, rot!" said Tom cheerily. "We understand!"

"You bet!" said Lowther, as he and then Manners shook hands with the outcast. "Keep your pecker up, Talbot, old man!"

Talbot caught his breath almost with a sob.

"You speak like that to me, when—when you know——" he murmured.

"Of course we do," said Tom. "We know you never had a chance at the start, and we know that as soon as you had a chance you jumped at it. That's all we want to know. Now, what have you been doing with yourself all this time? Sit down here, and have a whack in this toffee, and tell us all about it!"

Talbot smiled, his face brightening curiously under the influence of the hearty cordiality of the chums of St. Jim's. He accepted the chunk of toffee; he was once more a frank and cheery schoolboy, if only for the moment. The lines of care seemed to have faded from his handsome face.

"Where have you been?" asked Manners. "We heard that you were gone abroad. You might have dropped us a line, you bounder!"

"Better not," said Talbot. "Better for you to have forgotten all about me. I'm not the kind of fellow for chaps like you to remember!"

"Are you looking for a thick ear?" demanded Tom Merry.

"No, thanks!" said Talbot, laughing.

"Then don't talk any more rot like that! Now, tell us what you've been doing!"

"I cleared out of England," said Talbot slowly. "The Head helped me, like the brick he is. He believed in me. I—I couldn't take any of the money, you understand. I had plenty of money, but—but it wasn't mine. I handed it all over, and I was stony. I let the Head give me ten quid for a start. I got the express that night to Newhaven, and crossed the Channel. I had some luck after that. You know I'm pretty good at German and French, and I got a job in a merchant's office in Hamburg—a German merchant. Next to nothing in the way of pay, but it was a beginning, and I could just live on it. There was a chance of getting on, too, by hard work, and I'm not afraid of that. I wanted to be in England, but that was impossible, of course, so I made up my mind to stick it out in Hamburg. I should be there still, only——"

"The war?" said Manners.

"Yes. I had to clear out of Germany at once, as soon as I could after war was declared, like all the other English. I could have got a job." Talbot's lip curled for a moment. "I had an offer—all right so far as money went, but it wasn't the kind of job I could accept." He laughed a little harshly. "The Toff was beginning to get particular, you know, though even in my worst days I don't think I'd have taken on what Karl Elberfelt offered me. You see, as I am English, I should have been useful to them. Elberfelt had wormed out that I had been in trouble in England, and he thought I was the kind of fellow he was looking for!"

"What did he want you to do?" asked Tom curiously.

"Spy," said Talbot briefly.

"The rotter!"

"What did you do?" asked Lowther.

"I punched his head," said Talbot. "I had to make my meaning clear."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then I cleared off. I got home somehow. I tramped through Belgium." Talbot shivered a little. "I was in the German lines more than once. I won't tell you what I've seen in that country; it's enough to keep you awake at nights. I got back to England with a crowd of refugees. I've been back a good time now. I—I ought to have stayed in London, I suppose, but I couldn't resist coming to have a look at the old place. You fellows don't understand all that St. Jim's means to me. I had to come and see the place again. I tramped it, and—and here I am!"

The juniors looked at him with friendly commiseration. In face, in manner, he was the old Talbot they knew so well; but he did not look much like the Talbot who had been one of the best dressed fellows at St. Jim's. His clothes were shabby and worn, his boots ragged and dusty. It was very easy to see that he had been through many a hardship and privation.

"And now——" said Tom, after a pause.

"Now I've got work with a farmer near Wayland for a few days," said Talbot quietly. "Hard work; but, as I said, I'm not afraid of that. If I were older, I know what I'd do. There's a way a man can wipe out the past, however bad it is, now that men are wanted in the fighting-line. But they don't want a kid of my age. I say, I'm jolly glad I've seen you fellows. It bucks me up."

"I wish you could come back to St. Jim's," said Tom wistfully.

Talbot compressed his lips.

"I wish I could," he said. "But, you forget, I'm wanted by the police. But if I could come, I shouldn't have the cheek. And the fellows—what would think they of the Toff as a schoolmate, now they know?"

"I know we'd all welcome you."

"You're bricks, all of you," said Talbot, with a break in his voice. "If I'd had better chances when I was a kid, I should deserve this more now. But the past can't be helped.

The only thing is to keep straight in the future, and I'm keeping straight now—straight as a die. You believe that?"

"Of course we do," said Tom warmly. "We know it. Talbot, old man, you're in danger down here."

"Danger?" said Talbot.

"Have you ever heard of a chap named Foxe, of Scotland Yard?"

"One of the keenest detectives in the C.I.D.," said Talbot. "He was after Captain Crow—my father—for years, before the end came. Not a bad man; but I shouldn't like to meet him now."

"He's down here," said Tom.

Talbot started.

"Looking for me?"

"Yes. You've been seen, and it's been reported. He's come down to the school to inquire after you. He's in the school now."

"Then I'd better clear," said Talbot, with a sigh. "It's a bit hard that a fellow can't be left alone when he's proved that he means to run straight; but it's not easy to shake off the past. I've got to pay for that now—pay for it with interest. Foxe is only doing his duty. But he won't nail me if I can help it. I—— What's the matter?"

Monty Lowther uttered a sudden, startled exclamation.

"Here he is!"

Talbot set his teeth as he started up and glanced round. In the lane, coming from the direction of St. Jim's, was a figure in a grey coat and a bowler hat. It was Mr. Foxe, of Scotland Yard. He caught sight of the group of juniors on the hillside at the same moment. A gleam came into his steely eyes, and he broke into a run towards them.

"Talbot! The Toff! You are my prisoner!"

## CHAPTER 5.
### To Save a Pal!

TOM MERRY clenched his hands desperately.

The detective was almost upon them; the handcuffs were already clinking in his hand. There was no mistaking his determination. He had found his quarry, and Talbot was his prisoner. The unhappy lad had reached the end of his tether at last.

Talbot did not attempt to run. Behind him was the steep hillside, before him was the active, muscular detective. He had no chance. His face paled a little, but there was no sign of fear in it. A bitter smile was on his lips, that was all. His fate was upon him, and he was prepared to face it.

"Talbot," Tom Merry almost choked—"Talbot, old chap, run for it!"

"Run!" panted Manners.

"Useless," said Talbot quietly. "I've got to go through with it. Here you are, Foxe. You have me at last."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Foxe quietly. "I've got my duty to do. It won't be so hard on you, Toff—not so hard as it would have been, I mean. You will get off lightly, considering what you have done. But I have orders to arrest you, and that's what I'm going to do."

"You're not!" shouted Tom Merry, his eyes blazing. "Talbot, you ass, cut off, I tell you. We'll help you."

Mr. Foxe frowned grimly.

"If you interfere, Master Merry, you will be breaking the law, and you will be taken into custody, too," he said. "Come, Toff! If——"

He strode towards Talbot.

Monty Lowther's foot came suddenly in the way, and the detective stumbled and fell on his knees, with a sharp exclamation. Tom Merry caught Talbot by the shoulder and dragged him away.

"Run for it!" he panted. "Are you mad? It means prison—years of prison, perhaps. Cut, you duffer—cut——"

"But you——"

"Never mind us—cut!"

"I won't get you into trouble!"

"Hands off!" roared Mr. Foxe. He was struggling to his feet, when Manners and Lowther grasped him, and bore him to the earth. "You young rascals! How dare you! Hands off!"

"Cut, Talbot!" yelled Monty Lowther. "Take your chance, you idiot!"

Tom Merry excitedly thrust Talbot away. The outcast did not hesitate longer. The chums of St. Jim's had crossed the Rubicon now. They had laid hands on Mr. Foxe, and they had to face the consequences. And liberty was dear. It was all that the unhappy boy had left.

"I'll go!" he muttered huskily. "Heaven bless you for this, Tom Merry!"

With the speed of a deer, Talbot dashed down the hillside.

Mr. Foxe uttered a yell of rage as he saw him go, and made a desperate effort to throw off Manners and Lowther. Slight as he was in build, the detective was muscular, and he nearly succeeded. But Tom Merry flung himself upon him, and the man from Scotland Yard was crushed to the earth again.

With the three juniors sprawling over him and clinging to him, Mr. Foxe was helpless.

He struggled and grunted under the weight of the Terrible Three, while Talbot dashed away, and disappeared into the wood.

Not until Talbot was out of sight, and there was no chance of the detective running him down again, did the Shell fellows release Mr. Foxe.

Then their grasp relaxed, and they rose.

Mr. Foxe sat on the ground, utterly out of breath, panting wildly, his face red with rage.

"Grooh, grooh, grooh-hooh! Oh! Ow!"

The Terrible Three were breathing hard. Their faces were grave enough. Talbot was gone. They had saved him. But at what a price! What had they done? He was their old pal, and they had chipped in to save him. But that was not how the law would look at it. They had forcibly prevented a detective from arresting a law-breaker for whose arrest a warrant had been issued; and the thought of what they had done and its probable consequences made them feel almost giddy. Yet they were not sorry!

Mr. Foxe staggered to his feet. He stared round furiously for Talbot; but the deep, dark woods had long swallowed up the fleeing Toff. Then he fixed his eyes upon the chums of St. Jim's.

"You know what you've done?" said Mr. Foxe, breathing hard. "You know what you'll have to pay for it?"

"We know," said Tom Merry quietly.

"It's prison for you!"

Tom Merry caught his breath. He supposed it was that, and the thought of the scandal, the disgrace, the gossip, made him feel almoost sick. Manners set his teeth hard. Lowther turned a little pale. They had acted upon the impulse of the moment to save their old pal. But what was to happen now—what would their people say?

Mr. Foxe regarded them keenly, the anger dying out of his face.

"What did you do it for?" he asked gruffly.

"To save him," said Tom.

"To save a criminal—a cracksman!"

"He isn't that now! When he was at St. Jim's he was our pal. He risked his life to save a chum of ours. We—we couldn't leave him in the lurch." Tom Merry's voice faltered. "We know we've broken the law, Mr. Foxe. You can do as you like. We sha'n't resist."

"You told me you knew nothing of him only an hour ago."

"We didn't then. We came out hoping to meet him, after what you told us, and—and we met him here. He had come back to have a look at the old school. That's all. Now, if you want to take us, we—we'll go!"

"You know what it means?"

"I—I suppose so."

"For mercy's sake, get it over!" said Manners nervously. "We've broken the law, and we've got to pay for it. I suppose it's only right, in a way. But if you knew what a splendid chap Talbot is you'd understand. But you've got your duty to do, I suppose, and you must do it. Get it over!"

Mr. Foxe picked up the handcuffs, which had fallen into the grass in the struggle. Tom Merry's face went red and white.

"Not that," he muttered thickly. "We—we'll come quietly, Mr. Foxe. You needn't rub it in like that."

"I don't mean to," said Mr. Foxe. He slipped the handcuffs into his pocket. "You are three young rascals!" he went on deliberately. "Three young fools, I should say, rather. You deserve to be made an example of, but——" Mr. Foxe paused. "Perhaps I can understand things better than you think. Good-afternoon!"

He brushed his bowler hat, set it on his head again, and turned away

The Terrible Three could scarcely believe their ears.

"Mr. Foxe," burst out Tom Merry, "you—you don't mean——"

"You—you're going to look over it," stammered Lowther.

The detective smiled.

"You young asses," he said. "I'll leave it to your conscience. I shall get my prisoner, anyway, sooner or later. Only don't do anything of the sort again. I sha'n't be so patient next time."

"I—I say, you're a brick," stammered Tom Merry. "I—I hope we didn't hurt you, Mr. Foxe. This is simply splendid of you."

"You did hurt me, as a matter of fact," grunted Mr. Foxe. "But it's all in the day's work. Be more careful next time, that's all. Good-afternoon!"

And the detective walked away. He was smiling.

The Terrible Three looked at one another in silence. For the moment their relief was too deep for words.

"Well," said Tom Merry at last, with a deep breath, "we're well out of that scrape, you chaps! I think it's about the

worst we've ever been in. And—and that detective chap is a ripping good fellow!"

"One of the best!" said Lowther. "I was feeling pretty sick, I can tell you. Let's get back to St. Jim's. An experience like that leaves rather an unpleasant taste in the mouth."

The Terrible Three walked back to the school in silence. They had saved Talbot, and they were glad of that. But—but for Mr. Foxe's generosity, matters might have gone very badly with them in consequence. And their feelings were very kindly now towards the gentleman from Scotland Yard.

## CHAPTER 6.
### The Letter from Talbot.

"LETTER for you, Tom!"

Monty Lowther came into the study with a letter in his hand. It was a couple of days after the meeting with Talbot, and the St. Jim's fellows had heard nothing of him since, and nothing of Mr. Foxe But in this case no news was good news, for if Talbot had been caught they would certainly have heard of it.

Lowther closed the study door, and tossed the letter on the table.

"I brought it up as soon as I spotted it in the rack," he explained. "Levison was nosing over the letters, and he had his eye on it."

"No harm in Levison seeing Tom's letter, is there?" asked Manners.

"That depends. I think I know the fist," said Lowther.

Tom Merry took up the letter quickly. It was addressed to him, in a handwriting he did not remember to have seen before. But as he scanned it it occurred to him that the hand was disguised, and that there was something familiar about it after all.

"Talbot!" he murmured.

"So I suspected," said Lowther. "And the less Levison knows about it the better. You remember he was always up against old Talbot, and he would do him harm now if he had half a chance. Let's see what he says—if it is from Talbot."

Tom Merry opened the letter. It was from Talbot. Inside, the writing was not disguised. It was only in the superscription that Talbot had taken that trouble, in order not to draw attention to the fact that Tom Merry was receiving a letter from a fellow who was "wanted" by the police.

"It's from Talbot," said Tom quietly. And the three juniors read it together.

"Dear Tom,—I want to thank you and the other chaps for the way you helped me the other day. I got clear away, thanks to you. I hope you did not have to suffer for it. I am very anxious about that. What you did was a jolly serious thing. If you are in trouble over it I shall give myself up to Mr. Foxe, and get you clear that way. I can't let you suffer for my sake. You have done quite enough for me.

"I am in Abbotsford now. I have a job here. I think I am safe enough; but I must know whether you are in trouble on my account. Will you write to me—George Brown, at Slingsby's Farm, Abbotsford?—Always yours,

"R. TALBOT."

"Just like him!" said Tom Merry. "He was always a decent chap, and now he's thinking about us instead of about himself. If he's staying at Abbotsford, we may be able to see him again, though I wish he were in a safer place. I believe the detective is still hanging about looking for him here. Still, it's a good distance to Abbotsford."

"We shall be over there on Saturday afternoon for the footer match," Manners remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; and we might see him then, perhaps. I want to see him again. Anyway, I'll write to him at once and tell him it's all serene with us, and relieve his mind. He's got a job on the farm under the name of George Brown, it seems. I——"

Tom Merry broke off abruptly as the study door opened. Levison of the Fourth looked in. Tom hastily crumpled Talbot's letter in his hand, and turned a flushed face towards the cad of the Fourth.

"What do you want?" he asked angrily. "Why don't you knock before you come in, Levison?"

Levison's eyes lingered upon the crumpled letter in the Shell fellow's hand.

"Sorry!" he remarked. "I just looked in to speak to you fellows——"

"Well, what is it?" growled Tom Merry.

He put his hand in his pocket with the letter in it. Levison smiled slightly.

"It's about the Abbotsford match to-morrow," he remarked. "I was wondering whether you'd care to play me in the team."

"No, I wouldn't!"

Levison laughed.

"Sure? You want a good half, you know, and I——"

"I won't beat about the bush with you," said Tom Merry abruptly. "You didn't come in here to ask me about the footer team. You know jolly well that I wouldn't play you at any price. You came in here to spy."

"On what?" asked Levison, with a smile.

Tom Merry did not answer that question. It occurred to him that he was, in fact, giving the matter away to Levison. Levison had noted the similarity to Talbot's hand in the address on the letter, and he had come there to make sure. And Tom Merry's angry words furnished him with proof, for if there had been nothing to conceal, Tom would not have suspected the Fourth-Former of prying. The Shell fellow bit his lip angrily. It was not the first time that he had realised that he was no match for Levison in a contest of cunning.

He pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said sharply.

Levison shrugged his shoulders, and quitted the study. He had discovered what he had come there to ascertain. There was no doubt left in his mind that the letter he had seen crumpled in Tom Merry's hand was from Talbot.

Lowther slammed the door after the cad of the Fourth.

"Hang his prying!" he growled. "Better get that letter destroyed, Tommy. The cad will get his eyes on it sooner or later."

"Right-ho! I'll answer it and then burn it," said Tom.

And he sat down at once to reply to the letter. It did not take long.

"Dear Talbot,—We are all right. Mr. Foxe acted like a brick. No need to worry about us. We're playing Abbotsford School on Saturday afternoon—to-morrow—and the public are admitted to the ground. If you can come along we might see you, if you think it safe."

And the Terrible Three all signed the letter.

Tom Merry promptly burnt Talbot's letter, setting fire to it with a match in the grate, thus satisfying himself that it was safe from Levison's prying eyes. Then he walked down to the school letter-box with his reply to it, and slipped it into the box. He passed Levison in the quadrangle, and the eyes of the Fourth-Former followed him curiously. Tom Merry took no notice of him.

The letter dropped into the box. Tom returned to the School House.

"That's done!" he announced, as he came back into the study. "The collection goes at six, and Talbot may get the letter to-night—anyway, first thing in the morning. Then he will know that it's all right. Now for tea!"

And the chums of the Shell sat down to tea, discussing the forthcoming match with Abbotsford over that cheery meal, and not troubling to give a thought to Levison of the Fourth.

They little guessed how Levison was occupied at that moment.

## CHAPTER 7.
### Levison's Trick.

BLAGG, the postman, came along from the direction of Rylcombe.

Outside the walls of St. Jim's a junior was lounging idly. It was Levison of the Fourth.

He was leaning against the school wall close by the letter-box. He smiled to himself in his cat-like way as he discerned the postman coming up the lane. Mellish of the Fourth came out of the school gates and looked round.

"Oh, here you are!" he exclaimed.

Levison nodded.

"Ain't you coming in to tea?" asked Mellish, looking at his study-mate in surprise.

"Presently."

"What are you hanging about here for?" asked Mellish.

"I want to see the postman."

"It isn't a delivery now—it's a collection," said Mellish, puzzled.

"I know that."

"Then what the dickens——"

"Shurrup! Here comes Blagg!"

Blagg, the postman, touched his cap as he came up to the letter-box. The box was placed in the thickness of the school wall. The slit for inserting letters was on the inside of the wall, but the opening for the postman was on the outside. Blagg stopped before the letter-box to make the collection.

"Good-evening, Blagg!" said Levison affably. "I've been

waiting for you. There's a letter in the box I want to see——"

Blagg shook his head stolidly.

"Can't touch any letters what is once put in the box, Master Levison."

"Oh, yes, I know; but I've forgotten whether I put a stamp on my letter," Levison explained "That's all I want to know. I want to look over the letters and see if they're all stamped. No harm in that, Blagg."

"No harm at all, Master Levison."

"Thanks! I'll wait while you do it."

Mellish looked at his chum in surprise. He knew Levison better than Blagg did, and he was quite certain that his study-mate was not speaking the truth. But why Levison should wish to look over the letters in the box was a mystery to Mellish. Blagg was an unsuspicious old fellow, but he knew his duty, and he certainly would not have allowed Levison or anybody else to meddle with the letters once posted.

Blagg opened the box and collected the letters. He did not see any reason why he should not oblige Levison by looking over them to see whether they were all stamped.

Levison made no attempt to touch the letters. He simply looked over the postman's shoulder while he examined them. A sudden gleam came into his eyes.

What he was looking for was not an unstamped letter, as a matter of fact, but a letter directed in Tom Merry's handwriting.

And he had spotted it.

Blagg turned over among the rest an envelope addressed in Tom Merry's well-known hand, which Levison, of course, recognised at once; and the address upon it was "George Brown, Slingsby's Farm, near Abbotsford."

That was enough for Levison.

That Tom Merry was not acquainted with anybody named George Brown at Slingsby's Farm, near Abbotsford, he was quite assured.

Tom Merry had posted only one letter—there was only one directed in his hand. This, then, was the letter he had posted immediately after receiving the letter which Levison suspected to come from Talbot.

The inference was clear.

Tom Merry was writing to Talbot under the name of George Brown, at the address of Slingsby's Farm, near Abbotsford.

"Don't seem to be no letters 'ere without a stamp, Master Levison," said Blagg.

"All serene!" said Levison, with a nod. "I suppose I stamped it all right, after all. Much obliged, Blagg."

"Don't mention it, Master Levison."

And Blagg touched his hat and went his way.

Levison grinned.

"What the dickens are you up to?" asked the mystified Mellish. "You jolly well knew you hadn't put a letter in there without a stamp on, you ass!"

"Quite so!"

"Then what did you want to see the letters for?"

"I wanted to see what name and address Tom Merry was writing to," grinned Levison; "and I've seen it now. You know that Talbot is hiding himself somewhere in this neighbourhood?"

"I know that detective chap said so," replied Mellish.

"Foxe is staying in Rylcombe, to look for him," said Levison.

"How do you know?"

"He told me. I'm going to help him. It's a chap's duty to help the police to arrest a notorious criminal!" said Levison virtuously.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Mellish. "Don't give me that kind of thing. I know you've got your knife into Talbot, and you'd better not let the other fellows know you're trying to damage him. It won't be nice for you if you do."

"I don't intend to let them know," said Levison coolly. "I knew that Talbot would write to Tom Merry sooner or later, and I've been keeping my eyes on the letters. I spotted a letter this afternoon—in a disguised fist, I know; but I thought I knew it, all the same. I meant to know where Tom Merry's answer was addressed to, and now I know."

"Talbot?" asked Mellish, with a whistle.

"George Brown, at Slingsby's Farm, near Abbotsford," said Levison.

"Then you're on the wrong track, after all."

"Fathead!" said Levison. "You don't think Talbot would be living about here under his own name, do you?"

"Oh!"

"Of course, he's taken another name. Easy enough for him to do so; he's used to it. I don't suppose Talbot is his real name, for that matter. Probably he doesn't know what his real name is, if he's got one," said Levison, with a sneer. "Anyway, I'm sure that he's staying at Slingsby's Farm now, under the name of George Brown."

"My hat!" said Mellish. "If that man Foxe knew——"

"He's going to know. I'm going down to Rylcombe now."

Mellish looked a little uneasy.

"I say, it's a bit rough on the poor brute, to set the bobbies after him like that," he muttered; "and when the fellows find out about it——"

"I've got my duty to do," said Levison loftily. "Coming along with me?"

"No fear," said Mellish promptly. "I'm not going to be mixed up in it."

"Go and eat coke, then!" growled Levison.

He turned in the direction of the village, and Mellish promptly went in at the school gates again. Levison grinned as he went down the road. He was sure of his ground now, and he felt that he held the fate of his old enemy in the hollow of his hand. And he would have no mercy. Ere a couple of hours had passed, Talbot, once of St. Jim's, would be the detective's prisoner, with handcuffs on his wrists. And Levison grinned with delight at the anticipation.

But Levison's little scheme was not destined to be carried out quite so easily. He had not covered a dozen yards from the gates when a sharp voice called to him. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, was coming up the road from Rylcombe.

"Levison!"

The Fourth-Former stopped.

"Yes, Kildare!"

"Where are you going?" asked the Sixth-Former, frowning "It's just on locking-up. Have you a pass out of gates?"

"N-no!"

"Then get inside—and sharp!"

"I—I say, Kildare, I—I want particularly to go down to Rylcombe," stammered Levison, dismayed by this unexpected check. "You can give me a pass. Will you?"

Kildare eyed him grimly. He had a very unfavourable opinion of the cad of the fourth.

"And what do you want in Rylcombe?" he demanded.

"I—I want to go to the outfitter's."

"Indeed! What are you going to get at the outfitter's?"

"My—my new footer boots."

"Your new footer boots can wait till to-morrow," said Kildare drily. "No need for a special pass out to fetch a pair of footer boots. Get in!"

Levison ground his teeth. He had so extensive a reputation for untruthfulness that it was natural that the prefect should not take his word. Indeed, it was a lame enough excuse, for Levison was known not to be a footballer. But it was useless to argue with Kildare, and Levison went back sullenly into the school.

A few minutes later Taggles locked the gates.

Levison went savagely into the School House. He was baffled for the time. It was too late to send Mr. Foxe a letter to reach him even the following morning, as the last collection had been made at the school letter-box. But unless Levison took the risk of breaking bounds after dark to visit Mr. Foxe, there was no other way of conveying the valuable information to him. Mellish looked at his chum as the latter came sullenly into the study, and grinned.

"You haven't gone, after all?"

"That rotter Kildare sent me back!"

"Never mind—leave the thing alone," said Mellish. "Very likely you're after a mare's-nest all the time, you know."

Levison grunted, and sat down at the table to write.

"After all, he'll get this by midday to-morrow," he said. "The rotter will still be at Slingsby's Farm, and the detective can catch him there. It's the best I can do."

"Better leave it alone," advised Mellish.

"Oh, rats!"

In ten minutes Levison's letter to Mr. Foxe was written and dropped into the school letter-box, to wait there for the morning's collection.

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three were keeping Talbot's secret. Not even to the chums of Study No. 6 did they mention Talbot's name and address. For his safety's sake, the fewer in the secret the better. Little did they dream that Levison knew already as much as they knew, and that the information, carefully written out, was lying in the letter-box, to be delivered to Mr. Foxe on the morrow.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Match at Abbotsford.

"HEAH'S the bwake, deah boys!"

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry.

The St. Jim's junior eleven were ready to start for Abbotsford.

It was a keen, sunny November afternoon. Tom Merry & Co., muffled in coats and comforters, took their places in the

big brake, and started. They were in great spirits. Tom Merry had a thoughtful shade on his brow. He was thinking of Talbot, and wondering whether he would see anything that day of his old friend; for, in spite of all, Tom still regarded Talbot as a friend. Several fellows beside the footer eleven had crowded into the brake, and a good many juniors were following it on their bikes, to see the match. Among them was Levison of the Fourth, and the footballers noticed his presence there with surprise.

Levison was not a footballer, and he somewhat ostentatiously took no interest whatever in the House and School matches. Why he should be following the junior eleven to Abbotsford was not easily to be understood.

"Where are you off to, Levison?" Figgins of the New House called out to him, as he pedalled away behind the brake.

"Abbotsford!" replied Levison.

"What for?"

"To see the match, of course!"

"And what the dickens do you want to see the match for?" asked Figgins, in surprise. "Have you been making any bets on it?"

"Oh, rats!" said Levison. "Go and eat coke!"

Levison soon dropped behind the other cyclists; he was not a good rider. The brake dashed on, and the juniors soon forgot all about Levison. Surprised as they were by his unaccustomed interest in the footer match, they did not think of suspecting that he had any other object in visiting Abbotsford that afternoon.

By that time, as Levison knew, his letter was already in Mr. Foxe's hands. The detective was aware that Talbot, under the name of George Brown, was to be found at Slingsby's Farm, near Abbotsford.

Levison wanted to be "in at the death."

He surmised that it was quite possible that Talbot would look in on the Abbotsford ground, if he could, to see the St. Jim's match, and if he turned up there, Levison intended to keep his eyes open for him, and take his measures accordingly. The cad of the Fourth was bitterly determined that his old enemy should not elude the net that was spread for him.

The brake arrived at Abbotsford School, with a little army of cyclists round it. There were a good many people on the footer-ground already—Abbotsford fellows, and townspeople who had strolled in to see the game. Tom Merry looked over the crowd, but he did not see Talbot.

Yorke, the Abbotsford junior skipper, greeted Tom Merry & Co. warmly. In the last match with St. Jim's juniors Abbotsford had been successful, Tom Merry and several other members of the team being away at the time. The St. Jim's eleven meant to avenge that defeat now that they were in full force.

"We have got to give them the kybosh, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked impressively, in the dressing-room. "They licked us last time—or, wathah, they licked you fellows, but now I am heah it will be all wight, I twust."

Kangaroo of the Shell gave an expressive snort.

"Weally, Kangy——" began Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the Cornstalk. But Monty Lowther interrupted.

"Gussy would be more useful if his place in the team was changed," the humorist of the Shell remarked thoughtfully.

"Yaas, I have sevewal times wemarked to Tom Mewwy that I should be more useful as centah-forward than as outside-left," said Arthur Augustus. "The duffah does not seem to see it, howevah."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't see it now, Gussy!"

"Still, I suggest a change," said Lowther solemnly. "'Tain't too late, Tommy, and it may make all the difference in the game."

"What are you driving at, ass?" asked Tom Merry politely.

"You see, Gussy is outside-left——"

"Yes."

"Well, I suggest that he should be left outside, instead——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And then we shall really be a much stronger team!" explained Lowther.

"You uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus witheringly. "I wegard you as a howlin' duffah, Lowthah. Pway keep your wotten puns for the 'Weekly,' deah boy!"

"Well, I was only suggesting a change for the good of the team——"

"Oh, wats!"

And Arthur Augustus walked out with aristocratic nose high in the air, followed by the rest of the team, chuckling.

Tom Merry won the toss, and Abbotsford kicked off. St. Jim's followed up the kick-off with a hot attack upon the Abbotsford goal, the whole forward line—Kerr, Figgins, Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy—going in fine style. But the Abbotsford defence was sound, and the rush was stopped, and the ball from Tom Merry's foot struck a goalpost and glanced again into the field of play. There was a sharp struggle before the goal, and the backs strove hard to clear, but the leather went in again. The goalkeeper punched it out, and Figgins's head met the ball and drove it in again before the goalie knew what was coming. There was a shout as the leather went into the net.

"Goal!"

"Well done, St. Jim's!"

"Hurrah!"

It was first blood for Tom Merry & Co. The crowd round the ropes cheered loudly.

"Bravo, Figgins!"

Tom Merry looked round quickly; he thought he knew that voice that shouted "Bravo, Figgins!" Close up to the ropes stood a lad in corduroys, with a sunburnt face, and a cap pulled down over his forehead. He looked like an ordinary farmer's lad, but Tom Merry knew the handsome face at once. It was Talbot. He had come to see the match after all.

As the footballers walked back to the centre of the field Tom Merry waved his hand to the lad in corduroys.

"Who's that, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Talbot!" whispered Tom Merry. "Keep it dark!"

"Bai Jove!"

The players lined up again. Talbot was watching the match with keen interest, longing to be in the ranks of the St. Jim's juniors. Had matters gone well with him—had he been able to remain at the old school—he would have been in the junior eleven, and would have been lining up with the rest that sunny afternoon. And his heart was with his old comrades yet.

He followed the game keenly, cheering every success of the St. Jim's players, and quite forgetting, in his keenness, that the shadow of danger was over him. Not that he had much fear of being recognised. The change in his appearance as a farmer's boy was very great, and it needed a second look to know him as Talbot, once of the Shell at St. Jim's.

But there were keen eyes there, and not all friendly ones. Levison was in the crowd, and he was scanning all the onlookers in turn, in the hope of discovering his old enemy. He knew the keen interest Talbot took in the sports of the school; he remembered how keen the outcast had been upon cricket when he was at St. Jim's.

If Talbot had come to see the match, he would have unconsciously eluded Mr. Foxe, who probably at that very moment was seeking for him at Slingsby's Farm. And Levison was sure that he would come there if he could. And if he came Levison intended to spot him, and take his own measures. And within a quarter of an hour of the start Levison's keen and stealthy eyes were upon the lad in corduroys who was taking so keen an interest in the game.

Levison's eyes glittered as he caught the handsome profile, and he worked his way nearer to get a closer view of the face.

Talbot, his eyes on the game, did not notice him—did not think of him or any other enemy. Levison came near enough almost to touch him, and Talbot did not observe him.

Satisfied that he had found his quarry, Levison slipped quietly away through the crowd. He did not intend to put Talbot on his guard. The outcast could remain there, in a fool's paradise, till Levison had had time to play his cunning game, and then the blow would fall. The cad of the Fourth wheeled out his bicycle, mounted it, and rode away at a scorching speed.

In ten minutes he jumped off his machine at the gate of Slingsby's Farm. If the detective was there—— His eyes gleamed as he caught sight of a figure coming towards the gate from the direction of the farmhouse.

"Mr. Foxe!" he called out.

The detective hurried towards him.

"You had my letter?"

"Yes," said Mr. Foxe drily. Levison was rendering him a service, and yet he found it very difficult to infuse anything like cordiality into his manner. It was impossible to like Levison, and Mr. Foxe had a very shrewd suspicion that the junior was seeking to serve only his personal ends.

"You haven't found him?"

The detective looked sharply at Levison.

"I came over here at once," he said. "I am afraid your information is not very well-founded, Master Levison. There is certainly a boy named George Brown employed here. He is absent at present, Mr. Slingsby having given him leave for the afternoon. But Mr. Slingsby gives him an excellent character."

Levison sneered.

"Talbot always had a way of making friends," he said. "He can twist anybody round his finger if he likes."

"Not yourself apparently," said Mr. Foxe.

"I was too cute for him," said Levison loftily. "He couldn't take me in as he did the others. Why, some of them would stick to him now, though it was proved that he was a thief and a regular cracksman. But I've come here to tell you where you can find him. I've just seen him!"

"Where?"

"He's watching the St. Jim's eleven play at Abbotsford School."

"You are sure?"

"I tell you I've seen him," said Levison. "I stood as close to him as I'm standing to you now. I could have touched him."

"Good!" said Mr. Foxe. "Show me the way there, and I'll soon put an end to the tricks of our young gentleman."

"I'll take you there," said Levison, walking beside the detective and wheeling his bicycle. "But I won't come in with you. I don't want the fellows to know that I've put you on Talbot's track. They would rag me bald-headed if they knew. A lot of them still stand by Talbot, thief as he is. Tom Merry and the rest would make my life not worth living if they knew I'd given him away. But you'll find him quite easily. He's dressed in corduroys, with a cloth cap; he's close up to the ropes, watchin' the game."

"Very good."

At the gates of Abbotsford they parted company. Levison cycled slowly away, a triumphant grin on his face. Mr. Foxe strode away towards the football-ground. Levison felt that he had reason to be satisfied. The Toff was fairly run down at last—and it was only a matter of minutes before the detective's hand dropped upon his shoulder. And Levison dismounted from his bike at a short distance and waited for the pleasure of seeing the Toff led away with the handcuffs on his wrists.

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## CHAPTER 9.

### During the Interval.

"GOAL! Well done, Abbotsford! Phip!

The whistle went for the close of the first half. Almost on the stroke of time, Yorke of Abbotsford had scored a goal, and the teams had equalised—goal for goal.

It had been a gruelling half, and the players on both sides were breathing hard. Tom Merry sauntered to the edge of the field of play to exchange a word or two with Talbot. The lad in corduroys nodded to him with a smile.

"I say, are you safe here, Talbot?" Tom Merry asked in a low voice.

"I think so. Why not?"

"There are a good many St. Jim's fellows in the crowd, and they might recognise you."

"They wouldn't give me away if they did."

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"There are some who would, old chap—Levison, for example. Or Mellish, or Crooke."

Talbot smiled.

"But those slackers won't be here," he remarked. "I remember they never used to turn up for the cricket-matches when I was at St. Jim's. They wouldn't be likely to come over here to see a footer-match."

"Levison has come over, though."

"Levison! What for?"

"To see the match, he said."

Talbot looked a little uneasy.

"I remember Levison pretty well," he remarked. "He hasn't come over here to see the match, I know that. And the match isn't big enough for him to have any bets on it, so that can't be his reason. I wonder what he is doing here? He knows, of course, about the detective having come down here to look for me?"

"Yes. They all know that."

Talbot gave a sharp look round.

"The rotter may suspect that I'm here," he said. "I dare say he can guess that I would like to see a St. Jim's match. Perhaps I shouldn't have come here. But where is he? I don't see him—— Good heavens!" He broke off suddenly.

Tom Merry followed his glance, and for a moment his heart seemed to stand still.

In the distance, but easily recognisable, was the figure of Mr. Foxe of Scotland Yard advancing towards the football-ground. A movement of the crowd hid him from sight the next moment, but both the juniors had seen him.

Their eyes met in a startled glance.

"That's Foxe, the detective," Talbot muttered.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"He's here for you, Talbot. Levison must have seen you, and warned him. He couldn't possibly have come here, otherwise."

"The cad!"

"Talbot, there's time yet! Run for it!"

"He's between me and the gates," said Talbot, with a bitter smile. "No good running, and I won't make a scene here and disgrace you before the Abbotsford fellows. It's all right, Tom. I'll go with him quietly."

"You sha'n't! You sha'n't!" Tom Merry panted. "We've saved you once. We'll do it again. Come with me, quick!"

"But——"

"Come—quick!"

Tom Merry grasped Talbot's arm, and hurried him into the pavilion into the St. Jim's dressing-room. It was done almost in a second, while the crowd still hid Mr. Foxe from sight.

"He hasn't seen you yet!" panted Tom.

"But I can't hide here," said Talbot quietly. "Better let me alone, old chap. It's bound to come."

Tom Merry pressed his hand to his forehead. He tried to think it out. Outside, in the crowd, the detective was scanning the faces for Talbot. Sooner or later, if he did not find him, he would look into the dressing-rooms. How was Talbot to be saved? Flight was impossible. If Levison had betrayed him, he would have described him to the detective. The moment he showed himself outside the dressing-room he was lost.

"What's the row, Tom?" asked Lowther, following his captain in with Manners. He had seen Tom Merry rush the lad in corduroys into the pavilion, and he wondered what it meant. He gave a jump as he recognised the junior. "Talbot!"

"Shut the door," said Tom Merry hurriedly.

"It's close on time for the whistle," said Manners.

"Shut the door—quick!"

Manners obeyed.

"Foxe is out there looking for Talbot," breathed Tom Merry. "What's to be done? Can you fellows think of anything?"

"By Jove!"

"Talbot's got to be saved, somehow. He can't run for it. What's to be done?" said Tom Merry, almost in despair.

The door opened, and Blake and D'Arcy came in. Kerr followed them. The Scottish junior was sucking a lemon.

"Nearly time," he remarked. "What the—— Hallo, Talbot!"

"How do you do, deah boy?"

"Shut the door, for goodness' sake!" groaned Tom Merry. "Foxe is outside, looking for him. What's to be done?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"He's not going to have him!" growled Blake. "We'll sling him out if he comes here, confound him!"

"Yas, wathah!"

Talbot smiled slightly.

"You can't do that," he said quietly. "Better leave it alone, you fellows. I've got to stand it, and I don't want to disgrace you."

"Wats!"

"Hold on," said Kerr quietly. "There's a way, I think."

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry. He had great faith in the sagacity of the Scottish junior. "Think of a way out of this fix, Kerr, old man, and you can call the New House cock house of St. Jim's as long as you like."

"Talbot can't bunk," said Kerr hurriedly, "and he can't stay here. The detective will look in here for him. He knows already that we back up Talbot—some of us, at any rate. But there's a way. Go and see Yorke!"

"Yorke?"

"Yes. Tell him one of your men wants to stand out, and ask permission to play another chap in his place."

"But—but what——" began Tom Merry dazedly.

"Don't you see? I'll change clothes with Talbot—footer rig—and he can go on in my place," said Kerr hurriedly. "The detective won't think of looking for him in the footer team. It's about the only place where he won't look."

"My hat!"

"Oh, you—you giddy genius!" gasped Lowther.

"Get your things off, Talbot, quick!" panted Kerr. "Shove them into a locker out of sight. I'll get into my own clothes. You can have my jersey and shorts—see? Get some mud on your face, too. Some of the fellows have muddy chivvies already, and it won't be noticeable specially, and it will disguise you. Quick!"

Tom Merry clapped Kerr on the shoulder with a gasp of relief.

"Kerr, old man, you're a genius. It's a chance—a good chance. Buck up, Talbot, and get changed, while I go and speak to Yorke."

Talbot hesitated.

"It will get you into trouble."

"Hang that!"

"I can't plant this on you."

"Shut up, you ass, and get changed!" said Tom Merry, almost fiercely. "Besides, it won't get us into trouble. It won't be found out!"

"I'll whisper a word to the rest of the team," said Blake. "Every fellow in the team will stand by you, Talbot, like a giddy Trojan."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I say, you are bricks, you fellows," said Talbot, with a break in his voice. "Blessed if I know how I deserve this."

"You are a wippin' good fellow, deah boy!"

"Buck up!" breathed Kerr. "Not a second to lose."

"Right-ho!"

Talbot threw himself into the scheme with all his heart. Liberty was dear to him, and the daring venture, too, was just after his own heart. He stripped off the corduroys, and donned Kerr's footer rig, the Scottish junior changing back into his Etons. Mud scraped from Kerr's footer boots was daubed on Talbot's face—only a few touches; but Talbot, who had been an adept in the art of make-up in the old days, knew how to make those few touches effective.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry hurried out in search of Yorke. To confide the matter to the Abbotsford skipper was, of course, impossible. But Yorke was a good fellow and a sportsman, and Tom had no doubt that he would agree to the arrangement. He was not disappointed. As soon as he heard that Kerr wanted to stand out of the second half Yorke agreed at once for another fellow to take his place. As he remarked cheerfully, he intended to beat St. Jim's, and he wanted to beat eleven, not ten, of them. Tom Merry thanked him with a warmth which made Yorke conclude that the St. Jim's skipper already regarded a licking as highly probable. He little guessed the thoughts that were really in the Shell fellow's mind.

Blake had "whispered a word" to the other footballers of St. Jim's. Startled as they were, the whole team were ready to play up loyally. Every fellow in the team had been on good terms with Talbot when he was at St. Jim's, and remembered him with kindness. And they were all willing to do what they could to help him.

Tom Merry hurried back to the dressing-room. He had caught sight of the detective again. Mr. Foxe was strolling among the crowd round the ropes, quietly but very keenly scanning all the onlookers. Tom Merry knew what he was seeking. But it was doubtful now if Mr. Foxe would find what he sought.

"Time!" said Tom, as he came in breathlessly. "The sooner we're playing the better now. Ready, Talbot?"

"Quite."

Very handsome and fit Talbot looked in footer rig. And the change in his appearance was marvellous. Tom Merry himself hardly knew him. The juniors were grinning with glee at the trick that was to be played on Mr. Foxe. It was hardly likely that the gentleman from Scotland Yard, keen as he was, would think of looking among the eleven players from St. Jim's for the outcast. Talbot was safe, at least, until the end of the match—at all events, they fervently hoped so.

"Come on, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

In the midst of the St. Jim's footballers Talbot left the dressing-room. It was more than time for the players to line up for the second half. They lined up, the whistle went, and the second half of the match commenced. And Kerr, having generously sacrificed his share in the match for the sake of an old pal, sauntered out of the pavilion, and passed the word among the St. Jim's fellows in the crowd.

For it was highly necessary that the St. Jim's fellows should not make audible remarks upon the change in the team—Mr. Foxe had very sharp ears; Levison was not to be seen—and all the other St. Jim's fellows present belonged to Tom Merry's "set," and were quite ready to back him up in the scheme to save Talbot. And, having passed the word, Kerr proceeded to keep his eyes very wide open, in case Levison should return; for Levison was very likely to spot the "wheeze," and if he spotted it, he would seek to betray it at once. And in that case, Kerr was prepared to deal with him promptly and effectively.

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"Go it, Abbotsford!"

"On the ball!"

The second half was in full swing, and the play was fast and furious.

## CHAPTER 10.
### No Exit!

MR. FOXE wore a baffled expression.

Careless of the match that was going on, unmoved even by the shouts of "Goal!" the detective had made a round of the footer-ground.

Not a single person in the crowd had escaped his hawk-like eyes.

If there had been a lad in corduroys present, the gentleman from Scotland Yard would certainly have spotted him at once.

And if Talbot had been in the crowd in any other guise, Mr. Foxe would have known him equally well—having a photograph of the "Toff" as a guide.

But Talbot was not there.

Mr. Foxe was puzzled and angry. He had set his heart upon effecting that capture, which he had been especially despatched from headquarters to effect. The Terrible Three had baffled him once, and now it seemed that he was to be baffled again. If Talbot had been there, where was he now? There was only one way out, and Mr. Foxe had had an eye upon that all the time.

A mere onlooker, a farmer's boy in corduroys, a stranger to Abbotsford, could scarcely have gone into the school buildings. It was impossible to suppose that any Abbotsford fellow was hiding him. Then where was he?

Had the informer been mistaken? Or—Mr. Foxe coloured with anger at the thought—had Levison been pulling his leg? Was the anxiety of that junior to serve him simply a pretence, and was he playing a practical joke at the detective's expense?

It was possible; but, upon the whole, it was not likely. Mr. Foxe was a good judge of character, and he had read in Levison's face his bitter animosity against the "Toff." If Levison had given him false information, he must have been mistaken—it was not deliberately done. And how could he have been mistaken, when he knew Talbot so well? It was scarcely possible!

No. Talbot had been there. He might have gone before the detective arrived; yet, if he had come to see the football match, that was not probable. Why should he leave after the first half, instead of seeing the match through?

Mr. Foxe, with a determined frown, walked towards the pavilion. He remembered how the Terrible Three had stood by Talbot on a previous occasion. It was not possible that any of the Abbotsford fellows were hiding the fugitive in the school buildings, but it was quite possible that he had found refuge in the St. Jim's dressing-room. And Mr. Foxe meant to know.

Kerr and Bernard Glyn, and Clifton Dane and Digby were standing in a group outside the pavilion, watching the game. They looked at Mr. Foxe as he came up, and raised their caps politely.

"I think I have seen you young gentlemen before," Mr. Foxe remarked, scanning them sharply.

"Yes; we were in the tea-party when you came to see Tom Merry," said Kerr affably.

"You remember what I came for?" the detective asked.

"Something about a chap you were looking for, wasn't it?" remarked Digby.

"Yes. I am still looking for him."

"Not turned up yet?" asked Glyn.

"Not yet."

"I have reason to believe that he is here!" Mr. Foxe said emphatically.

"Here? By Jove!"

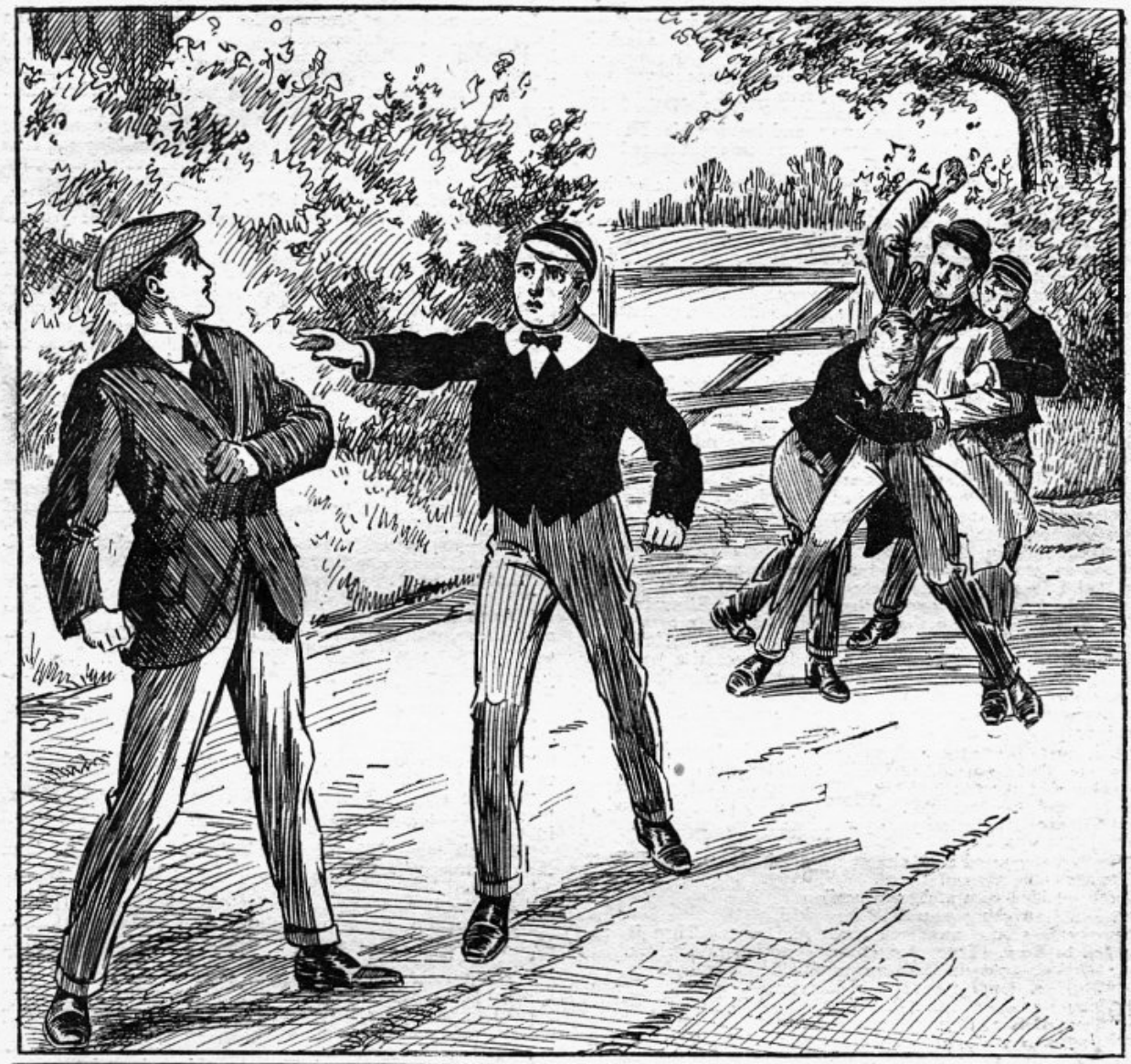
"And I wish to look in your dressing-room!" said Mr. Foxe sourly. "Is there any objection, young gentlemen?"

"Not at all!" said Kerr, with an air of wonder. "Look where you like, Mr. Foxe. You are quite welcome."

"Certainly, Mr. Foxe!"

"Very well, I will do so," said Mr. Foxe, and he went into the pavilion.

The juniors smiled to one another, and resumed watching the game. Mr. Foxe was welcome to search the pavilion from end to end if he liked, so far as they were concerned.



**"Hands off!" roared Mr. Foxe. He was struggling to his feet when Manners and Lowther grasped him and bore him to the earth. "Cut!" yelled Monty Lowther to Talbot. "He'll nab you if you don't!" Talbot did not hesitate. With the speed of a deer he dashed down the hillside!** *(See Chapter 5.)*

The detective came out in a few minutes. A tussle was going on before the St. Jim's goal, and a player was down on the ground. He rose, smothered with mud, and quite unrecognisable. Kerr chuckled softly as he noted it. He knew that that muddy player was Talbot.

The detective walked away without speaking to the juniors again. He had looked through the dressing-rooms without finding Talbot.

He was puzzled and angry.

If he had known that Kerr had been in the St. Jim's eleven for the first half of the match, he would have suspected something, but he did not know that.

As it was, he never even thought of looking at the twenty-two players in the field. They were outside the scope of his investigations.

With a frowning brow, and feeling savage and disappointed, Mr. Foxe walked away to the school gates. He had failed again. Either Levison had misinformed him, or the boy had gone before his arrival on the scene. In that case, he had doubtless returned to Slingsby's Farm, and Mr. Foxe would seek him there once more—unless he had got wind of the detective's proximity, as was possible. Well Mr. Foxe knew the astuteness of the boy cracksman who had been known as the "Toff."

He strode away angrily from the school gates. Levison of the Fourth was waiting a little distance down the road, his machine leaning against a wall. He came hurriedly towards the detective, his face blankly disappointed.

"Where is he?" he exclaimed. "You've got him, surely?"

Mr. Foxe halted, and surveyed Levison grimly.

"I have not got him!" he snapped.

"But—but why not?" exclaimed Levison, in bewilderment. "You haven't let him go?"

"I have not seen him."

"But he is there."

"He is not there!"

Levison's eyes glittered with rage. Was he to be disappointed after all, when he had laid his plans so carefully?"

"He is there, I tell you!" he almost yelled. "I left him there, and he wouldn't have gone away. He was neck-deep in the match—watching it as if he'd never seen a footer match before! Why should he go away? I tell you, he's there! Perhaps he saw you coming, and dodged out of sight somewhere."

"I have searched for him."

"Those rotters are hiding him, perhaps," said Levison, gritting his teeth.

"I have looked in their dressing-room," said Mr. Foxe coldly. "I suppose they could not hide him in the school—a school they don't belong to? You must have been mistaken in thinking you saw him there."

"I wasn't mistaken! Do you think I don't know him?" hissed Levison. "Perhaps you've forgotten his face. But I described him to you. He was dressed in corduroy——"

"There was nobody in the crowd dressed in corduroy."

"My hat! They've diddled you somehow!" snarled Levison. "It's Tom Merry at the bottom of it, I suppose. You let them see you, and they've worked it, somehow."

"I don't want any of your impertinence, my lad!" said Mr. Foxe sharply. "Good-afternoon!"

"I—I say, you're not going away, and leaving him free?" exclaimed Levison, in dismay. "I'll swear he's still there!"

"Nonsense!"

"I know he is!" growled Levison. "I'm certain of it! They've diddled you somehow. Look here, I'll go in and look for him, and tell you, if you'll wait here. Don't clear off, and leave him to escape. I know he's there. They've hidden him somewhere, and kept him out of sight. Wait here for a few minutes, anyway, while I have a look round."

The detective hesitated. He was very anxious to effect his capture, and very unwilling to admit defeat. He nodded finally.

"I'll wait here ten minutes," he said.

"Right-ho! I'll bring you word."

And Levison ran off towards the school, leaving Mr. Foxe in a very dissatisfied frame of mind.

In two minutes Levison was on the football-ground, scanning the crowd. It did not need more than a minute or two for him to ascertain that the lad in corduroys had indeed vanished. Levison hurried towards the pavilion. Kerr, who had seen him in the distance, had slipped into the building. Levison found Dane and Glyn and Digby outside the door. They glanced at him carelessly.

"Hallo! What do you want?" asked Digby.

Levison scowled. He did not care to explain what he wanted. If possible, he wished to keep his share in the betrayal of Talbot a secret, though he was willing to risk even a ragging rather than allow his old enemy to escape. He hurried into the building, and the three juniors followed him. They knew that Levison would guess the truth as soon as he discovered that Kerr was no longer in the team, while St. Jim's were still playing a full eleven. And as soon as Levison made that discovery, the chums of St. Jim's were fully prepared to deal with him.

Levison ran into the dressing-room. He had a very strong suspicion that he would find Talbot hidden there in spite of Mr. Foxe's failure to find him. There was certainly a junior in the dressing-room, and Levison gave a cry as he saw him.

"Talbot! I've found you, you villain!"

"Hallo!"

Levison staggered back almost stupefied. It was not Talbot.

"Kerr!" he gasped.

Kerr nodded with a cheerful smile.

"Yes. Anything wanted?" he asked.

Levison's glance wandered round the room. Then it returned to Kerr. There was strong suspicion in his look.

"Why ain't you in the team now?" he demanded.

"Oh, I'm standing out!" said Kerr airily.

"You were in the first half."

"True, O King!"

"And why ain't you in the second half? They're not playing a man short."

"Quite so."

"Then who's the other man?" shouted Levison. "Who's been put in the team in your place? I'll jolly soon know. I know already. I know your rotten trick. That's where you've hidden Talbot—in the eleven, by gum! You're hiding a criminal from the police in the footer eleven, and that fool of a detective—— But I'll soon let him know!" He ran towards the door, panting.

Three juniors stood in his way. Bernard Glyn and Clifton Dane and Robert Arthur Digby were lined up to prevent the exit of the cad of the Fourth. Levison tried to shove past them, and was promptly and unceremoniously shoved back into the room by Clifton Dane. The Canadian junior administered a powerful shove that sent him staggering.

"Let me pass!" shrieked Levison.

"Not just now!"

"You—you hound!"

"What?" said Clifton Dane, advancing upon the cad of the Fourth with his hands up. "What did you call me, Levison?"

Levison shrank back from the Canadian junior.

"Let me pass, hang you! You're hiding Talbot—hiding him among the players in the eleven. You know you are!"

"Go hon!"

"I'm going to fetch the detective here."

"Are you?" said Kerr cheerfully. "My private opinion is that you're not. I rather think you're not going out of this room, Levison. I may be wrong. But that's what I think."

"Same here!" chuckled Glyn. "There are four of us for you to walk over first, Levison, old man, and some more outside, too. It looks to me as if you've put your silly head into a hornet's nest, old chap."

Levison made a sudden rush for the door. Clifton Dane hit out without hesitating, and Levison caught the Canadian's knuckles on the side of his head. He went to the floor with a crash, and lay there gasping.

"Have some more?" asked Dane sweetly. "Where that came from there's plenty more, you know."

"Ow!"

"Some here, too," said Digby. "You're making me miss seeing the match, you worm, and I'd like to give you a thick ear. Come on!"

Levison did not come on! He staggered to his feet, his hand to his head, and scowled savagely at the four juniors. He was a helpless prisoner in the dressing-room, and he realised it. And the minutes were passing. Mr. Foxe had promised to wait ten minutes for him to bring information, if he could. The ten minutes had already passed. Levison ground his teeth with rage as he realised that the detective would now be on his way to Slingsby's Farm again, and the way of escape would be left open for Talbot as soon as the match was over. And he was helpless.

"Look here," he muttered, between his teeth. "You know you're breaking the law! You know this is illegal."

"What's illegal?" smiled Kerr. "Nothing illegal in keeping a cad shut up in a dressing-room that I know of."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's illegal to help a criminal to escape!"

"We're keeping a criminal from escaping, you mean!" grinned Glyn, and the juniors laughed again. Levison panted with rage.

"You—you rotters! You know very well that Talbot is out there. You know that the detective is hunting him!"

"Let him hunt!" yawned Digby.

"It's our duty to help him!"

"When did you first begin to think of doing your duty?" asked Kerr, with an air of friendly interest. "Rather a new departure for you, isn't it?"

"Yes; don't you set up as a humorist, Levison," said Glyn, with a shake of the head.

Levison's eyes blazed with fury.

"Will you let me get out?" he yelled.

"No jolly fear!"

"Then I'll report you all to Dr. Holmes for helping Talbot to escape from the police."

"I dare say you'll act like a dirty sneak," agreed Kerr, "and I know you'll get the ragging of your life for doing it, too!"

"I don't care. I'll make you suffer for this. I'll inform the detective too. You may be sent to prison for it!"

"Go hon!"

"Anyway, you'll get a flogging!" howled Levison.

"And what will you get, afterwards?" murmured Clifton Dane.

"I don't care!"

"You'll care when the time comes, my pippin!" said Clifton Dane, with a gleam in his eyes. "You've been ragged for sneaking before now. If you sneak over this matter, we'll make your life not worth living at St. Jim's!"

"What-ho!"

"Let me pass, and—and I'll say nothing about it!"

"Rats!"

"You're not going to pass, and we're not going to waste time looking after you here," said Clifton Dane coolly. "I'm going to lock you in this room."

"I'll yell for help!"

"And one of us will stay with you," said Dane. "One's enough to watch a worm like you. And if you give a single yelp you'll get pulverised. Toss up which of us wastes half an hour looking after the cad, you fellows."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors were keen to see the finish of the match. They tossed up, and Clifton Dane was odd man out. Digby and Kerr and Glyn walked out, and the Canadian locked the door, and sat down near it, and took a copy of "Chuckles" from his pocket. Levison stood with clenched hands and burning eyes. He did not dare to attempt to pass the Canadian junior. He knew how painful the results would be. He could only wait, with the knowledge that his scheme had failed—that the detective was passing further and further away every minute—that the way was clear for Talbot to escape! He writhed with rage as he thought of it; but he was helpless, and he remained, gritting his teeth, biting his lips, till a loud shout from the football-ground announced that the match was over.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Looking After Levison!

TOM MERRY & CO. came crowding into their dressing-room with cheerful faces. The crowd outside were still shouting.

"How goes it?" asked Clifton Dane eagerly.

"We've won, of course, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I vewy neahly had a goal!"

"Was that the winning goal—the one you nearly had?"

"Weally, Dane——"

"Three goals to one," said Tom Merry cheerily. "Beaten to the wide. And I fancy our new recruit would be a jolly valuable member of the team if we could keep him. I jolly well wish we could."

Talbot smiled. He wished for nothing better himself.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus heartily. "Hallo! Is that that wottah Levison?"

Levison was scowling at the victorious footballers.

"Yes. Dane's been keeping an eye on him," said Kerr.

"Will you let me pass now?" demanded Levison fiercely.

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

"You are hiding a criminal here."

"Oh, shut up!"

"You are keeping that rascal here!"

"There's only one rascal here at present, and his name's Levison," remarked Blake; "and if he says another word he'll get a whack across his beastly mouth!"

"You rotter!"

Whack!

Levison uttered a yell and staggered into a corner. Jack Blake had suited the action to the word.

"Want some more?" said Blake grimly. "Open your caddish mouth again, and I'll wipe my boots on you!"

"Yaas, wathah, and mine too!"

Levison did not open his mouth again. He lay scowling and gasping, his eyes glittering like a snake's. Talbot hardly glanced at him.

"I'd better get off, you fellows," he said. "I only hope you won't get into any trouble over this."

"Oh, that's all right!"

"That cad will make trouble for you, if he can," said Talbot, with evident misgiving. "I—I'm afraid I oughtn't to have allowed you to help me."

"Wats, deah boy!"

"Yes, rats, and many of them," said Tom Merry. "You can't get out in your own clothes, Talbot. Levison's friend the detective may be hanging about. You can put on my clobber, and I'll take yours."

"But—but you can't go back to St. Jim's in corduroys!" exclaimed Talbot.

Tom Merry laughed cheerily.

"Yes, I can. I'll button up my overcoat over them, and they won't be seen. You take my clobber, and buck up. You can borrow one of the fellow's bikes——"

"Mine's outside," said Clifton Dane. "I'll lend it to you with pleasure, Talbot."

"But—but——" stammered Talbot. The cordial friendliness of the St. Jim's juniors seemed almost to overcome the outcast.

"No 'buts!'" said the Canadian junior. "You can have my bike. You can send it back to the school by railway when you get a chance, or you can leave it at Brooke's place. You know Brooke, the day-boy—his place on Wayland Moor——"

"Yes, yes! I—I don't know how to thank you!"

"Don't try, old chap!"

"If the giddy Foxe is nosing round he won't be likely to suspect a fellow in Etons on a bike," grinned Monty Lowther. "You'll pass for one of our fellows going home after the match, Talbot. You'll get clear."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thank you all!" said Talbot, in a voice full of emotion. "I—I can't say much, but I'm grateful. I only wish I deserved it more. I hope you won't get into any trouble on my account. Mind, if you do, I shall give myself up; and then they'll let you alone for helping me. I've made up my mind about that."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry. "If there's a row we can stand it. As for Levison, we'll find a way of making him hold his rotten tongue."

"Yes, rather!" said Manners. "We'll give him a House ragging, to begin with."

"Mind the cad doesn't get away," added Tom Merry. "He's going home with us."

"I'm not going home with you!" snarled Levison. "I've got business in Abbotsford."

"Then it can stand over for another day. You're coming home with us in the brake, and we'll see that your sneaking tongue is kept quiet for a bit, anyway."

"My—my bike is out in the road."

"Hang your bike!"

"I'll look after that," grinned Clifton Dane. "I'm lending my bike to Talbot, so I can ride yours home for you, Levison."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you——" began Levison furiously.

"Shut up!" said Blake threateningly. "Do you want another one on your talk-trap? This is where you take a back seat, my boy. You're dead in this act!"

Talbot was soon dressed in Tom Merry's clothes. Kerr and Blake scouted outside, and came in to report that there was no sign of Mr. Foxe in the vicinity. Clifton Dane fetched his machine. Talbot shook hands with his chums and left the pavilion quietly.

A minute later he was riding away on the Canadian junior's bike; and no one who saw the junior in Etons, scorching on the bicycle, could have suspected that it was the lad in corduroys who had come there to watch the St. Jim's match. And Levison, who could have given information, was in safe hands.

Tom Merry donned the rough attire Talbot had worn, and buttoned up his coat to conceal it. Then the St. Jim's juniors prepared to leave. Blake and Monty Lowther took an arm each of Levison's. They did not intend to give him any opportunity of making his escape and taking further information to Mr. Foxe. The cad of the Fourth ground his teeth and submitted—he had no choice but to submit. At the first attempt to pull his arms away Blake and Lowther twisted those arms till he gasped with pain—and he did not make more than one attempt.

Tom Merry & Co. took a cordial leave of the Abbotsford fellows. The brake came round, and the St. Jim's juniors mounted into it, Blake and Lowther helping Levison in without releasing him for a moment. The vehicle drove off, with a bunch of cyclists following it—among them Clifton Dane mounted upon Levison's machine. The juniors started for home in high good-humour. They had won the match, and their old pal Talbot had escaped. His danger had been brought upon him by the cad of St. Jim's, and the other St. Jim's fellows had saved him.

Levison sat with a sullen brow during the drive to the school. If he had been able to get away there might still have been time for conveying information to Mr. Foxe and securing the arrest of the outcast.

But he had no chance of getting away. The grip upon his arms never relaxed all the while the brake was driving home to St. Jim's.

When they reached the old school Levison dismounted with the rest, Blake and Lowther still holding him in a most affectionate manner. Levison gave them a look of poisonous hatred.

"Will you let me go now?" he said thickly.

Blake shook his head.

"Not yet! We've got to talk to you first! Quite a lot of things to say to you, my tulip!"

And Levison was marched into the woodshed instead of into the School House, as he had anticipated. With a crowd of juniors round him he had no chance of bolting, and he did not venture to call out. He reflected savagely that his hour was coming. As soon as he was able to carry his tale to the Housemaster Tom Merry & Co. would have to pay the penalty of the afternoon's work.

In the woodshed, with the door closed, Levison was released, the juniors forming a thick circle round him. Levison glared round the circle with savage eyes. He anticipated a ragging, but he told himself again furiously that his time was coming.

"Now," said Tom Merry quietly, "we're going to talk to you, Levison."

"Talk away!" sneered Levison. "That won't prevent me from going directly to the Head, and then you can look out for squalls. You've helped a criminal to escape from the police, and you'll have to answer for it."

"Whether we've broken the law or not I don't quite know," said Tom. "I'm not well up in the law. What I do know is that we've helped an old pal who's down on his luck, and who deserves to be helped as much as ever any fellow did."

"Hear, hear!"

"And I suspect that he wouldn't have been in danger but for you. I can't help thinking that you brought Foxe there somehow with your beastly spying——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And now," went on Tom Merry determinedly, "you're going to hold your tongue, Levison!"

"You'll see soon!" hissed Levison.

"We'll see now!" said Tom. "In the first place, if you sneak you'll be ragged. Every fellow here will do his level best to make you sorry for it."

"What-ho!"

"If you want to fight twenty fellows one after another—any one of whom could knock you into a cocked hat—you've only got to say the word!" grinned Blake. "You can begin with me if you like!"

"Pway begin with me, Levison!"

"Me!" implored Figgins.

"Me! Me! Me!" shouted half a dozen fellows together.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall ask the Head for protection after having done my duty," faltered Levison, his face growing a little pale.

"Much good that will do you!" growled Herries.

"In the second place," resumed Tom Merry steadily, "if you go to the Head, Levison, I will go to the Head! Some of us might be sacked or flogged for helping Talbot get away—I don't know. But I do know that you'd be sacked if the Head knew what we could tell him about you—of breaking bounds at night to play cards at the Green Man in Rylcombe. We know your little games, and we've held our tongues, because we're not sneaks. But we could tell if we chose—and prove it, too! And if you say a word about this affair, I give you my word of honour that, besides the ragging you'll get, the Head shall know your history for the past term. And you'll be sacked from St. Jim's. You know it! Now let the lad go!"

The juniors stood aside for Levison to pass.

He went without a word.

But he did not go to the Head's study. He knew that Tom Merry would keep his word; and he knew that if his blackguardly way of life was revealed to the Head nothing was more certain than that he would be expelled from St. Jim's. Sneaking was not in Tom Merry & Co.'s line; but it was, after all, a game that two could play at, and Levison, chafing with rage and disappointment as he was, dared not risk it. And so that visit to the Head's study was never paid; and Dr. Holmes remained in blissful ignorance of the happenings at Abbotsford that afternoon.

## CHAPTER 12
### The Tempter.

"ACH! So it is you!"

Talbot started violently.

It was night upon Wayland Moor—dark night, with but a few stars glimmering in the sky.

Talbot had been tramping wearily over the moor. He had escaped from the trap Levison had laid for him at Abbotsford; but he could not venture to return to Slingsby's Farm. There, he was certain, the detective would be looking for him. He had left Clifton Dane's bicycle at Brooke's house on the moor, and tramped on.

Brooke of the Fourth, the day-boy at St. Jim's, had been very friendly with Talbot, like most of the best fellows in the Lower School, during the outcast's stay at the old place. He had asked Talbot to stay for the night, but the outcast had thanked him and declined. He would not run the risk of bringing trouble upon Brooke. He left a note with the day-boy for Tom Merry, and another for Farmer Slingsby, excusing his sudden departure, and then went on his lonely way.

He had little money, and his heart was heavy.

He knew that Mr. Foxe was searching for him, he knew that he was probably looked for at the railway-stations. He was in danger, and he had to tramp his way to safety—if safety was to be found. But it was not only that that made the boy's heart heavy. He had had a glimpse of St. Jim's again, he had experienced once more the hearty friendship of his old comrades of St. Jim's, and it brought back keenly to his mind all he had lost.

If only matters had gone differently! If only he could have kept his place in the old school!

But repentance and reform were not enough.

The wretched past had to be paid for, and he was paying for it now—a terrible price. Even if he won his way to safety, the old school, and all he loved and prized, had to be left behind—for ever!

He would never see Tom Merry & Co. again—never look upon those frank and friendly faces, never hear those hearty voices.

He had to face the world alone, to keep on the struggle unaided by a friendly voice or a cordial grasp of the hand.

His thoughts were gloomy as he tramped over the moor in the deepening night. The rain was beginning to fall.

He was tired and dispirited.

A shepherd's hut, looming up blackly from the gloom beside the footpath, offered a shelter for the night, and Talbot turned from the path and approached the gloomy little building. It was dark, and looked deserted and half in ruins. There, at least, he could obtain a night's rest, and then start on his tramp again at the first glimpse of dawn.

But as he entered the tumbledown cabin there was a movement in the darkness within, and he realised that some other solitary wayfarer had taken shelter in the hut. Talbot paused in the entrance. He was not afraid of meeting a tramp or a footpad. He had little about him that was worth stealing.

A sudden flash of light came from the gloom. It was a small electric lamp suddenly turned on. The light fell full upon Talbot's face. Then he heard a voice with a German accent exclaiming in surprise.

Talbot clenched his hands.

Well he knew the voice. He looked at the man who held the electric lamp, dimly visible behind the bar of light—a small, wizened-faced man, with cunning, narrow eyes, his face half hidden by a slouched hat.

"Karl Elberfelt!" muttered Talbot.

The German grinned.

"What an unexpected meeting!" he said.

Talbot made a movement as if to quit the cabin. Elberfelt quickly stepped between him and the doorway.

"Not so fast!" he said. "Are you not glad to see an old friend?"

"You are no friend of mine!" said Talbot coldly. "What are you doing in England? You ought to be in your own country now!"

Elberfelt laughed.

"I may serve my own country better here than in Germany," he remarked.

Talbot looked at him closely.

"Do you mean that you are a spy?" he exclaimed.

"Not exactly a spy, but I am serving my country," said Elberfelt coolly. "I have business in England. What then?"

"What then?" said Talbot. "You dare to show yourself to me—and I am English? You are not afraid of being denounced to the police?"

"Not by you!"

"And why not?"

"I might do some denouncing in my turn," said Elberfelt, with a hard laugh. "You see, I know you, my young friend. Did I not know you in Hamburg? Did I not make discoveries about you? Do I not know that you are wanted by the police of your own country? You cannot afford to quarrel with me."

Talbot bit his lip hard.

It was true enough, and he knew it. What was the German doing there, skulking in that lonely place? Whatever he was doing, whatever his treacherous object might be, the Toff could not denounce him, for he had as much reason to fear the police as the German spy had.

He reflected bitterly that it was no business of the Toff, the one-time cracksman, to feel patriotic. Had he not been an enemy of society himself in his earlier evil days? He had repented; he had seen the light. Since his days at St. Jim's he had been as straight as a die. But he had not earned the right to feel and to act as other Englishmen. He was an outcast. If he denounced this scoundrel, one inevitable result would be his own arrest, his own imprisonment!

Elberfelt watched the struggles in the boy's face in the light of the electric lamp. He smiled grimly.

"You understand that you cannot afford to be my enemy?" he said.

"I understand," said Talbot dully.

"What reward would they give you if you gave me up?" jeered Elberfelt. "Prison—prison to eat away all the young years of your life—hein?"

"Yes."

"Bah!" said the German. "You know where your own interest is. My young friend, it will pay you not to quarrel with me. I made you an offer in Hamburg."

"And I refused it," said Talbot between his teeth.

"So! I did not offer you enough?"

Talbot shrugged his shoulders. He did not expect Karl Elberfelt to understand his motives for refusing to betray his own country.

"Do not let us mince words," said the German, still with his narrow, cunning eyes upon Talbot's face. "You are a criminal. You belong to the class that is wanted by the police. You are—or were—a member of the swell mob, as they call it—a gentleman crook. You do not deny that?"

Talbot made no reply.

"I repeat my offer to you," resumed Elberfelt. "I can make it worth your while to serve us. You are valuable. You speak German and English. You are keen, sensible. You are a boy, and, as such, not liable to suspicion; but you have the experience and the resource of a man. I tell you you are worth very much to us, especially since the greater number of our spies in England have been seized by the police. It is almost impossible now for a German spy to be of service here. The police—once so sleepy—are growing so sharp. You would be worth a handsome salary."

"Hold your tongue!" muttered Talbot.

"Ah, you are fencing with me!" smiled the German. "Do not ask me to believe that you, a criminal wanted by the police, are troubled with patriotic scruples. That would be what you call funny—hein?"

"You would think so, no doubt," said Talbot wearily.

He wondered whether the German was right. What busi-

less had the Toff, the old confederate of Hookey Walker and his gang, to be troubled by scruples? He was a hunted fugitive. The country he belonged to had nothing but a prison to offer him. And yet he would have died before he would have taken a foreigner's pay for the work of treachery.

"Listen!" said Elberfelt. "You have asked me if I am a spy. I am not a spy. I have work to do in England—great work for my country. You can help me."

"I?" said Talbot.

"Ja, ja wohl! You have more knowledge of the country than I," said Elberfelt eagerly. "You can protect me from suspicion, with your English looks and ways, while I do my work."

"What is your work?"

Elberfelt laughed.

"That is my secret at present. But say, will you accept the offer that I made you in Hamburg if I repeat it now?"

"No!"

"And why not?" the German demanded. "Warum nicht, denn?"

"Because I am not a traitor!"

"You are not a traitor. You have been a thief and a criminal, but you are not a traitor," said Elberfelt, with a bitter sneer.

"Yes," said Talbot dully, "I have been a thief and a criminal, but I am not a traitor. Now let me pass, Karl Elberfelt! I have nothing more to say to you. And the rain and the wind are better than sharing a shelter with a German spy!"

The German gritted his teeth.

"You will go? Yet you are poor?"

"I am penniless."

"And I offer you what you choose to name——"

"Hold your tongue, I tell you, and let me pass!" Talbot clenched his hands. "I struck you in Hamburg when you made me your offer, Karl Elberfelt. If you do not stand out of my way, take care!"

The German muttered a curse, and stood aside. Talbot strode from the cabin, out into the wind and the rain. The light went out in the lonely hut. The German remained alone in the darkness. Talbot, with bitterness in his heart, was tramping away over the dark, rainy moor.

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## CHAPTER 13.

### To Redeem the Past.

TOM MERRY & CO. were in their warm beds in the dormitories at St. Jim's. Talbot thought of them as he tramped gloomily on.

He wondered whether they were thinking of him.

He had looked his last on St. Jim's. He had seen the last of his old friends. The world—the cold, bleak world—was before him now. He was an outcast and a fugitive. But never had he felt the humiliation of it so keenly as now. The German had taken it for granted that he would be willing to play the traitor, and Talbot had bitterly reflected that he had a right to take it for granted. Why should he expect to find honourable scruples in one who was outlawed by the laws of his own country?

What was Elberfelt doing there? He had said that he was not a spy. What was the work that he was skulking there to do? That he was there in secret Talbot was assured, and it was his duty to reveal the man's presence to the police. His duty! But he could not do his duty without giving himself up to a punishment which doubtless he had deserved once, but which he no longer deserved. He must hold his tongue, and allow the German to carry out his schemes, whatever they were, or lose his liberty. That was the alternative.

He came out into the road over the moor again, heedless of the wind and the rain, thinking—thinking hard.

After all, what if he gave up his liberty? What was the German scheming? He had said he was not there as a spy—his work was of another kind. What was it? Talbot tried to think what it might be.

He remembered Karl Elberfelt in Hamburg. The man had been engaged in chemical work—in the manufacture of explosives. Was it something in that line that brought him here—here, within easy distance of the main railway-line to Southampton—the line upon which the troop-trains frequently passed?

Talbot halted, with a gasp, as the thought flashed into his mind.

Was that it?

Was there some design upon the troop-trains? If so, Karl Elberfelt was the man fitted for the task; a man without scruple, daring in his own cunning way, and with an intimate knowledge of high explosives. And Talbot, remembering his old acquaintance with the surrounding country when he had been a junior at St. Jim's, remembered the railway viaduct, where the railway crossed a deep gully, within half a mile of the spot where the old shepherd's hut stood. Was that Karl Elberfelt's business? And was he biding his time in the old hut, where Talbot had discovered him—waiting for the right moment to do his fiendish work?

"Good heavens!" muttered Talbot.

The suspicion was terrible, but it might be true. If it was true—if the scoundrel was there to do such deadly work—there was no choice left to Talbot. At any cost to himself he must stop the dastard. His liberty—his life—weighed little in the balance. More than once he had seen the troop-trains pass—the long trains crammed with cheery soldiers destined for the fighting-line. He pictured in his mind the possible scene—the roar of the exploding bomb, the railway-bridge blown to pieces, the loaded train plunging down to destruction with its human freight. Was it possible that that was the work Karl Elberfelt was there to do—the work in which he had deemed that the Toff might help him?

Talbot set his teeth hard.

If it was so he would baffle him, come what might. He stood in the rain thinking it over. The railway viaduct was not far away; under it he could obtain shelter from the rain and watch. And if the German came there——

A form loomed up in the shadows, and the bright light of an electric lantern glittered on Talbot's face. There was a sharp exclamation.

"Caught!"

Talbot sprang back.

The hand of Mr. Foxe of Scotland Yard was on his shoulder, closing there in a grip of iron.

"Caught at last!"

Talbot gritted his teeth. With an upward sweep of his arm he knocked Mr. Foxe's grip from his shoulder and darted away in the darkness.

The detective sprang after him.

But the night had swallowed up the fleeing outcast, and after a few steps the detective paused, his face dark with anger and disappointment. The Toff had slipped through his fingers once again—slipped through his fingers when his grasp had been fairly upon him!

"Hang the luck!" growled the detective. "Hang it! To meet him like this, and let him go again! It wouldn't do to report this at headquarters, my boy. Hang the luck! But I'll have him yet!"

He shut off the light of his lantern savagely. The fugitive had vanished into the darkness. The chance meeting had brought no luck to Mr. Foxe; it had only added to his list another disappointment.

Talbot ran on in the darkness.

But he soon slackened down. There was no sound of pursuit behind him. The night had favoured him—pursuit was well-nigh impossible.

He changed his direction, and made for the railway-bridge. He remembered the lie of the land; he had learned it well when he was a junior at St. Jim's. He tramped on steadily through the wet grass and gorse.

Once or twice he stopped to listen.

It seemed to him that he heard faint footfalls, like an echo of his own, in the windy night.

Was the detective following him after all? Or was it the German? Or fancy? In the moan of the wind, the rustle of the gorse, he could not be certain.

He tramped doggedly on.

He knew his duty. If the German had the designs he suspected, it was his business to baffle them at whatever cost to himself. And that he would do. It would be an atonement for all wrongdoing in the past, and after that the handcuffs might snap upon his wrists; he hardly cared. And the more he thought about it, the more certain he felt of the German's design. Karl Elberfelt could not be skulking in that lonely hut on a rainy night for nothing. He had a purpose there, and what other purpose could he have?

He caught sight of the railway embankment at last, looming up dimly. Deep below, in the gully, flowed the stream, swollen by rain, with a heavy, sullen murmur in the night. Dimly through the night twinkled the lights on the railway-line.

Again that sound of footsteps.

But Talbot was not listening. He clambered over the embankment, and reached the railway track.

Standing on the track he looked along the lines. On the high bridge there was a glimmer of light.

A man was bending down there, and Talbot knew that the light came from an electric lamp, such a lamp as Karl Elberfelt had had in the shepherd's hut.

It was the German!

He was at his work there—and Talbot knew what his work was. He did not know when the express was due, but he

knew that the German would know. The dastard was undoubtedly timing his villainous deed to take place shortly before the express passed—the troop-train crammed with men in khaki.

Then there would be no time, no possibility, for the destruction of the bridge to become known. The train would rush on to a yawning gap—to horrible destruction—and five hundred brave fellows would never reach the fighting-line; they would find their doom closer at home—at the bottom of the rocky gully—death not by German bullets, but by German treachery!

Talbot's heart beat hard. He heard the footsteps again by the railway embankment. He smiled grimly as he realised how close Mr. Foxe was. The detective was close behind him, with the pertinacity of a bloodhound. It would have been easy for Talbot to dodge him in the shadows; his escape would have been simple. But he was not thinking now of escape.

He turned back, and clambered down. Then he called out softly:

"I am here!"

There was a startled exclamation in the darkness.

"The Toff?"

"Yes; I am here! Come—quickly!" Talbot groped forward in the darkness in the direction of the detective's voice, and his hands came in contact with Mr. Foxe's overcoat. An iron grip closed on his shoulder.

"So you've decided to give yourself up? You will not get away again!" There was a clink of metal in the darkness. "Wrists, please!"

"There is no time for that, Mr. Foxe!" Talbot's voice was low and steady. "Listen to me; I will not try to escape. I will give myself up if you choose. Only help me now—help me——"

"What do you mean?"

"There is a man on the bridge," muttered Talbot hoarsely—"a German! Do you understand? He is going to destroy the bridge——"

"What!"

"And then—the express——"

"My heavens! The troop-train passes at midnight——" The detective's grip closed tighter on the Toff's shoulder. "Are you telling me the truth? Is this a trick?"

"Look!" muttered Talbot.

The detective, still with a grip on the boy's shoulder, clambered up the embankment. On the bridge, in the rain and the wind, the glimmer of light was still shining.

## CHAPTER 14.

### In the Shadow of Death.

TALBOT gripped the detective's arm.

"You see him?" His voice was a barely-audible whisper. "You see him?"

"Yes."

"You see what he is doing?"

"Who is he?" muttered the detective, standing motionless, his eyes on the figure that crouched on the rails, partly visible in the glimmer of the light. "What do you know of this? Who is the man?"

"His name is Elberfelt; he is a German. You can see what he is here for!" Talbot muttered hoarsely. "You needn't fear that I shall run. I am your prisoner, if you choose. I could have escaped if I liked—you know that!"

The detective nodded; he knew that. He had wondered why Talbot had deliberately run into him instead of escaping in the darkness.

"He must be stopped; he must be taken!" said Talbot. "I will help you. But be on your guard; I am certain that he is armed, and it is a bomb that he is fixing there. There's no time to lose. Come!"

Mr. Foxe drew a deep breath.

He was out in the wind and the rain that wild night to capture the Toff, the boy who was now in his grasp. But he realised that there was more important business on hand now. There was a bigger and more important capture before him—if he could effect it. He knew more than Talbot; he knew that the troop-train was to pass by that bridge soon after midnight; he knew that it was close upon midnight now. He knew that if Elberfelt were left to carry out his nefarious work, the train would go plunging into the gully, carrying its human cargo to sudden and terrible death.

Mr. Foxe drew his breath hard. He knew that he was taking his life in his hands now, and he did not hesitate.

"Stand by me, Toff!" he said quickly. "This may mean a pardon for you if we secure him and prevent an accident. It may mean death for both of us. But——"

"I am not afraid!"

"No; you were always a cool hand," said Mr. Foxe. "Come, then!"

He had released Talbot.

The detective and the Toff crept along the lines, cautiously and silently; what slight sounds they made being drowned by the moan of the wind and the pat-patter of the rain.

They were behind the German as he crouched over the track.

What he was doing they could only partly see; but they could see that he was affixing some object there, in the centre of the track.

With his back to them, the German did not see them; and in that lonely place he had no suspicion of being observed in the rain and the darkness.

Only the barest glimmer of his lamp lighted his rascally work.

Closer and closer came the two strange comrades—the Scotland Yard detective and the cracksman he had been hunting—comrades now in peril of their lives!

For they knew their peril. The explosion that was intended to wreck the railway bridge might come while they were close to the spot, and hurl them into eternity without an instant's warning.

They were within six feet of the German, still unseen and unsuspected, when Karl Elberfelt suddenly rose to his feet, with a low exclamation of satisfaction, and the glimmer of light was shut off.

His work was finished.

He turned, and came back quickly along the track, evidently anxious to get away at once—for good reasons. But he halted suddenly, as the two figures loomed before him, almost touching him.

"Mein Gott! Ich——"

They had sprung upon him the next moment.

Elberfelt uttered a sharp cry, and grappled with them fiercely. But he went down heavily on the lines, with two pair of hands grasping him. The detective's knee was planted on his chest, pinning him down. Elberfelt struggled savagely. He was not a big man, but he was muscular, and the detective had his hands full.

"Let me go!" shrieked Elberfelt. "Fly—fly—fools—fools—in one minute more you will be blown to dust! Run!"

The detective's grip tightened.

"Can you hold him?" panted Talbot. "I will look——"

"I've got the villain!"

"Good!"

Talbot sprang up, and ran forward to the spot where Elberfelt had been kneeling. The German was still struggling ferociously with the detective. It was not only arrest he feared. It was the explosion of the infernal machine he had fastened to the track—the bomb that was to shatter the bridge, and leave a yawning gulf for the oncoming express. If that explosion came while he was still struggling on the bridge, Elberfelt knew what his fate would be. He was fighting for his life!

Mr. Foxe understood well enough, but he did not relax his grip. And he was keeping the German pinned down, though he could not get the handcuffs on him.

Talbot stopped, peering at the dark track before him. In the gloom he could see nothing; he struck a match, but the wind extinguished it instantly. His heart was thumping—he knew how precious the minutes were—the seconds, even! He knew that at any moment might come a frightful explosion, and death in the midst of destruction!

But if he could not use his eyes, he could use his ears! A faint tick, tick, tick! came to his strained hearing, and he knelt, and bent over a dark object that was placed between the metals. He comprehended. It was an infernal machine worked by some mechanism, timed to explode when the German had gained a safe distance. Karl Elberfelt had not expected that he would be stopped on the bridge! How long had he allowed for the interval before the explosion? Two or three minutes had already passed! The frantic fear of the German showed that the explosion must be close at hand.

Talbot felt an icy thrill run through his body for a second, as his hand touched the dark object from which the faint ticking came.

In an instant it flashed through his mind like a picture of fire. What if it exploded even as he touched it?

Yet the brave lad did not hesitate.

With steady hands that did not tremble, he grasped the horrible contrivance, and lifted it from the track!

Then he groped his way towards the parapet of the railway-bridge.

He stumbled on the lines, but he did not fall. The ticking of the infernal machine, it seemed to his throbbing ears, had grown louder and faster. The impulse to drop it and run was strong. But he stumbled on—he reached the parapet—

he lifted the bomb over it with steady hands, and dropped it into space.

The bomb whizzed downwards into the deep gully, and Talbot listened with a beating heart, and almost swimming brain.

A sudden, fearful roar, came from the darkness below—a terrific explosion that awoke the echo of the moor for miles.

The bomb had exploded before it reached the bottom of the gully. But it was too far off to cause damage to the bridge. He heard a rattle of falling stones, he felt the bridge shiver, that was all. The thunderous echoes died away. Only the moan of the wind was heard on the lonely moor. The danger was past.

Talbot stumbled back towards the detective and his prisoner. The German was still struggling.

"Safe now!" muttered Talbot, through his white lips. "I threw it over, thank Heaven, in time. Safe—safe!"

"I know!" The detective was shuddering. "A narrow thing for both of us! Lend me a hand with this scoundrel while I put the bracelets on!"

Talbot's grip fastened on the German. Elberfelt had released his right hand by a tremendous effort from the detective's grasp, and thrust it into his coat. It came out suddenly, there was a gleam of steel, the next instant a sharp report—a cry, and a heavy fall!

"You scoundrel!" panted the detective.

His clenched fist dashed into the German's face, Elberfelt's head crashed on the metals under him, and he gave a groan and lost his senses. He was handcuffed the next moment. The detective sprang to his feet, and bent over Talbot. The boy had raised himself on his elbow.

"Toff, you are hit!"

"Yes," muttered Talbot thickly. "Never mind, we've saved the train!"

There was the shriek of an engine down the line. The detective dragged Talbot to the embankment, and then dragged Elberfelt, still unconscious, from the line. He stood aside with panting breath, while the express roared by, glimmering with lights through the rainy night, and with a loud, cheery chorus coming from the crowded carriages.

The express had been saved—the troop-train was safe—and Talbot had saved it, and there, in the pattering rain, lay the brave lad, with the pallor of death in his face, and a bullet in his body. Truly, the Toff had atoned fully for the past!

## CHAPTER 15.
### The King's Pardon.

TOM MERRY heard the news the next day.

The whole school was soon buzzing with it.

At first all they knew was that an attempt had been made to wreck the troop-train, and that a German had been arrested by Mr. Foxe of Scotland Yard, and that a lad who had hurled the bomb from the bridge and saved five hundred lives lay in Wayland Hospital with a bullet in his body, between life and death.

It was a story to thrill the hearts of the St. Jim's fellows; but when they learned more their hearts beat with pride in their old chum, who had so nobly redeemed the sins and mistakes of his unhappy past.

For on Monday they had fuller news—news that the boy who had saved the troop-train was a fellow who was "wanted" by the police, known as the "Toff"—and then they knew that it was Talbot.

"Talbot!" Tom Merry said, almost dazedly. "Old Talbot! Who will say a word against him after this?"

"Bai Jove! I'd like to heah anybody say a word against him!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy truculently.

But nobody did. Even Levison of the Fourth was silent and ashamed. Even the cad of the School House had nothing to say. He realised that if his trap for Talbot at Abbotsford had been a success, the troop-train would have been destroyed—Talbot would not have been there to save it.

Five hundred lives would have been lost, and the German, Elberfelt, would have been free and unsuspected, to carry on his deadly work in other directions. And so, even Levison was glad that his scheme had failed, and that Talbot had escaped to render his country that service.

And Talbot was lying wounded—in danger of his life! The knowledge of that tempered the pride and satisfaction of his old chums.

Tom Merry & Co. cycled over to Wayland to inquire for him as early as they could.

At the hospital they were refused admission to Talbot—his state was too serious. But they learned that the bullet had been extracted, and that he was going on well. His splendid constitution was saving him, and the danger was almost past. As they came away they met Mr. Foxe, who had also been there to inquire after the Toff. The juniors looked grimly at the detective, whose face was very grave.

"So you've got your prisoner, Mr. Foxe?" said Tom Merry, with a bitterness he could not repress.

Mr. Foxe nodded gravely.

"Yes, Master Merry. He will recover, poor fellow; there is no doubt about that now, and it will be the best thing he has ever done for himself."

"How is that?" asked Figgins. "I suppose he will be arrested when he leaves the hospital, though it's a rotten shame."

The detective shook his head.

"He has earned his pardon," he answered. "As I told you when I saw you at the school, he would have been dealt with leniently, in any case. I have made my report to the authorities, young gentlemen, and there is not the slightest doubt that the Toff will receive the King's pardon!"

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"The King's pardon! My hat! That's ripping!"

"Wippin', bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, you know!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Mr. Foxe smiled.

It was good news for the chums of St. Jim's. They returned joyfully to the school with the news for the other fellows that Talbot was out of danger, and that his liberty as well as his life was safe. And the whole school rejoiced. From Dr. Holmes, the reverend and respected Head, down to the smallest and inkiest fag, St. Jim's was proud of Talbot—proud that he had once been sheltered by those ancient walls.

"I knew that I was not mistaken in the boy," the Head said to Mr. Railton, with great satisfaction. "I was certain of it. He has more than redeemed the past now. I only hope it will be possible for him to come back to the school. After what he has done, I am sure that the governors will raise no objection, in spite of his past, and I think the boys will give him a rousing welcome."

"And the masters too!" said Mr. Railton heartily.

There was no doubt about that. And the same thought was in the minds of Tom Merry & Co. Talbot was pardoned, Talbot was free, and he must come back to St. Jim's!

A week later they were allowed to visit him in the hospital. They found him pale, but calm and cheerful, and mending rapidly. He was glad to see them, and he listened with a smile to their congratulations; but he shook his head when Tom Merry told him that he must come back to St. Jim's.

"Impossible, old chap!"

"Rats!" said Tom warmly. "You've got to come!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "What possible objection can you have, Talbot, deah boy?"

"You can be jolly certain of a welcome on all sides," said Figgins. "I can assure you we'd be jolly glad to have you in the New House."

"No fear!" said Tom Merry promptly. "He's coming back into the School House! We can't spare him!"

Talbot smiled faintly.

"It's impossible," he said. "I'd like to come, you know that, but—but I can't! You forget that I've got no money. I have to work for my bread."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"Neither did I," confessed Tom Merry. "I suppose that's rather an important point. But we will work it somehow. We'll have a whip round to raise the tin——"

"Hear, hear!"

Talbot shook his head.

"I couldn't come on those terms," he said. "I thank you all—you know I'm grateful—but I couldn't! It's impossible! I'd give anything to come back to St. Jim's, but I couldn't come on charity, and that's what it would be. You're bricks, all of you, but it can't be done!"

"It's going to be done!" said Tom Merry firmly. "If that won't do we'll find some other way; but you're coming back to St. Jim's, that's settled."

And when they left Talbot, it was with that determination fixed in their minds; and at St. Jim's they discussed it, and discussed it, and discussed it—turning the matter over in every way—determined that a solution of the difficulty should be found.

Talbot had received the King's pardon. He was free as air. In a few days more he would be discharged from the hospital. A way must be found. It simply had to be found. But it had not been found by the time Talbot left the hospital, and Tom Merry & Co. learned that he had gone back to his work on Slingsby's Farm. But the heroes of St. Jim's were not easily to be beaten, and, difficult as the matter seemed, the juniors were determined—and they did not allow themselves to doubt for a moment—that ere long Talbot of the Shell, no longer an outcast, would resume his old place at St. Jim's.

THE END.

***(Another magnificent, long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. and "The Toff," entitled "Working his Way!" will appear next week. See that you order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance.)***

OUR GRAND NEW WAR SERIAL.

# A Bid for a Throne.

## A Thrilling War Story.

## By CLIVE R. FENN.

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 decoyed Grace Lang, Satorys' fiancee, 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 help Germany. 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 Paul comes into his own. Herr Von Blumstock, a German Secret Service agent, uses the likeness between Stanton and Paul for his own benefit, and Paul is decoyed to a house and trapped at his orders. Stanton, once more assuming the identity of the King of Istan, is paid by the agent to secure information in London likely to be of use to Germany, and while he is strolling down the Strand one night he is tapped on the shoulder, and, turning, he finds himself face to face with a very old friend, Sam Bourke.

(Now go on with the story.)

### The Criminal's Resolution.

The wiry-looking man gave a low laugh, and winked. He was not much to look at in his threadbare coat, his bowler hat, too big for him, and pressed down over his eyes as if to hide as much as might be. And Stanton moved suddenly, thinking to escape further parley with the undesirable specimen; but Sam Bourke caught his idea, and gripped his arm.

It was all painfully clear now to Stanton, the old lag who had first put him on the track of a great coup; but he wanted to forget.

"No, you don't," said Bourke, "not this journey, governor. I have often been thinking about you since, wondering how you might have got on. There has been a lot since those days, but I never forget a pal. How's things been going with you, old sport, since we met?"

"I don't know what you are talking about, my good fellow," said Stanton in a nervous, nettled tone.

"Now, come, come," said Bourke, "that won't wash with a pal like me. I never expected to see you in London, or anywhere else, for that matter; but since we have met, you may as well tell me what you've been doing. You can stand me a dinner if you like. Times is precious bad, though there's one thing, the police don't chivvy a fellow as they used to, too busy looking for Germans, I reckon."

There was no help for Stanton. He took the line of least danger.

"I'll stand you a dinner," he said; "but, you see, things have altered so much, and, of course, it would not do for me to be seen talking to you."

Bourke pursed up his mouth, and the first bar of "It's a long, long way to Tipperary," came in a soft whistle.

"There's nobody to see," he said. "Where shall we go?"

He still had firm hold of Stanton's arm as though the other were a prize which he feared to lose.

Much against his wish as it was, Stanton submitted to the ordeal, accompanying Bourke down a side street, and entering a cheap restaurant.

Bourke was eager for news.

"You aren't a real king, then?" he said, as he leaned back in the corner of the humble eating-house and drained his glass. "But, there, of course, I can see you aren't. But, then, what are you doing in London, living like a gentleman by the look of you? Not a spy, are you? I hope not. I wouldn't be a blooming spy—no, not if they was to offer me a thousand a year, for I hate the Germans, poor as I am!"

"No," said Stanton uneasily, "I am not a spy."

"Glad to hear it, old horse! Ah, but it's a funny world, and yet you have been hitting it lucky. You will be able to help yours truly a bit, for we were pals."

"What do you want?" asked Stanton sharply.

Sam Bourke gave another whistle.

"Well, from the look of me, I should say that I want pretty well everything. I tell you, mate, times is very bad for business, nothing doing at all, and the whole place seeming sort of lonely like with the places closed for the most part, and nobody caring to let go of a bob lest the Germans come. I tell you what. I should just like to meet that there Kaiser, have a quiet five minutes alone with him; that's all I ask. Hadn't he got enough with all Germany to play with, and as much money as he could spend? The likes of him don't know when they are well off; but he will have to hop it, and quick, before long."

Stanton was silent.

"But what are you doing, anyway?" asked Bourke, fixing his host with his little ferret-like eyes, which seemed able to draw the truth out of a man.

"Look here, my man——"

"Come, now, we are pals, there's no sense in 'my manning' me. Won't wash, old sport. Now, just tell me where you have been, and what is going. I have been living anyhow, and a job is what I'd like. Would have gone for sojer, but the ramrod in mustard that I spoke to only laughed, and said they weren't taking fossils, though I could do my bit if they'd let me. I want to run honest now, for the sake of old times—I mean the very old time before—before anything happened at all, and it makes me irritable to think of the Old Country being in a tight place."

"But you have no cause to love England, surely!" said Stanton guardedly.

"Haven't I, though. I tell you what it is, Jem Stanton, there's a lot of things which a chap like you might never be able to understand, for it isn't in your phiz, and I suppose

you can't help it, but I do love the old place, and, maybe, it was all my fault that things went wrong."

Stanton darted the speaker a look. He was annoyed, troubled by the attitude of this weird bit of human flotsam from down below. Sam Bourke might prove a nuisance and a real danger.

"Come now, Jem Stanton, you needn't play the haughty on an old friend because you have struck lucky. You are different to me. I have been stung all the time; but for all that I wouldn't do the dirty on the Old Country. Dare say I had my chance once, and I missed it, but I wouldn't be that Kaiser for anything—I don't think! Calls himself a gentleman, and he has made poor womenfolk homeless and all the rest of it. Does a gentleman do that?"

Stanton was very eager to be off. He glanced round the shabby little restaurant, at the faded pictures of shepherdesses and officers mounted on caracoling steeds, then back again at the drivelling Sam Bourke, who seemed bent on causing him irritation, and who was now calling the shirt-sleeved waiter to bring another beer.

"My friend the duke will pay all right," said Bourke.

The waiter smiled, nodded, and hurried off.

"Now, tell me what's doing," said Bourke, placing his elbows on the spotted tablecloth, which had suffered in the wars like most other things. "I am out of a job, and I should like to run honest. I gave you a tip back there when you looked ready to cry, I told you not to be down-hearted then, gave you a winner—at least, I should say it was a winner, judging from the look of you with your nice new suit and your toff's way. Now you can do something for me. See? That won't hurt you. What is your little game?"

Stanton winced. Tell this vague, out-at-elbows patriot that he, Stanton, was living on German funds, and was waiting the order to present himself to people in the town as the real King of Istan! It was unthinkable.

"I? Oh, I am not doing much!" he said. "Sorry things are bad with you. If a sovereign is any use, here it is."

He tossed the coin across the table to Sam Bourke. The latter seized the money, bit it, nodded his head, and slipped the coin into his waistcoat pocket.

"Thanky kindly, governor. That's a bit to go on with, but I want more'n than a sov. It won't go far, and so I tell you. Now I suppose you live in a nice house, and have a good dinner every day, which is all more than I do, and I am your pal, mark you."

"I'll do what I can for you."

Sam Bourke eyed the speaker through half-closed eyes. Like the man who has had to batter his way through the world, whether by the crooked path or the other, he could read character, and Sam Bourke was no ordinary man. People talk of education—education, so called, is only the veneer. The real thing is ingrained, giving its possessor the entry to all the mysteries which lie beneath the surface of things.

Bourke was on the lowest plane, or nearly so, as far as material advantages were concerned, but in one way he was superior to life, not alone in the lingering quality of a certain rugged honesty which had survived through all, but also there was in him the deeper understanding of men.

"You won't tell me what you are doing, Jem Stanton?" he said huskily.

"I am doing nothing special."

"Oh, well, what is the not very special thing, then?"

There was no reply.

Stanton rose from his chair, called the waiter, and paid the bill, Bourke watching him keenly as the operation was performed. One thing was clear to the intelligence of Bourke. He knew the men—knew often enough by the cut of them what they did for a living, and he had seen men who were engaged in the very doubtful calling which he was attributing to Stanton.

As he followed the other out of the restaurant, he knew it better. Stanton did not pass into the street like an ordinary man. He looked up and down as if afraid. What was he afraid of? The Germans had not got as far as London yet!

"Well, I must be off!" said Stanton, with a nod.

"You aren't going to do anything for me, then?"

"I am afraid there is nothing that I can do."

"And you won't tell me what your special line is?" Bourke did not give the other time to reply. "No need to tell me," he said. "I know it well enough. I have seen scaly things like you before. No; you don't slip off till I have done with you."

Bourke's hand gripped Stanton's arm.

"There's something I want to say to you, Jem Stanton, mighty particular. When I have said it, then you can hop it quick, for I don't want any help from you. You are a spy! That's what you are. Here's your dirty sovereign!" Bourke sent the coin spinning into the middle of the road where it was immediately pounced on by a ragged urchin who was round the first corner like a streak of lightning. "You may be well-dressed, and have what you want all the time, but I know you now, Jem Stanton, and if I did my duty, I should call a copper and tell him what you are! Bah! Help the Germans! The Germans who have killed poor folks who had never done 'em any harm!"

Stanton gave a gasp as he threw off Bourke's hand. He was too much alarmed to do more than stutter out a denial. The next moment he was running down the street in the darkness, running like a hunted man as if a score of demons were hard in his wake. He turned after a hundred yards, breathing more freely, for he saw that he had left Sam Bourke—clumsy, rough-spoken Sam Bourke, who had hit on the truth and taken him unawares. Stanton ran on again, breaking into a walk at last, and not stopping until he had gained the courtyard of his hotel, where he paused as a man came up to him, and, without stopping, slipped a letter into his hand.

Stanton was accustomed now to that method of receiving his orders from the omniscient Von Blumstock. He went to his room, which was on the ground-floor, and turned up the light to read the letter:

"You will be at Charing Cross to-morrow at seven in the evening, dressed as Paul Satorys would be dressed after crossing from the Continent. There you will meet one of ours, who will give you fresh instructions. There is nothing to fear from detection now, as both the lady and S. are safe in our care."

Stanton slipped the letter into his pocket. He was beginning to feel assured. He knew that a rising of Germans in London was preparing, knew that as King of Istan he could come and go as he chose.

But there was one thing that he did not know—that was, that at the window Sam Bourke was watching him, eagerness on his weather-beaten, gnarled face, and, deep down in his heart, burning into a bright glow, was the fire of patriotism, something new, maybe, to him.

"I begin to see his game," muttered the watcher; "and I'll out him, or my name isn't Sam Bourke."

### Watched.

Sam Bourke grimly felt that Stanton was up to no good. By a process of reasoning, which lost nothing by finding rough and ready expression, the old "lag" was convinced that his former companion in the quarries, the man who was now doing himself so well in a fine house, and with smart clothes, was busy over something which ought to be shown up.

Not that Bourke was clear as to his own action. One thing at a time was quite plenty for him. If Stanton were fighting against England, and, of course, he was, or he would not have been ashamed to tell what he was up to, then he would have to reckon with his old friend, that was all.

It was no difficulty to Sam Bourke to keep guard. He had always lived as he could, taking things as they came, and making the best of them.

He was determined to keep his eye on Stanton. Perhaps he might be doing service to the country. Perhaps he might be doing himself a good turn, and as Sam Bourke compared his own lot to that of his former colleague, he mentally registered the idea that it was time something came his way.

Bourke was cut out for the job of shadowing Stanton. The latter felt pretty confident that he had thrown off his former friend. He would have felt less sure had he known that Bourke was watching the house, never letting his quarry out of his sight, determined to scent out the mystery which lay behind the other's prosperity.

Meanwhile, Herr von Blumstock was not idle. Herr Blumstock was never idle, but at the present time his remarkable activities were phenomenal. Nothing that was happening in England was indifferent to him, and as one of the chiefs of the powerful Secret Service of Berlin with its myriad agencies and innumerable ways of obtaining information which was useful to Germany, he missed nothing, not a speech of anybody whose word was important to the British Empire, not the least action of any public man.

Germany was as yet far from being cut off from the rest of the world. Her routes were open to America via Holland and Sweden, and it was thanks in a great measure to Herr von Blumstock that German-spies were disseminated throughout the world, and false reports circulated as to the latent strength of Germany and the certainty of her being able to fulfil her mission, namely, to overrun Europe, and become the mistress of the world.

It was the ingenious and plausible Blumstock who met Stanton at the appointed place, and who, in the guise of a courier, saw the adventurer installed in the place of Paul

Satorys, but clever as he was even Blumstock was on this occasion outmatched by Sam Bourke.

Bourke would have made an excellent sleuth. In his periods of liberty he had learned as much about life as there was to know, and this time his naturally alert wits were smartened by that idea of thwarting Stanton, for Stanton was a spy, and had got to be stopped, as Bourke put it.

Blumstock complimented Stanton on his turn-out, and gave him further instructions as the two drove from the South Eastern terminus to an hotel.

"As Satorys you will have the entree everywhere," said Blumstock. "You will be kept in constant touch with me. Be on your guard as to the war. Satorys has been through much of the campaign, and you will find in these notes particulars of his life during the last few months. Study them carefully, mix in society, maintain a quiet reserve, and all will be well."

Sam Bourke waited outside the hotel and saw Blumstock emerge alone. Bourke had been at the station for hours, and his patience was rewarded. Stanton had not given a single glance at the shabby-looking man, who, with his hands in his pockets, was apparently absorbed by the time-table on the wall close to the main entrance, nor had he seen the same individual slouch out of the forecourt, stepping it briskly as soon as he gained the Strand, and by proceeding along side streets, reaching the hotel which had been named by the porter who had called the taxi, pretty well as soon as the two conspirators.

Bourke moved after Blumstock. Stanton was evidently a stayer at the hotel, he argued.

Blumstock had no means of knowing that there was such a person as Bourke in the world. Stanton had never told him of the existence of the wily old ex-convict. Stanton was very reticent as to the past. If the highly-placed German had known he was followed all the way to the country headquarters of his party, he would have taken good care to place it beyond the power of the shabby-looking individual to do harm.

But he did not know, and Bourke found the task of tracking his prey quite easy. For Blumstock performed the journey out of London in the ordinary way, namely, by a suburban line. Motor-cars were rather suspect in those times. Blumstock looked the most harmless personage as he strolled up from the country station to the retired house which had been selected as the rendezvous of German intriguers, and Bourke had not the slightest difficulty in tracking his man to the entrance. There he was rather puzzled. What did it mean? This stout gentleman passed into the gates. Bourke scratched his head and looked at the iron gates.

Blumstock was received at the door of the house by one of his followers, a man who reported as to the two prisoners.

"I will see them both," said Blumstock, as he walked into a room which might have been the library in an ordinary family residence.

Larnches was, in fact, taken by the Berlin Secret Service in the name of a distinguished French nobleman, and, as such, was freed from all suspicion on the part of the Home Office in London. The frequent coming and going at the local station of polite gentlemen who spoke French without the least trace of accent, and the circumstance that motor-cars were frequently driving down the avenue to the house, were details quite unlikely to cause gossip, for the Frenchman who was also reported to be taking an active part in the many charitable works connected with the war.

A woman who was specially told off to watch over Miss Lang hurried away to inform her charge. Since her incarceration in the house the girl had almost given up hope of ever recovering her freedom. She realised that much was happening around her, but so far as news was concerned, she never had any at all, the various women who took care of her treating her as if she were a child.

She passed much of her time in sewing, trying not to dwell on the misfortunes which had filled her life ever since the time when she had first told Paul Satorys that he should seize the opportunity to make good his claims to the Throne of Istan. All that seemed now a very long time ago, and now she had only exchanged one imprisonment for another.

"A gentleman wishes to see you," said a woman, who had just entered the room where the girl was seated in company with two others of her guards. The room was lighted but badly by a window, heavily barred, and only the top panes of which were level with the ground. Through it the girl was able to see a stretch of turf, and the trunks of some trees.

"I do not wish to see anybody!" she cried angrily. "I am a prisoner, of course, but if I am to be kept here, at least I can be spared the insult of meeting that man."



The thought of the infamous Jem Stanton was ever with her now, and she knew his hand was in her fresh captivity.

The woman gave a laugh, and seized the prisoner by the arm.

"Come, come, my dear!" she said in very good English, though, in her case, the German pronunciation was marked. "It is no good you being stupid and obstinate. It is for you to do just what you are told, as I told you when first you came to us!"

She jerked the girl to her feet. Miss Lang drew back, her face crimsoning.

"I have done what you have ordered," she said; "but surely there is no need to treat me like that! I know that there is no escape, and that I must wait here until the police find me——"

"The police!" cried the woman, with contempt. "The police won't find you. By the time it is known you are here with us, England will all be in the hands of the German Emperor!"

"It is not true!" cried the girl, with vivid indignation vibrating through her voice.

The other smiled. Miss Lang shivered. There was so much assurance about these German women, for she knew they were German, although they always spoke English to her, and amongst themselves when they were in her presence. Since she had been kidnapped everything had been shut out from her. Not a word had been uttered to her as to what was really happening, but at least, she thought and felt she knew, that Paul Satorys was safe with his troops, and that one day, when he came back to England, he would seek her out and set her free.

"Are you coming, my dear?" asked her gaoler, with assumed civility. "It is better to obey, for if you are foolish we shall have to force you to do what is required of you."

"It is Mr. Stanton who wishes to see me? Tell me the truth, please! If it is that wretch, then I will not go."

The woman gripped her arm tighter.

"No; it is not Mr. Stanton, though I understand he will be coming here to see you one of these days."

"Who is it, then?" asked the girl.

"Herr von Blumstock!" was the reply. "And he is a great gentleman who has to be obeyed. Come at once! He must not be kept waiting!"

So little had the prisoner heard that the name of the secret agent of the German Emperor meant nothing at all to the girl. But the sound of the "von" and the rest told her plainly that she was in the hands of the enemies of her country, and that Stanton was still working with England's foes.

To repine at her fate was useless now, though the thought of her adventures, when an officer in the French Army, she had sought out Paul, and been the means of saving him from a cruel death, made her sad at heart.

She knew that now she was merely a helpless captive, completely at the mercy of unscrupulous people who would stop at nothing to further their aims.

She surrendered herself to the inevitable, and was led out of the room, and down many passages, to the entrance of another apartment, seeing more of the house which was her prison than she had ever done before.

Blumstock rose from his chair as the girl entered.

"You may leave us," he said to the woman in attendance. "I wish to speak to Miss Lang alone!"

The other withdrew, and Blumstock pushed forward a chair.

"Please be seated!"

The prisoner sank into the chair, and waited for what was to come.

"I wished to have a chat with you, Miss Lang," said the herr. "It was necessary for our purpose that we should have you under our eye. By the way, I trust that they have treated you here with every courtesy?"

He waited for his answer.

"If bringing me here to this prison without my knowledge or consent, and holding me a captive, is to treat me with courtesy, sir, then I suppose I have been well treated," fired up the girl.

Blumstock smiled.

"I was sorry for the necessity, Miss Lang, but it was all unavoidable. You have been drawn into the net, and I am here to offer you certain terms, terms which, if you accept, will enable you to resume your former place in the world, and even assume the high position which should be yours, that of Queen of Istan!"

The girl flashed the speaker a look of inquiry, but said nothing.

"It is like this, Miss Lang," the other went on. "We are working for the great future of the German Empire, and the Kingdom of Istan, although temporarily divorced from its

allegiance to the Emperor, will return to its old ally. Ah, better hear me out!" said Blumstock quickly, as the girl half-rose from her chair. "You are quite helpless. You are only a pawn in our game. We win that game. It is decreed, and very soon London will hear of things which will cause it and the whole country to repent that England ever dared to oppose the wishes of the Kaiser. But all that you will not understand. We are aware of all that has passed. Paul Satorys, who is now safe with us"—again did the girl give a start, her face paling as she heard the words—"caused the Istan troops to rebel against Germany. I am afraid there is no hope for him, but the man who is now recognised as King of Istan has spoken to me of you. This is your chance, Miss Lang. You are the wife by law of the man who was formerly Jem Stanton. If you like to tell me that you are willing to forget the past, and to bow to what must be, your imprisonment shall cease."

"On what conditions?" asked the girl coldly.

"But is it not clear? You are married to the new King of Istan. He is our friend. He is wise." A slightly scornful smile played about the lips of Blumstock, for he was thinking of the real, ignoble character of Stanton. "He will be glad to make peace, to acknowledge you as his wife, and you, if you are obedient and loyal to him, will share in the coming triumph. Let me urge you to dismiss the thought of Paul Satorys from your mind. He is our prisoner. I am afraid he will never see liberty any more. But Stanton, your husband, as he is—ah, by forgetting all else you will be giving yourself a great future, and you will be able to help him, to give him advice, which sometimes he needs."

The prisoner sprang to her feet.

"If you had me brought here to insult me," she cried angrily, "then I may tell you at once that you are wasting your time, for I will listen to nothing—nothing! If that is all you have to say, perhaps you will let me go back to my prison, for I will never have anything to do with the man you mention. I am here at the mercy of the enemies of my country, and you tell me that Paul Satorys is also in your clutches. But be that as it may, whatever vile plot you and yours may be planning against England, I know it will come to naught, and that your Emperor will rue the day he drew the sword!"

"Finely spoken, my dear Miss Lang!" said Blumstock imperturbably. "But it is all idle froth. I only suggested this to you. You will have time to think over my words, and when his duties in London permit him, I have no doubt that the man you speak of so improperly will come down and see you. Perhaps he will be able to bring you to a better frame of mind. Rest assured that I know of what I speak, but you women, you would not comprehend the greater things. They are a mystery to you."

The girl made a step towards him, and Blumstock, who was in the act of touching the bell at his side, glanced at her mockingly. Had she already begun to repent of her hasty resolve?

"You—you will let me see Paul Satorys?" she cried.

Blumstock leaned back in his chair as the girl stood there on the other side of the table facing him, a look of entreaty in her eyes.

"I do not think so," he said softly, as he rubbed his fat hands together, and examined one of the rings he wore. "I do not think so, Miss Lang. You have notions of honour, of course. If I permitted you an interview with Satorys, I wonder if you would give me your solemn oath that you would serve our cause, assist the work here, stand by Stanton, remain silent when you were told, return to London with Stanton, and be ready to acknowledge him not only as your husband, but as the rightful King of Istan? Would you do all that, and serve Germany faithfully through all?"

"Never," cried the girl vehemently—"never! Better death than that!"

Blumstock touched the bell and turned to his papers.

"I knew what your reply would be—now, but we will see what time—time and other circumstances—your imprisonment here—will do."

The prisoner recoiled in useless anger as she saw her tormentor pick up a paper and begin to study it as though she had not been there at all. The utter humiliation of her position had never come home to her as bitterly as it did then, for as she turned away from the table the door opened and she saw the woman who had brought her to the room beckoning to her to come.

Miss Lang looked round. There was no possibility of escape. She knew that, besides the women who had her in their charge, there were others in the house—men who marched down the corridors with the regularity of soldiers. She had heard them often. No escape was out of the question, and she went slowly to the door, for her arm to be seized.

The woman drew her out of the room and closed the door.

"Now, then, Miss Lang, you must come straight back to your room. Is not the herr a nice gentleman?"

### A Dash for Liberty.

Satorys walked up and down the room where he was confined. Since he had walked into the trap he had seen nobody but the two men who brought him food. His prison was now a room, better than the one where he had first come back to his senses. There was a little light from a grating, and the place was furnished with a couple of chairs and a couch.

He knew that Miss Lang was likewise a prisoner, and as the time passed he tried to form plans for getting away so that she might be saved; but his guardians never relaxed their vigilance.

As a rule, they entered the place in company, as if in dread of their prisoner; but on the third day Satorys looked up, to see one only standing in the doorway, a tray in his hand. The man seemed disposed to talk.

"It will soon be all over with you," he said, with a cynical grin.

Satorys was wearied out with the solitude, and he turned to the speaker, glad of something to break the monotony.

"How so?" he asked.

"Oh, it is going to be the end of England very soon," said the other complacently. "All is ready, and you will have to know directly. I don't know what they mean to do with you, but, anyway, you are not to be allowed to do any harm."

Satorys watched the man as he spoke. He was the ordinary type of German boaster, and after he had once spoken he seemed likely to go on, forgetting all else in the pursuit of his subject. He perched himself on the edge of the table, swinging his legs.

"Yes, there won't be much left of this country when we have done with it," he went on. "I have heard all about you, and it seems to me you made a big mistake when you threw over our Emperor. The Government here isn't any good. We are going to sweep through England, and then people will see. They will all rise then."

Satorys had moved nearer to the door. He saw that the passage outside was deserted, and as the man went on to say something about the intentions of the Germans, the prisoner made a sudden spring, bearing his gaoler back, stifling his cry, and driving him backwards to the stone floor.

The sound of a body crumpling to the ground and a smothered cry did not penetrate beyond the room, and the moment after Satorys was gazing down at the man who lay there stunned, the back of his head having struck the flags.

He glided to the door and listened intently. There came the hum of far-off talking. Then he went back to the big German whom he had placed out of action—temporarily, that was all.

"I must put him right," muttered Satorys.

He turned the man over, and dragged off his coat. Next, he unknotted the scarf the man wore, and with this securely pinioned his arms behind his back, afterwards placing the thick coat round his head and fastening it as tightly as he could.

"There, my friend, I think you will do for the present," he said.

There was no alarm yet, but every second was vital. Satorys was at the door once again, passing out, keeping well back in the shadow of the wall. The house was an ancient, rambling specimen, built, probably, way back in the Middle Ages. Satorys went forward cautiously. On him rested the responsibility of carrying the warning as to the existence of the centre of German intrigue and all it stood for.

***(Another splendid long instalment of this grand serial next Wednesday.)***

# FROM THE FIRING-LINE!

**A Series of Letters of Enthralling Interest received direct from Corporal Charles, of his Majesty's —th Dragoons, who is an old reader of "The Gem" Library, and is now on active service on the Continent with the British Expeditionary Force.**

**(Exclusive to "The Gem" Library.)**

## No. 4.—MY GERMAN PRISONERS.

Since my last letter to you I have made my first capture of prisoners of war. There is little glory in the adventure, so my native modesty will not prevent me from describing the affair.

It happened just a day or two before the dastardly crime upon Rheims Cathedral.

The Germans were firmly entrenched on the north bank of the Aisne. The French were keeping them busy with an everlasting shell-fire, whilst our own little lot, working as hard as a dozen armies rolled into one, were performing a flanking movement, which threatened to bottle up Von Kluck's horde of barbarians and give them a taste of British steel. Of that more anon.

As for your humble, I had just come in after our troop had been treating the Uhlans to a few lessons in swordsmanship—which they didn't appreciate—and was giving my tired old mare a well-deserved brush-down, when an orderly told me our colonel wanted me.

"Ah, Corporal Charles," said the jolly-faced old colonel, when I stepped into his tent and saluted, "you've distinguished yourself in many ways, but there's one job you've left undone. I'm surprised at your negligence."

I bit my lip and cudgelled my brains. It was the first time the colonel had grumbled at me since I had joined the troop after leaving Namur.

"How's it you've brought in no prisoners?" he asked, with twinkling eyes, before I could stammer out a reply.

"Well, sir," I answered, "the fact is, when the King's Dragoons have done with the Germans they're hardly worth the trouble of roping-in. Still, I'll bear the matter in mind, sir."

"Don't you worry, my lad," smiled the gallant old chap. "You've a chance to distinguish yourself straight away. Frenchie here will explain the business. Take four of our boys with you. That'll be enough for a score of Germans, I dare say."

It was then that I noticed a third person in the tent—an old Frenchman, wan-cheeked, grizzled-moustached, with valet in every eloquent gesture.

"Ah, Monsieur le Corporal!" exclaimed the old fellow as we stepped out into the waning light. "I have no fear when I have the brave Anglais soldiers with me. You will come to the chateau, to my master's home? You will rescue the good master and madame, his charming wife? Ah, it is proud I am to do the good friends of poor Armand a service!"

"All in good time, old chap," I responded. "We'll pay our respects and a bit over to the Germans first. Where shall we find them?"

Armand told me as we moved out from the village. He was only a little fellow, and I easily found room for him before me on the peak of my saddle. Four of our boys, as keen as you like, cantered behind us.

"Ah, it was terrible, monsieur!" began the old man-servant. "The Germans they come and they rob, they burn, and they kill. Master and madame they fly, but the Germans not let Armand go. They say, you stay here, and give us the food and the drink. I could not help myself, monsieur. They show their pistols when I shake my head. I was afraid at first, monsieur. Then I laugh. Little Armand, he beat the big Germans without a single sword or a pistol. He, he, he! Wait till I show the brave Anglais corporal!"

More than that I couldn't get out of the old fellow. He had been timid in the colonel's tent; now he was laughing almost hysterically.

"Poor old boy!" remarked Ted, one of the troopers. "The experiences he's gone through with those German pigs has affected his brain."

"I'm not so sure," grunted Jock, a canny lad from the Tweed. "We may be riding into a hornet's nest, for all we know. 'Tis the devil's own game some of these German spies get up to!"

I couldn't believe that Armand, who didn't know a word of English, was a spy. Still, Jock's remark, and the country through which we were passing, put a damper on our spirits.

Our road lay parallel with the river, on whose banks a terrible engagement had been fought the day before. We had driven the Germans back for over seven miles after stubborn resistance, and the dead—the enemy mostly—lay on either side of us at every few yards as we galloped along.

Behind us were the British and French lines, smoke rising from the bivouac fires. Before us were the slopes of gaunt, grey hills, dotted here and there with black clumps—woods and coppices. A battlefield is not an over-pleasant place to travel through in the dusk of evening, especially when you feel there's a possibility of the enemy stealing up to make another attack.

We lapsed into silence. Even little Armand stopped his giggling, and cast shuddering glances at the dark, silent figures that strewed our path.

Creuil, or something like that, was our destination—a village which was three miles from our lines, according to Armand, though it must have been nearer five.

In a hushed murmur he told me how the Germans had attacked the fine old mansion in which his master and the family resided. Two sons were in the war—officers in an artillery regiment—whilst a daughter of seventeen was at home with her parents. The battle had raged about the chateau for two days, a colonel of infantry making it his headquarters.

They had compelled Armand to give up every morsel of food in the mansion, after which they had plundered the rooms, stealing every valuable that came under their hog's eyes. Monsieur Coquelin and his wife and daughter had fled to a secret attic in the rafters of the roof, where they had lived in terror of the shells which screamed fearfully near their hiding-place.

What I couldn't understand was, why the Germans had not left the chateau when their army had been beaten back.

"They are in the cellar, monsieur," was the old fellow's answer. "I do not know how many. The brave Anglais will settle them."

As he spoke we turned a bend in the lane. It was pitch-dark now, with leaden clouds and drizzling rain. My horse shied from a bush in the road.

Instinctively I turned my eyes in its direction, knowing very well that the old mare had not jumped for amusement. An indistinct shape, man or beast, crouched out of sight. My revolver was out in a flash.

As I fired, there was a re-echoing shot. A bullet whistled between the back of Armand's head and my face. I fired again quickly. While the report still hovered in the air there was a moan, followed by the crash of a falling figure.

"Steady, lads!" I cried, as my boys slipped from the

*(Continued on Col. 1 page iii. of cover.)*

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# FROM THE FIRING-LINE!

*(Continued from page 24.)*

saddle. "Might be an ambush. Two of you look after the horses."

Before I could dismount, Ted and Jock disappeared through a hedgerow.

"Got him!" almost immediately came Ted's triumphant shout. "You made no mistake, corporal."

They dragged a big, burly figure out into the road. He was dressed in the drab dungarees of a French peasant, though his round, greasy face and bullet head showed him at a glance to be a German.

"Robbing the dead," cried Ted contemptuously—"that's been his dirty game! And look here, corporal, there's a bundle of maps and papers in French and German on him! He's been doing the spying game as well."

There was no doubt about it. I rammed the papers into my tunic for examination later on, and gave the order to move forward again. Fortunately, the shots had attracted no unwelcome attention. We still had the great, gloomy battlefield to ourselves.

At Armand's instruction, we struck across country, and within a quarter of an hour pulled up in the grounds surrounding a big, desolate mansion. It was Mons. Coquelin's chateau. Windows and walls had been shattered by shell-fire, though not badly, the holes in the walls making the front appear in the weird light as if splashed with masses of whitewash.

"Germans!" sneered Jock. "There's not a sign of the pigs to be seen! Look out for a trap, corporal."

The place was as silent and forlorn as a graveyard.

"I'll chance it," I said, lifting Armand from the saddle. "Jock will wait here under cover with the horses while we follow Frenchie. Give us a whistle if you want us. Lead on, Macduff Armand."

The little manservant began to tremble afresh as he led us to the rear of the mansion. We followed him through the ruins of what had been an exquisitely-furnished room, where, in the light of the electric-torch I had fortunately brought with me, we saw furniture overturned, pictures slashed to pieces, covers ripped from chairs, and the remains of meals and bottles of wine—empty, and many broken, everywhere.

"Madame's own apartment!" groaned Armand. "What a carnage!"

He led us through many rooms and winding passages till we came to a flight of stone stairs leading to the cellars below the chateau. Here we paused, gripping our swords, our left hands fingering our revolvers. From below came the heavy gurgle of voices.

"Hush!" stammered the old Frenchman. "They are still there, monsieur. They cannot escape. See, I have locked them in."

We crept down to the bottom, and paused on the stone flags before a stout door, which was fastened by an iron bar fixed into sockets in the masonry.

"Be careful, monsieur," quavered Armand. "They are brutes—terrible! They will kill. Ah, it was too bold of me to bring the brave Anglais to the terrible death!"

What with the little man's terror and the eerie silence of the place, I don't mind admitting that my nerves were a little bit rattled. There's no pluckier chap in the dragoons than Ted, and even his teeth were chattering, though I heard him calling himself any but polite names.

"Hook it upstairs!" I snapped fiercely at Armand. And the little man, though he didn't understand me, bolted in terror.

"Let's get it over," I whispered to my companions. "Keep back in the gloom, and prepare for a rush."

Softly I raised the iron bar and pushed the door open. An aroma, sour and sweet, strong and pungent, rushed into my face. That was all. No Germans. Not a murmur. Was it a trap, after all?

"Chance it," whispered Ted. "Flash the light on, corporal."

We could see nothing in the pall-like gloom that filled the wine-cellar, for that's what it was, until I shot a beam of light from the electric-torch through the door.

We could have laughed at the sight that met our eyes. Seated on the floor, with their backs to a huge wine-vat, their arms round one another's necks in an attitude of affection, were two grey-clad figures—German infantrymen. The faces of each were marked with the stupid look of the drunkard. Their open mouths and their eyes blinking in the light made them appear more comic than a pantomime.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" grinned Ted. "What price the glorious, invincible Kaiser's army now?"

"Penny a box—all made in Shermany!" laughed one of the others. "No wonder little Frenchie was able to bottle 'em up!"

"Come out of it, you lager-swilling hogs!" I cried aloud. "We've got some more champagne, and real pain if you don't behave yourselves, waiting for you in the British lines."

Would you believe it? Not even that atrocious pun made them move a limb. How far the cellars extended we were not able to see from the doorway, but everywhere I turned the torch Germans seemed to be lying about.

To make a long story short, we had to go in and drag them out. There were fourteen of them in all, not to mention their colonel—a stout, bloated old hog, whom we found lying on his back, with his mouth wide open, beneath a claret-vat, from which the wine was falling drop by drop into his gullet!

They were too intoxicated, the whole lot of them, to give us any trouble. With Armand's help, we roped them up and lifted them into a waggon, in which, amidst rousing cheers and much merriment, we dragged them back to the British lines—and chokey.

I'm wondering what the old colonel will say when he comes round.

Incidentally, I might mention that we rescued Monsieur and Madame Coquelin and their pretty daughter from the attic, and assured them they had no reason to fear the Germans would again be in their vicinity.

What a fuss they made of us! Mons. Coquelin hugged me with his short, podgy arms. They made me promise to visit them again at the chateau. Mademoiselle was keen on it. Perhaps I will, when the war's over.

***(Another stirring letter from our Chum at the front will appear next Wednesday. Order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance.)***

**A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.**

# Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

### MODERN.

Constable: "Come along, you've got to have a bath!"
Tramp: "A barf wiv water?"
Constable: "Yes, of course!"
Tramp: "Couldn't you manage it wiv one on them vacuum cleaners?"—Sent in by J. S. Treweek, Kew, S.W.

### WHY HE OBJECTED.

"Generally run-down?" asked the man in the chemist's shop. "Want a tonic? I've the very thing for you—Briscoe's Beat-All. Three times a day; and in two days you'll feel like another man. Two shillings a bottle."

"Oh, no, no!" said the customer protestingly.

"But it is the very thing for you. All the doctors are recommending it. We can't get it fast enough for our customers."

"I believe you; but I would prefer something else."

"Nonsense! It cures everything. What's your objection?"

"Only that I'm Briscoe."—Sent in by F. Richardson, Worthing.

### "ALL HOPE ABANDON."

Two Irishmen out in Africa took refuge under the bedclothes from the mosquitoes. Presently Pat put his head out cautiously to reconnoitre. He suddenly espied a firefly, and exclaimed:

"Shure, Teddy, it's all up wid us! The craythurs are searching for us wid a lantern!"—Sent in by Miss Olive Offord, Brighton.

### OUT OF THE QUESTION.

A father was lecturing his son upon the evils of intoxication.

"Never take drink, my son," he said. "To test if you are intoxicated, do you see those two men over there? Then——"

"But, father——" interrupted the son.

"No 'buts,' my son," continued the father. "As I was saying, when those two men appear as four, you are drunk."

"But, father," interposed the son, "there is only one man over there!"—Sent in by James Munro, Glasgow.

### HIS LITTLE JOKE.

It was in a motor-bus, and the old gentleman noticed that the conductor did not demand any fare from a police-constable who was travelling.

After the constable had alighted, the old gentleman beckoned the conductor to him.

"Don't policeman pay fares?" he asked, suspicious that the conductor was giving a friend free conveyance.

"No, sir," answered No. 2863, with a grin. "You can't get twopence out of a copper, can you, sir?"—Sent in by E. Stephens, Harlesden.

### STILL ALIVE.

A City man kept a diary. The following is a record of one minute:

"Was nearly run down by a cab. Narrowly escaped being killed by a cyclist. Was almost chopped up by a motor. Electric car missed me by a hair's-breadth. A second cab failed to catch me napping. An additional motor didn't run over me owing to my long experience in dodging them. Reached the kerb safely, but slipped on a piece of banana-peel, and will be out of the hospital soon."

Moral.—Stay on your own side of the street.—Sent in by E. Hollands, Canterbury.

### QUITE CANDID.

An artist was showing a friend round his studio, when they came to his latest painting, showing coastguards chasing smugglers.

"What is this going to be called?" he asked.

"That," said the artist, "will be called 'Smugglers Surprised at Sunrise.'"

"Ah!" exclaimed his friend, gazing at the picture. "And I don't wonder they were surprised at it!"—Sent in by F. Kirkham, Bolton.

### HE FELT FOR HIMSELF.

Brown came home one night with a deep band of black crepe around his hat.

"Why, John," exclaimed his wife, "what are you wearing that mournful thing for?"

"I'm wearing it for your first husband," replied John firmly. "I'm sorry he's dead."—Sent in by H. D. Clark, Bristol.

### WHAT HE WANTED.

After a railway collision a Scotsman was extricated from the wreckage by a companion, who had escaped unhurt.

"Never mind, Sandy," his friend remarked, "it's nothing serious; and you'll get damages."

"Damages!" roared Sandy. "Have I no' had enough of them? It's repairs I'm seeking the noo!"—Sent in by A. Dodsworth, West Hartlepool.

### A CHEAP LAWN-MOWER.

Dear Old Lady (to tramp, lying on the lawn): "My good man, what on earth are you doing on my lawn?"

"Why, bless yer, kind lady, I'm that 'ungry, I've got to eat grass!"

Dear Old Lady: "Well, if you go round the back you'll find the grass grows much longer and thicker there."—Sent in by Herbert Dyson, Shipley.

### A BUTCHER IN LOVE

"Dear heart, I'm in an awful 'stew'
How to re-veal my love to you.
I'm such a mutton-head, I fear,
I feel so sheepish when you're near
I know it's awful cow-ardice
That makes these lamb-entations rise.
I dread a cut—let me explain,
A single roast would give me pain.
I should not like to get the hooks,
And dare not steak my hopes on looks.
I never sau-sage eyes as thine!
If you would butcher hand in mine,
And liver round me every day,
We'd seek some ham-let far away.
We'd meat life's frown with love's caress,
And cleaver road to happiness."

—Sent in by Miss Myra Stocks, near Manchester.

## MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

**Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.**

**ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.**

**THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.**

*No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.*