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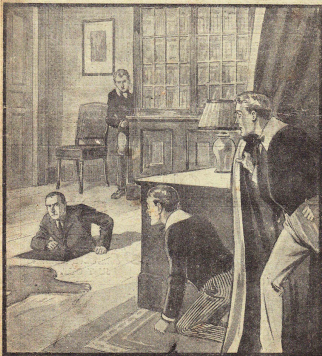
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THE SECRET OF THE TOWER

A Grand Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



GOING TO MEET GUSSY'S GIRL CHUM!

CHAPTER I. Put to the Test.

"WONDAH how many friends I've got!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arny made that remark quite suddenly in the junior common-room, in the School House at St. Jim's.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, but, as it was raining in torrents, most of the fellows were indoors, killing time as best they could.

Tom Merry and Manners and Loveth, the Terrible Three of the Staff, were playing chess—Tom Merry and Manners actually playing, and Monty Loveth giving advice impartially to both sides in turn—advice which seemed to be rendered with the blackest impartiality.

Blake and Leroy were arguing on the ever-dreaded subject of football, and Horatio was mending a collar belonging to Towser. Arthur Augustus had been reading a letter for some time; but he had put it down at last, with a thoughtful look upon his aristocratic face, and made the above remark.

There was a general look of inquiry at the wall of St.

Jim's. Arthur Augustus had lots of friends, but it was peculiar that he should be calculating their number.

"What's that?" granted Blake, leaving the subject of the off-side rule for a moment to stare at his elegant chess.

"How many which?"

"Friends, dear boy."

"What the deuce?"

"That depends," said Monty Loveth, relieving the chess-players for a moment of his kind attention. "Have you had a resolution, or do you want to borrow some money?"

"Well, Loveth—"

"A lot depends on that," said Loveth, with a wise shake of the head. "Now, if your father has just sent you a five, and you want help in getting rid of it—"

"Well, you are—"

"Then you can put me on the list as a beson chum. But if you are looking for a chap to squeeze for ten bob till next week, I regard you as a more acquaintance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I regard you as an am, Loveth," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass severely upon the baronet of

Next Wednesday:

"THE PRIDE OF ST. JIM'S!" AND "OFFICER AND TROOPER!"

No. 367. (New Series), Vol. 3

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the Shell. "I wonder, I wonder how many friends I have got!" It is wathah important to know!"

"What for?" demanded Tom Merry.

"For a very important reason."

"What's in that letter?" asked Herrie, pruned. "Some of your relations had up?"

"Welly, Herrie—"

"Not your father?" exclaimed Leather. "You don't seem to say that Lord Rastwood has the beakers in, or anything like that?"

"You stah an—"

"Welly, you never know," said Leather. "Now Lord George is likely on the war-path, it's a bad lookout for the kids. And your father's an old fish, and you're another, like me."

"Is, he, ha, ha?"

"I see nothing" to chuckle at in Leather's witless remarks!—It is wathah important for me to know how many friends I have," said Arthur Augustus, looking at his wrist. "How many of you will come down to the station with me?"

"In this rain?" ejaculated Blake.

"Welly, Blake, it is not likely to stop wathah because we want to go to the station?"

"I don't want to go," grumbled Blake. "And I'm jolly well not going, or a friend of mine, Blake—"

"How now?"

"With you come to the station with me, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry looked round from the chess-board in surprise.

"My dear Gussy, it's raining cats and dogs and rabbits. What the dickens do you want to go to the station for?"

"Dahy, dahy boy. I've got to go. I should like my friends to come with me," said Arthur Augustus.

"Look here, are you bent on go?" asked Blake, with an angry glance at the window, against which the rain was dashing and splashing.

"No, dahy boy; but I wogad it as a dahy to go. And I want all my friends to come with me," said D'Arcy earnestly. "Any cheap dahy wogad to come with me, I shall wogad to wogad as a friend."

The juniors stared at the elegant Fourth-Former. What he was driving at was a mystery beyond their comprehension; but he was working in his eyes showed that some idea or other was dawning in his mighty brain.

Blake rose to his feet with a yawn.

"If you really want me to come, Gussy—"

"Yah, wathah?"

"Then I'll come; but you're a blithering idiot to go out in this weather. We shall all catch influenza agin!"

"Wah! Will you come, Dig?"

"I suppose so, if you make a point of it," granted Dig.

"I do make a point of it. Will you come, Herrie?"

"Oh, I'll come if the others do," growled Herrie. "I think you're a howling ass to go out in this weather!"

"You fellows come!" cried Arthur Augustus, looking inquiringly at the Terrible Three.

The Shell fellows looked at the rain-splashed windows.

"What for, Gussy?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Because I ask you to, dahy boy, as a friend!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, all right! We'll fetch this later, Manners, old man?"

"Manners is comin' too, I trust?" said Arthur Augustus. Manners nodded.

"Your mistake?" he replied. "I'm not going out to get drenched to the skin without knowing what it's for!"

"As a friend, dahy boy—"

"How now?" said Manners.

"I trust you will come, Lewlah?"

"Anything for a quid, He?" said Leather.

"Are you comin' Welly—and you, Kerwath?"

"Sure, and I don't like to leave the job," said Heilly.

"I don't see any sense in going out, unless there's a reason, Gussy dahy!"

"Sense here?" yawned Kerwath.

"Very well," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "May I wogad your company, Lewton?"

"No fear!" said Lewton promptly.

"And you, Kangaroo?"

"Rats!"

"And you, Lemley?"

"I guess not!"

"You otkah follow?"

"More rats!"

"Very good. I cannot ask old Talbot, as he is in the wash-room," said Arthur Augustus. "It appears that my friends are only five in number!"

"Six," said Harmond of the Fourth, who had just come.

Tom Merry LIBRARY—No. 307.

into the common-room. "I'll go anywhere!" said the Guss?"

"Thank you, dahy boy! Come and get your coats on, dahy fellows!"

The six juniors, very much pained by the sudden persistence of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, followed him from the common-room. The crowd of fellows left there stared after them and laughed. There were plenty of them who felt quite friendly towards the wall of St. Jim's, but weren't as all inclined to tramp out in a rain-storm without a good reason being given.

"Off his rocker, I should say!" muttered Melkida.

"I guess so."

"Must be dotty," yawned Guss. "What's he going out in this rain?"

Five minutes later seven juniors, with the coats of their coats turned up, and armed with umbrellas, set out from the School House. The rain came down on them in sheets.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake, as they went plunging into the rain. "This is rather thick!"

"Come on, dahy boy!"

"Oh, make the best of it!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Quick march!"

The juniors tramped off to the gates. They tramped away through the rain and road towards Rykewick. Tom Merry & Co. peered themselves on not being "soth," but, as Mousy Leather remarked, that rain was more than a joke. There was a smile, however, upon Arthur Augustus's wet face as he trudged on.

But his companions were not smiling. They were growing wathah. Arthur Augustus had appealed to their friendship to make them come, and they had come; but, when the swell of the Fourth could show a good reason for taking them out in the rain, it was extremely probable that his friends would visit condign vengeance upon his head.

The old High Street of Rykewick was simply swamping at that moment through it, already thoroughly wet, in spite of umbrellas and overcoats.

They reached the station, and gasped with relief when they were under the shelter of a wathah, clean canopy.

"Hal Jore, this is wathah beautiful!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Terrible, dahy boy, is the three-thirty in yet?"

"Just due, sir," said Terrible, the old porter of the station.

"Very good! Come on the platform, dahy boy."

The juniors went on the platform. The train was signalled, but was not yet in sight. They stood at the end of the rain-sweep like Newfoundland dogs.

"You're wondering that train, I suppose!" demanded Ebbel.

"Yah, dahy boy."

"What's coming?"

"Cousin Ebbel," chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Oh?"

The juniors brightened up at once. Arthur Augustus's cousin, Ebbel Cleveland, was very popular at St. Jim's. A good many of the juniors would have come through any street of rain to meet Miss Cleveland at the station.

"Oh, good!" said Mousy Leather. "That abouts the case. But why couldn't you tell us that Cousin Ebbel was coming, indeed?"

"I refuse to be called a farhead?"

"Why couldn't you tell us?" roared Blake.

"Because I had a jolly good reason, dahy boy. I wanted to pick out my friends—to separate the sheep from the goats, you know!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "I'll send you my lathah soon, and you'll comprehend—"

"How's the train?"

D'Arcy's letter had to be postponed. The train came rushing in, and stopped, and seven wet juniors watched the opening doors of the carriages for the graceful form of Cousin Ebbel.

CHAPTER 2.

Not at all Nice for Gussy!

"YOU are!"

"You differ?"

"Yes, dumpy."

Those remarks, and a good many more of the same sort, were levelled at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as the passengers from the train cleared off.

For Ebbel Cleveland was not among them.

The juniors scanned every passenger, and scanned the train and it rolled on out of the station, but Cousin Ebbel did not appear.

Arthur Augustus looked astounded.

"Hal Jore, she hasn't come!"



JIMMY SILVER'S JOY RIDE TO BUCKWOOD!
 (A stirring incident in the first of a magnificent series of school tales, by Owen Conquest, commencing in **THE BOYS' FRIENDS**, which is on sale to-day throughout the kingdom. Every Gemite should obtain a copy.)

"You cheap!" roared Blake. "You've bought us out in this giddy storm for nothing, then!"

"Oh, you see!"

"You jabbering jabbercock!"

"I refuse to be called a jabber! jabbercock!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I had every reason to suppose that Ethel was coming by this train. She told me she would arrive by the express at Wayland at three o'clock, and therefore she was bound to take the local train that reaches here at three-thirty. She must have missed the train."

"Foolish! Taken a taxi from Wayland direct, sooo likely!"

"But Jove, I never thought of that!"

"You—you—you—"

Words failed the juniors.

"Now I cease to think of it, she didn't say anything about us meeting her at the station," confessed Arthur Augustus. "I know she doesn't like waiting at the junction for these local trains, too. But really—"

"Oh, you cheap! There, she wasn't even likely to come by this train!" demanded Harriet.

"Apparently not, dear boy."

"And we've walked a mile in a rainstorm, and we've got to walk another mile back, because you've played the giddy game!" said Lowther.

"Yess, apparently. However, it is all right. I wanted to put you to the test, you know," said Arthur Augustus, with an agreeable smile.

"My 'at!" said Hammond, wringing the water out of his cap. "You must have heard a drier one, Master Giver."

"We shall want Hammond's pater to supply us with new hats all round," said Lowther.

Hammond cried. He was accustomed to references to the great goodness of Hammond's High-Class Hats—or 'Augustus's 'Igh-Class 'Ahs, as he called it himself—by which his father's fortune had been made. The Cockney schoolboy did not mind it at all.

"It's all right!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "I propose

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that Cassia Ethel has taken a taxi from Wayland, so we needn't worry about her. And I have saved myself a lot of bother by selecting your shops."

"What are we going to do with him?" asked Tom Merry seriously.

"Boop him!"

"Squash him!"

"Something lingering, with boiling oil in it!" suggested Dig.

"Weally, deah boys, let me explain——"

"Rats!"

The drenched and exasperated juniors collared the elegant Fourth-Former. With rain running down the backs of their necks, and mud up to their knees, they were not inclined to take Arthur Augustus's lively excuses so cheerfully as Arthur Augustus took it. They collared him and proceeded to boop him on the platform.

"Release me!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "I am going to explain——"

Buap!

"Oh, crumble! Yawwooh!"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" exclaimed old Trumble, coming along in alarm.

"It's all right, Trumble! We're only executing the sentence of the Court!" said Tom Merry. "Give him another!"

Buap!

"Woo-woe! Release me! Wescote!"

Buap!

"Gwost Scott!"

Arthur Augustus sat gasping on the platform; and Blake, with a final swipe, speared his silk hat over his eyes. Then the indignant juniors walked out of the station, leaving Arthur Augustus struggling with his silk hat and gasping for breath.

"My hepel!" murmured old Trumble. "My hepel! Can I 'elp you, air?"

"Gwwooh! Yewwew!"

"Let me lend you a 'and, air——"

"Dreag this howtal hat off!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, struggling with it in vain. "Dreag it off!"

Trumble grinned and yanked at the hat. It came off at last; but the state of that hat when he had finished was simply shocking.

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. He lowered his eyes into his gleaming eye and glared around for the juniors.

"Bai Jove! Where are these wottaks!"

"Goon, air?"

"I want to give them a fearful thrashin' all woterd!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Gwost Scott! I shall wescote to take them to the house-wain!" now! I shall wescote to take them to the house-wain at all! Bai Jove?"

Arthur Augustus stood aghast.

"Eow's your 'at, air?" said Trumble.

"Bai Jove, I forgot that! Thank you, deah boy! Will you do me the favah to accept this shillin', Trumble!"

Trumble did.

Arthur Augustus stood out of the station and looked round for Tom Merry & Co. He wanted vengeance, and he wanted it at once. But the juniors were gone. With their umbrellas up and their heads down, they were tramping as fast as they could back to the school, in a hurry to get home.

The rain was simply peering. Arthur Augustus put up his umbrellas and started after his comrades. He intended to overtake them and administer prompt chastisement, but reverse was set fast in the wind and the rain. He did not catch them again till he was close to the gates of the school. He saw their disappear at the gates, and shook his hat after them, his wench still unabated.

Hot-foot-hot!

The sudden yelp of a water-horn behind made him jump to the roadside. A taxicab shot by, and rushed on towards St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus rushed after it.

"Bai Jove, that's bound to be Ethel's cab!" he muttered. Right enough, the taxi turned in at the school gates.

Arthur Augustus dashed in after it. In his heavy his umbrella had blown inside out, but Arthur Augustus did not heed it. He wanted to see Cassia Ethel before she vanished into the Head's house and welcome her to St. Jim's.

The taxi hesitated along the drive, and stopped outside the Head's door. Arthur Augustus panted along after it.

The door of the taxi opened, and to his surprise, it was a junior in an overcoat who stepped out.

Arthur Augustus recognized Figgins of the Fourth—the hero of the New Home. And he stared blankly as Figgins of the Fourth grandly gave his hand to a young lady, holding an umbrella in the other hand, and helped her out of the taxi.

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of the taxi. It was Cassia Ethel. And following Miss Cleveland from the cab came Kerr and Wynn of the New Home.

Arthur Augustus breathed wrath. While he had tramped through the rain to meet his cousin at Rykcombe, Figgins & Co. of the New Home had come over to Wayland, and brought her to St. Jim's in a taxi. Arthur Augustus had often complained that Figgins seemed to regard Ethel more as his own cousin than as D'Arcy's. But this was a little too much.

Kerr was ringing the bell when Arthur Augustus came up breathless through the rain into the porch.

"Ethel!" he gasped.

"Arthur!" said Ethel. "Dear me, how wet you are! And what ever have you been doing to your hat?"

"I have been to the station to meet you, deah gal," said Arthur Augustus reproachfully.

Ethel looked concerned.

"Oh, Arthur! But I told you I was coming to Wayland, not to Rykcombe. I had no idea."

"I thought you would take the local train."

"No; I intended to take a taxi from Wayland," said Ethel, quite distressed. "I am so sorry, Arthur!"

"Psey don't wetch, deah gal," said Arthur Augustus angrily. "My mistake; it's all right. But what a remarkable coincidence that Figgins happened to be there!"

Figgins blinked.

"Figgins came over on purpose," said Ethel. "I wrote to him the same as to you, Arthur. He promised I should come direct from Wayland, I suppose."

"That's it!" said Figgins.

"Bai Jove! Do you mean to say, Figgins, that you had the fearful check——"

"Arthur, it was very kind of Figgins to come out in this dreadful rain——"

"Yes; but——"

"Now I must go in," said Ethel. The door was open, and Miss Holmes could be seen within, and Ethel hurried into the house. The door closed, and Arthur Augustus looked frowardly at Figgins & Co. They were smiling.

"You look a bit woterd," remarked Kerr.

"Figgins——"

"Bald!" said Figgins.

"I regard it as a fearful check on your part to go over to Wayland and meet my cousin, without sayin' a word to me."

"Go on!"

"Wah, you woterd——"

"You could have come if you'd liked," said Figgins. "But as you neglected your cousin——"

"Wah!"

"It's lucky we went, you see," concluded Figgins.

"I regard you as a shewky wottah, Figgins."

"How-wah!" said Figgins.

"I have woterded befoah that you seem to regard my cousin as your cousin," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I considah—— Psey don't walk away while I am talkin' to you, Figgins!"

"It's raining," Figgins mentioned.

"Blow the wain! I tell you——"

"Good-bye!"

Figgins & Co. walked off, chuckling. But that was too much for Arthur Augustus. He dropped his umbrella, and rushed after Figgins, and grasped him.

"Now, you woterd, Bai! I've gwin' to give you a fearful thrashin'! Oh—oh—my hat! Leggo! Woe!"

Arthur Augustus, in the grasp of the New Home Co., was swept off his feet, and sat down with a bump on the steps of the Head's house. Figgins & Co., chuckling, scabbled off towards their own Home, and disappeared. Arthur Augustus sat on the step, and gasped.

"Bai Jove!"

And it was a full minute before the swell of St. Jim's recovered himself sufficiently to gather up his hat and his umbrella, and leap away peacefully to the School House.

CHAPTER 3.

Only Friends Admitted.

"S STILL raining!" remarked Jack Blake. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made no reply. It was ten-o'clock, and Blake and Kerr and Dig had come into the Study No. 5, Blake bearing a parcel under his arm. Arthur Augustus sat in an armchair with a frown upon his noble brow. The three juniors exchanged a grin. Having thoroughly dried themselves and changed their clothes, they were feeling none the worse for their expedition in the rain, and were prepared to forgive and forget. Apparently Arthur Augustus wasn't.

"Coming down like anything, Gussy!" said Dig. D'Arcy did not reply.

"Ready for tea, Gussy?" said Harriette cheerily.

Still Arthur Augustus was absent. Blake set his pencil on the table, and stepped behind the armchair and yawned with sudden force in D'Arcy's ear:

"Ready for tea?"

"Be Jove!" Arthur Augustus yawned. "You silly ass—"

"Oh, wake up!" said Blake placidly. "Well, are you ready for tea? We've got ham and eggs, Gussy, and jam."

"And the Shell chaps are coming," said Blake. "We're going to have a little celebration, Gussy, to celebrate—that are we going to celebrate, Dig?"

"The rain!" suggested Dig.

"Good! We're going to have a little celebration to celebrate the rain," said Blake. "Back up, Gussy! We want you to receive our guests in the well-known first-class D'Arcy manner, same as you do when you dwell in marble halls."

"Woolly, Blake—"

"How's your cousin, Gussy?" asked Dig.

"I believe Cousin Ebbel is all right."

"I mean Ebbel's brother—Captain Cleveland. Didn't you tell us the other day that he was invalided home from the front?"

"Yess. He is practically recovered, but he is not fit to return to the front. I had something to tell you weeks ago about him, but such is the circus, such your usually conduct at the station, I shall refuse to mention the matter."

"What did we do at the station?" asked Blake innocently.

"You uttiah wotiah! You wotiah my hat."

"I hope you are not going to blame a chap for being patriotic at a time like this," said Blake reproachfully.

Arthur Augustus stared.

"I fail to see anything patriotic in wotiah a chap's topk."

"That's because you don't know anything about political economy. Don't you know that the trade in hats has gone down since the war broke out? Now, every chap who can't go to the front is bound to do his little bit at home to keep business going as usual. That was my little bit, to help look up the hat trade," said Blake. "You will have to buy a new topper soon."

"You uttiah ass—"

"I can hear the guests coming," said Blake. "Now, Gussy, you know we depend on you to do the honours of the study. I trust you are not going to let a squashed topper affect your manners—which you know we rely upon. We depend on you to receive our guests."

Arthur Augustus smiled a little.

"If you would put it like that, Blake—"

"I do," said Blake solemnly. "I do!"

"Under the circumstances, I will agree to pass over your wotton conduct," said Arthur Augustus magnanimously.

"Here, hear!"

The door opened, and the Terrible Three came in. They gave Arthur Augustus cheerful nods and smiles, quite as if nothing had happened. Reilly and Lonsley-Lonsley and Hammond followed them in. Jack Blake had had an unusually handsome remittance that day, and he had had the bright idea of a big feed in Study No. 5, which would help the juniors to forget the deplorable weather, and the fact that football had had to be put off. It was really an excellent idea, and the School House juniors were coming in a crowd.

Arthur Augustus, quite restored to good-humour by the duty placed upon him of receiving the guests, smiled benignantly, and received them with great embarrassment.

Quite a number came. Kangaroo and Clifton Dene and Bernard Glyn from the end study, and Kerriash and Lession and Gore, as well as the Terrible Three and several others. Study No. 5 was soon crowded, not to say crammed.

The rain was dashing on the window, and the quadrangle without was weeping with it, but within Study No. 5 all was calm and bright.

"Now, what's the news about Captain Cleveland?" asked Blake, when tea was in full progress. "Was that the letter you were poring over this afternoon?"

"Yess, dear boy!"

"Cousin Ebbel's brother?" said Tom Merry. "Tell us the news, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus smiled, and took the letter out of his pocket.

"Very well, dear boys. Cousin Cleveland has got over his wound, except that he limps a little—one of those beastly Germans shot him in the leg, you know—and he is taking a rest at present. He won't be able to go to the front again till next summer. Meanwhile—"

"I can see there's something coming," remarked Mooty

Lowther. "I know the gleam in Gussy's eyeglass—I mean his eye."

"Pile in, Gussy!"

"Captain Cleveland has taken the Towahs," said Arthur Augustus.

"You chaps have seen the place when you have been out cycling in the direction of Abberford. It's a very old place, mostly in ruins, and was let to some Germans, who closed off when war was declared, or soon afterwards. Poo-wah you wotiahst wotiah' them—"

Blake nodded.

"I remember," he said, "I've seen an old chap hanging about there—a German named something or other, I think—"

"His name was Hoffmann," said Arthur Augustus. "He was a sensible chap, and he used to convey out espionages there, so I have heard, but when they began working up the German spies, he closed off, and the Towahs was left unoccupied. It appears that the curish had let it furnished, and my cousin has taken it now from the landlord, and he is going to give a house-warming."

"Oh!" said Blake. "When?"

"To-morrow. My cousin has asked me to come and bring all my friends," said Arthur Augustus. "He is going to obtain leave from the Head for us to stay with him a few days. Cousin Ebbel is going with us, you see; that's why she came down to-day."

"Hurray!"

"Now, you understand," pursued Arthur Augustus calmly, "why I wotiahed how many friends I had?"

"Oh, I see!" murmured Mooty.

"Captain Cleveland has asked me to take all my friends with me. We shall have away a good time, I trust, and, anyway, we shall get without fewer lessons for the rest of the week. Of course, I could not take a crowd. It was difficult to find room for many to take—so I laid upon that wealthy landlord block of seawater the sheep from the goats—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy, old man, I know you know that I'm your dearest chum," said Blake affectionately. "Why, the Towahs is a ripping place—there's a lake in the grounds, and if it freezes we can go skating. And the rest of the week away from school—hurray!"

"Yess, it will be wotiah nice," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall take six chaps with me, if you fellows care to come—Blake, and Bewwies, and Dig, and Hammond, and Tom Merry, and Lowther."

"What about the six juniors joyfully. "You bet!"

"What about little me?" demanded Mooty.

"I'm sorry, Mooty, but I am limiting this party to my friends."

"But, my dear chap, I'm your closest chum," said Mooty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And what price me?" said Lonsley-Lonsley. "I guess I'm the best pal you ever had, Gussy."

"And, sure, you know that I'm attached to ye intirely," said Reilly.

"Same here!" said Kerriash.

"Gussy, old man, you couldn't leave out an old chum like me," said Kangaroo. "I couldn't believe it of you."

"I am afraid the number must be limited," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I have already selected my friends—the chaps who came out in the rain with me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a case of natural selection," grinned Mooty Lowther. "Where do you pick up these bright ideas, Gussy?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Clifton Dene warily. "If you'd told me there was a house-warming and a holiday, we'd have come like a shot!"

"Yes, rather?"

"Very much," asserted Arthur Augustus loftily. "But these chaps come without knowing that there was a house-warming or a holiday. Therefore—"

"Never mind; we'll come," said Lewison.

"Wot!"

"Now, Gussy darling—"

argued Reilly.

"Wabblish!"

"I game—"

"Wot!"

Arthur Augustus was as firm as adamant. It was evidently necessary to limit to some extent the number of fellows he took with him to the house-warming; the Head would not have granted leave to half the juniors in the house. And Arthur Augustus had really shown great generosity in making his selection. If the house-warming had been known in the first place, there was no doubt that he would have been overwhelmed with devoted friendship on all sides, and selection would have been a difficult matter. But Arthur Augustus had cut the Gordian knot in a really masterly manner.

The lucky six chuckled gleefully. The unlucky remainder looked wrathful. They felt that they had been caught.

"What about the New House chaps?" asked Tom Merry.

"Figgins would like to go."

"I am not takin' any New House boysdale," said D'Arcy firmly.

"But old Figgins—"

"Blow Figgins—"

"Cosin Ethel would like Figgins to come," remarked Harrow, rather unfortunately.

Arthur Augustus gave his cheek a freezing glance.

"I fail to see any woman why my cousin should care a wisp whether that long-legged boudahd comes or not," he said.

"You fail to see lots of things," chuckled Ethel.

"Wastly, Binky—"

"Oh, leave the New House boudahd out, by all means!" said Kangaroo; "but your old chums here, Gussy—simply devoted to you, worshipping the ground you walk on with your beautiful little feet—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wain!"

"Think how we shall miss you, Gussy darling!" murmured Betty.

"What will become of us when the light of your countenance is withdrawn?" murmured Bernard Glyn.

But Arthur Augustus was deaf to the voice of the charmer.

To all the persuasive remarks addressed to him, his inevitable reply was "Wain!"

CHAPTER 4. Figgins, Tool

THE next day, when the house-warming at the Towers was the general topic in the School House, Arthur Augustus realized the wisdom of his rejection. The prospect of half a week of holiday in the middle of the term was very attractive to all the juniors, and D'Arcy was the recipient of the most flattering attention on all sides.

Fellows he hardly knew by sight were suddenly possessed by feelings of great friendship towards him. They sought his company, they listened to his remarks with the deepest respect, and they searched ceaselessly for ripping it would be in get away from lessons for a few days.

Arthur Augustus received their advances with the utmost civility, and expressed a polite regret that he could not add them to the list of the fellows he was taking to the Towers for the house-warming.

Even fellows in the Fifth Form, who did not generally waste much politeness on mere juniors, suddenly became aware of the fascination of D'Arcy's company. Catts and St. Leger and Gilmore of the Fifth expedited to end of hindrances upon him, but they expended them in vain.

Catts came out into the open at last, Arthur Augustus having proved extraordinarily blind to anything in the shape of a puny kid.

"Look here, kid, I'll tell you what," said Catts. "We'll come."

"Thank you very much, Catts, dear boy—"

"Don't mention it. It will be a pleasure," said St. Leger.

"Yes are very kind," said Arthur Augustus calmly.

"Pwya don't think me ungrateful. I am quite aware of the bonah of iseloidis' Fifth-Form chaps in my little partah. But I feel that it is too great an bonah for me."

Catts looked at him suspiciously.

"Never mind that; we'll come," he said.

"Yass; but I must mind that," said D'Arcy, with a grave shake of the head. "You won't come."

"Look here, you cheek a Binky out—"

"Hal Jove! I do not regard that remark as friendly, Catts. And as I am only takin' my friends, I must decline the bonah of your company."

And Arthur Augustus walked away chuckling, leaving Catts of the Fifth looking as if he would eat him.

The swell of St. Jim's walked ahead into the arms of Figgins & Co. of the New House, who were evidently looking for him.

"Hold on, Gussy, old chap," said Figgins, with great politeness.

"Nice morning after the rain, isn't it?" murmured Kerr, "going to have good weather now, I think," remarked Fatty Wynn.

"I am not at all interested in the weather, Wynn," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyesless face towards the Co.

"Well, I'm glad you're going to have good weather for your house-warming," remarked Figgins.

"Thank you very much, Figgins," said D'Arcy, in his most stately manner.

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"The—the fact is, we've been looking for you," said Figgins.

"Yass!"

"I hear that Cousin Ethel will be at the house-warming," said Figgins.

"Very much."

"You're taking all your friends?" murmured Figgins.

"Yass."

"Any New House chaps on the list?"

"None!"

"Oh, Gussy?"

"Good-mornin'?"

"I—I—say, I suppose you don't bear any malice for that—ah—about that little joke yesterday, you know? I think I've heard you say that, from one gentleman to another, an apology sets everything right. We—ahem!—we've got an apology for you."

"Japologize!" said Kerr solemnly. "None apologize!"

"I accept your apology," said Arthur Augustus, without unblinking in the least. "Good-mornin'!"

And he walked away. Figgins & Co. looked after him, and then looked at one another.

"Shall we keep him?" murmured Kerr.

Figgins shook his head.

"No; we've got to get to that giddy horse-racing school."

"Ho, ha, ha!"

The chums of the New House looked very thoughtful. They wanted a holiday; and George Figgins, too, was very keen on going wherever Cousin Ethel went, for cousins had known to himself. But it was evident that there was nothing to be hoped from Arthur Augustus. He was adamant.

After lessons that day, Arthur Augustus and his six comrades prepared for their expedition. Captain Cleveland had obtained leave from the Head, who was not likely to refuse the request of a wounded hero from the battle-front. Tom Merry & Co. prepared in great spirits. There was to be a large party at the Towers for the house-warming. Captain Cleveland had issued invitations on all sides, and to say nothing of a tremendous list, those would be dancing, and so on, & so on. And Cousin Ethel was going with the party.

Arthur Augustus was always glad of any function that caused him to get into evening clothes, and certainly, when he had finished dressing—which occupied about two hours—he looked a perfect picture. Nothing could have exceeded the spotlessness of his shirt-front, unless it was the breast of his beautiful trousers and the gleam of his shoes.

Tom Merry & Co. were also looking very nice, but Arthur Augustus easily took the biscuit. The juniors parked their bags, as they were to stay several days at the Towers. A water-car from Wayland was to convey them to their destination. When the car arrived outside the Head's house, the juniors were all there, in their coats and shining topsies, ready, with Cousin Ethel.

A crowd of fellows had come out to see them off, and through the crowd there came three juniors in evening-dress, who spoke on, and topped that show as brightly as Gussy's own. Arthur Augustus raised his eyesless in surprise upon Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. He had made it quite plain to George Figgins that he was not in the little party, and he was surprised. Figgins gave him an affable nod.

"Lovely evening, considering what it was like yesterday, Gussy," he remarked.

"Quite so!" said Arthur Augustus coldly. "Are you going somewhere this evening?"

"Oh, yes!" said Figgins.

"I trust you will have a good time."

"No doubt at all about that," said Figgins heartily.

"Goin' our way?" asked Harrowood.

"Certainly!" said Figgins. "Same direction."

The juniors grinned. Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Look here, Figgins," he murmured, "I trust you're not thinkin' of playin' a watten trick—"

"Hardly," said Figgins.

"Where are you goin', then?"

"The Towers," said Figgins calmly.

"You are not goin' to the house-warmin'?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I distinctly recall you undertook, Figgins, that I did not ask you to join this party," said Arthur Augustus, a little caustically.

Figgins nodded.

"So you did, Gussy. I'm not feeling fault with you. You were as direct as it was possible for you to be, considering your beautiful account."

"Yass, that's true."

"Hallo, here we are again!" exclaimed a cheery voice, as Wally, D'Arcy's sister of the Third, joined the crowd in the hall. "All ready?"



The burly, bloody German leaped up from an instrument and spun round, his face going white. The captain rushed forward, forgetting his wound and his weakness. "Surrender, you coward!" he cried. (See Chapter 14.)

"Your tie is not quite clean, Wally," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Can't be helped," said Wally. "I got young Jameson to fix it for me—I can't fix dress-ties—and you know what Jameson's fingers are like."

"Wesley, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" said Wally. "Hallo! You New House bouncers coming!"

"Certainly!" said Figgins calmly. "Captain Cleveland was kind enough to send us an invitation this afternoon."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Musty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus almost fell down.

"C.C. Captain Cleveland!" he murmured.

"Yes. Thoughtful of him, wasn't it?" said Figgins cheerily.

"I suppose he passed, somehow, we'd like to come."

"I mentioned it to my brother," said Cousin Ethel.

"Yes—you did, Ethel!"

"Yes, Arthur," said Ethel calmly. "Now we are all ready, I think."

"Yaaa," said Arthur Augustus dazedly. "Yaaa, dash me, we're all ready. Pray allow me to place you—But Jove!"

Figgins's arm had already been accepted. The grinning jokers piled into the big car. The car rolled out of the gates of St. Jim's, crisscrossed with juncos inside, and crisscrossed with legs on the roof. Quite a merry party started for the Towers, but it might have been observed that Arthur Augustus's brow was extremely thoughtful. With his eyes

glazed jauntily in his eye, he looked first at Cousin Ethel and then at Figgins—hard. They did not seem to notice it. They were too interested in their conversation.

CHAPTER 5.

Not a House-warming:

THE winter evening had closed in, dark and grim. The car rolled on by shadowy lanes and roads lined with leafless trees. There was a merry buzz of talk in the car. The juncos were looking forward with great eagerness to the house-warming. They all knew Captain Cleveland and liked him. Before the war the captain had played in a cricket match at Glyn House against Tom Morry's eleven, whom Talbot of the Shell had first shown his prowess on the playing fields.

A good many things had happened since then. War had come, and the captain, fighting with his regiment in Flanders, had been knocked over by a German bullet and invalided home. The juncos were very keen to see him again. As a fellow who had "been through it" he was an object of very special interest to them.

The Towers came in sight at last. It was an old building, only partly in repair, and though it was called the Towers, there was only one tower remaining of the old place. A gate was opened, and the car rolled up a wide drive, though grounds that showed signs of late neglect. Since the German

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE PRIDE OF ST. JIM'S!"

tenant had departed the house had been empty for some time, only a few of the servants remaining.

Tom Merry and Co. were a little surprised at Captain Cleveland having taken the place, as it was an extensive residence, and no captain was named. But since he was giving a tremendous house-warming, and inviting their noble selves to it, they agreed that he could not have done better.

The big facade was ablaze with lights and the great door stood open, the light streaming out on the wide steps of the portico. Carriages and cars were already drawn up in a line, and the car from St. Jim's slackened down to take its turn.

Arthur Augustus put his head out of the window. "I don't see any sign of the captain," he remarked. "That fellow in the doorway in the balcony. What's his name, Ethel?"

"Lady," said Ethel. "But Jove, that sounds like a German name!"

"No; he is a Swiss."

Arthur Augustus shook his head wisely.

"Lots of Germans call themselves Swiss just now," he remarked. "I should really recommend the captain to seek him."

Ethel laughed.

"But, my dear Arthur, of course he has had to show his papers to the police, like all foreigners, and proved that he is a Swiss."

"Oh, in that case, perhaps he is all right," admitted Arthur Augustus. "But a chap who came home from Switzerland told me that the German-Swiss are in full sympathy with the Germans. They're really the same people, you know—the difference is only political. The French-Swiss back up the French, which is very sensible of them. However, perhaps the captain knows what he is about," added Arthur Augustus, as if that had just occurred to him.

"Perhaps," assented Ethel demurely.

"Or he may be waiting till Gussy comes, in order to get an expert opinion," suggested Mopsy Leather.

"Yes, perhaps—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you are wotting, you wotnik! Wotnik, Looziah!"

"Moving on again," said Blaker, as the car jerked forward.

The juniors arrived opposite the portico at last. They alighted, and ascended the broad steps. Arthur Augustus directed the chauffeur to drive on and deliver the baggage at another door, and meanwhile Figgins took possession of Cousin Ethel.

"Lady, the butler, a fat, imposing personage, showed the new arrivals into a large reception-room, which was already pretty full.

Captain Cleveland was not there, however, and the remarks that were being made by the assembled guests showed that they were somewhat surprised by the non-appearance of their host.

Arthur Augustus stopped the Swiss butler as he was returning to the hall.

"Where is my cousin, Judy?" he asked.

"Judy, sir," said the Swiss.

"Yes, my mistake. Where is Captain Cleveland?"

"He is in his study, sir."

Lady passed on, leaving Arthur Augustus considerably surprised. More guests were shown in, but Captain Cleveland did not appear.

"But Jove, this is wotnik odd, dear bees!" said Arthur Augustus, when ten minutes had passed. "What the deuce is keeping the captain?"

"It is very curious," said Ethel, rejoicing the janitor.

"My brother does not seem to be here to receive his guests."

"Can't have forgotten to be coming," remarked Hammond.

"There must be a wotnik folk ere already."

"Ah! How do you do, my dear boy!" beamed the Vicar of Ryebank, greeting the juniors. "And you, Miss Ethel? But I need not ask. And how is your teacher? Quine recovered from his wound, I hear."

"Alas," said Ethel. "It is very odd that he does not come." The girl coloured a little. "You have not seen him, Mr. Smiley?"

"Mr. Smiley check his head."

"Indeed, no! I have been—surprised that he does not appear. Lady Fitzbooke has just remarked to me that it is very strange."

"Nothing happened to him, surely?" said Tom Merry.

"Not could 'ave happened!" said Hammond.

Mr. Smiley started a little and looked oddly at Hammond of the Fourth. He had not expected to hear a St. Jim's junior utter his 'b's in that reckless manner.

"Ah! What did you—ah—remark, my boy?" he asked.

"I said, you could 'ave happened!" said Hammond impetuously.

"THE OBLIVIOUS," "THE PENNY POPULAR," "CUNDLES," 10, Every Thursday, Every Friday, Every Saturday, 1

erally. "Nottin' could 'ave happened to the captain in 'is own house, for as I see."

"Ah! No," said the vicar, greatly astonished. "You are—ah—ah—a new boy at St. Jim's, my young friend!"

"Not so old as some of 'em," said Hammond. "I'm 'Ahmond."

"Hammond. Ah! I do not—ah—remember hearing the name."

"Pretty well known, too," said Hammond. "You've 'eard of 'Ahmond's' 'igh-class 'Ain, ain, surely?"

"Dear no," gasped the vicar. "Encore me! Sir Hooker Wootter and the bookbinding to me."

And the good gentleman hurried away, quite overcome by 'Ahmond's' 'igh-class 'Ain. Harry Hammond looked round at his comrades, who were grinning. He coloured a little.

"Put me foot in it, I 'pose," he remarked. "I always forget to give the 'at dahl. Honour me; Master Goss!"

"Wot!" said Arthur Augustus, who with all his little weaknesses was not at all a snob. "If you were ashamed of the hat, dear boy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Which the steel odd gert seemed to 'ave rather a shock, all same," remarked Hammond.

More guests were arriving, and still Captain Cleveland did not appear. To the surprise of some, and none of the guests were getting restless. Sir Hooker Wootter looked offended, and seemed inclined to go. There was a buzz of talk, in low tones, and it was all on the subject of the captain's extraordinary absence. Cousin Ethel was colouring with vexation.

"I think I had better go and look for my brother," she said. "I do not know where his study is—I have not been here before."

"Judy will tell you," said Arthur Augustus. "I'll come and look for him, and I shall speak to him very plainly."

He went out into the hall, and called to the butler.

"Where is Captain Cleveland's study, Judy?"

"I will show you, sir."

"Pray do."

Cousin Ethel and Arthur Augustus followed the fat butler. Lady tapped at a door in a wide, oak-panelled passage. There was no reply from within. Lady tapped again, but still there was no response.

"It's all right—we'll go in!" said Arthur Augustus.

The butler stopped respectfully aside, and Arthur Augustus opened the door, and held it for Cousin Ethel. The girl looked quickly round the room.

"He is not here!" she exclaimed.

"But Jove! There is nobody here, Judy!"

The butler looked in with an expression of astonishment upon his plump face.

"But—but Captain Cleveland was here, sir," he said.

He gave no orders that he was not to be disturbed. That was two hours ago."

"This is very remarkable, Ethel."

"I cannot understand it," said Ethel. "Early, please, let the servants look for Captain Cleveland, and find him, and tell him that we are here."

"Yes, Miss Cleveland."

Cousin Ethel and Arthur Augustus returned to the reception room.

"Can't find the boy's study!" said Arthur Augustus, in response to the inquiring looks of his clients. "It's very remarkable!"

"The servants are looking for him now," said Ethel. "It is very odd. Lady will be here soon to tell us where he is. It is impossible that he can have gone out. The butler had not seen him for two hours."

"There was something like anxiety mixed with the general astonishment now. It was increased when Lady came in, looking very grave.

"Well, have you found your master?" asked Mr. Smiley. Lady shook his head.

"He is not in the house, sir."

"What?"

"But Jove!"

"The servants and I myself have looked everywhere," said Lady. "Captain Cleveland must have gone out."

"Impossible!" said Ethel.

"But he is not in the house."

Ethel knitted her brows.

"Something must have happened," she said. "It is impossible that my brother could have gone out when he was expecting his guests."

"Ah! No! I do not really see what can have happened to Captain Cleveland in his own residence," said Mr. Smiley slyly. "Captain Cleveland appears to have forgotten—ah—what is due to his guests. I really think—ah—that the best thing we can do under the circumstances is to—ah—wait!"

And the vicar promptly retired with Mrs. Smiley, the doctor, Miss Smiley, and Master Smiley. All the tribe of Smileys were evidently very much offended. The other guests began to retire, also looking disturbed and annoyed. There was really cause for offence—the conduct of the captain in failing to be present to receive his guests was extraordinary. Ethel was pink with vexation, and Arthur Augustus looked deeply disturbed.

"Somebody must've 'appened to 'im," said Harry Hammond, with conviction. "Ere, Lady!"

The butler turned his head slightly, apparently not occupied at being hailed in that unconscious fashion.

"Did you speak, sir?" he asked, in a stately way.

"Yes, I did. You ain't seen Captain Cleveland since he was in his study?"

"No, sir."

"He give orders not to be disturbed—well?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you ain't seen 'im go out?"

"No, sir."

"Der could he go out without being seen, you chaps?" said Hammond. "Wot with the 'ere full of servants, and cooks, and sibs. Somebodies 'appened to 'im. Let's go and 'ave a look in that there study."

"But what could have happened?" said Ethel, in distress.

"Ad a bit, and rolled under the table, p'raps," suggested Hammond. "Bides I knew in Bethnal Green was always 'aving fits."

"Welly, Hammond—"

"May as well go and look," said Figgins.

"Yess, that's all right. If he doesn't turn up soon, all the guests will be gone, and there won't be any house-warming."

Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to the study. There was a large table in the room, but Captain Cleveland certainly was not under it. The study was a large apartment on the second floor, with walls of paneled oak, and a large, old-fashioned fireplace. The floor was polished, and two or three tiger-skin lay upon it. An electric reading-lamp was burning on the table.

"No sign of big head, Hammond, dead boy?"

"Oid on!" said Hammond quietly.

The Cockney schoolboy was on his knees close to the chair that stood by the table near the lamp. Somehow had evidently been writing there, for an open blotter lay upon the table, with a pen fallen across it. The janitor gathered round Hammond. His face had gone white, and his hand shook as he pointed to a dark stain on the polished floor.

"Bai Jove! What's that?"

A single wood dropped from Hammond's lip, but it was full of intensity.

"Blood!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Disappearance of Captain Cleveland.

"WHAT?"

"Impossible!"

"Look for yourself," said Hammond quietly.

"It's a drop of blood!"

"Good heavens!"

Figgins involuntarily caught Cousin Ethel's hand. The girl had changed colour, her face was deadly white. But she was not going to faint. Cousin Ethel was not of the fainting kind of young lady.

"There's been 'ere play 'ere," said Hammond.

"But—"

"What do you say, sir?" exclaimed Lady, entering the study hastily. "What is it?"

"Look at that," said Hammond.

"Ah! A spot of ink?"

"It's blood!"

"Mela Gorn!" ejaculated Lady, dropping into his native language. "But is it that you are sure, or?"

"Look for yourself. Don't touch it. The police will want to see that."

"What can have happened?" muttered Ethel, pale as death. "Where is my brother?"

"We'll find him, never fear," whispered Figgins. "Back 'er! He—he can't be hurt—not badly hurt, I mean. It's impossible. Who could hurt him?"

"Somebody must have entered by the window, perhaps," said Lady, in great agitation. "It would be quite easy to do so, some burglar."

He pulled open the window. It was a large window, and outside was an iron balcony, with iron steps leading down into the garden. As the window was not fastened, it would certainly have been easy for anyone to enter and leave unseen.

"But where can the captain be?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Even if he was hurt, where can he be? He cannot have been taken away?"

"But he must have been," said Monty Leathier. "He isn't here, old chap."

"Kidnapped?" said Blahs doubtfully.

"What the deuce should anybody want to kidnap him for?" muttered Kerr.

"Bai Jove! It's extraordinary!"

Hammond was stooping, examining the polished floor for fresh traces. The Cockney schoolboy was as keen as a weasel. He uttered a sudden exclamation.

"There's been a struggle 'ere," he said.

"How do you know?" asked Dig.

"Look at this 'ere board—look 'ere the polish has been scraped off!" said Hammond. "Somebody was stamping 'od on this with his toe. There's where the 'oe scraped along—see?"

"Bai Jove! It looks like it."

"That 'ere—'ere's another spot of blood!"

"Good heavens!"

Hammond went to the window, and looked about him. Outside, all was dark, save where the glimmer of the lighted windows fell into the grounds. The janitors looked at one another with pale faces. Lady was the picture of consternation. He rubbed his plump hands together with a look of helpless distress.

"Ah! This is terrible!" he muttered.

"Better telephone for the police at once," said Hammond.

"There's a telephone 'ere, Miss Cleveland, don't be keened over, you know. We don't know yet that anything serious 'as 'appened to the captain."

Ethel did not reply; her white lips were hard set. But the fear and anguish in her heart was only too plainly written in her colorless face.

Figgins was still holding her hand; she did not appear to notice it. Even Arthur Augustus did not notice it. He was pale and distressed and worried. The obvious disappearance of his cousin had quite taken him off his balance.

"Better tell the guests what has happened," said Tom Merry.

"Yess, shall I do it, Ethel?"

Ethel nodded, without speaking, and Arthur Augustus released to the reception-rooms to make his starting announcement.

There was a telephone on the study table, and Hammond unlocked the receiver. The Cockney schoolboy seemed to be taking the lead, but he was not greeted.

"One sought one," said Hammond into the receiver.

"Ryckoube Police Station," said Tom Merry.

"Yes. Hello! Inspector Skeet—is that Inspector Skeet? Good! You are wanted here, sir—the Towns, Captain Cleveland's place. Captain Cleveland has disappeared, and there are bloodstains. Can you come at once? Good! Waiting for you. Good-bye."

Hammond put down the receiver.

"Yes, but Mr. Skeet won't be long in coming," he remarked. "Which he don't often get a case like this, and he was badly disappointed over 'is lost one, when old Talbot didn't turn out to be a burglar. It's all right, Miss Cleveland; we'll find him. He can't be far away, and they can't 'ave 'urt 'im much."

Ethel sank into a chair.

"My poor brother! What can have happened to him?"

"Oh, the others!" said Wally, clenching his fist. "There must have been more than one of them. One man couldn't have handled the captain; he was a good handfoul even for two. Who can they be? And why have they done it?"

But there was no answer to be given to those questions. It was an other mystery. It was impossible to form even a theory on the subject. There were footsteps outside, and some of the guests came in, alarmed and curious. The butler respectfully retired from the room.

There was a buzz of voices, of curious conjectures, and Ethel came to her feet. Mrs. Taddy, the housekeeper, took her to her room. The janitors remained in the study, waiting for the arrival of the police. They were silent and troubled.

Most of the guests had departed by this time, puzzled and wondering. A dozen men remained, and they were all collected in the study. The house-warming was very much off now. No one was thinking of that.

Vehicle after vehicle had rolled away, and at last there was heard the sound of wheels arriving.

"The police!" said Tom Merry.

A few minutes later Inspector Skeet of Ryckoube, followed by a constable, was shown into the study by Lady.

A few words acquainted the inspector with what was known.

Mr. Skeat made an imperious gesture with his fat hand. "Pray leave the room to me," he said. The worthy inspector almost hustled the guests out. He remained alone in the study with the constable to pursue his investigations.

Inspector Skeat was a gentleman with a very large idea of his personal importance, and it was as much as he could do to conceal his satisfaction at having a case that was so extraordinary out of the common.

Tom Merry & Co. left him to himself, and returned to the reception room, where the lights were still burning brightly; but all air of gaiety had departed now.

The guests were going, now that the police had arrived to take possession of the house. The juniors sat in a group, discussing the amusing happening in their town, and they soon had the place to themselves. Lady entered after the last of the other guests had gone.

"The car is ready, gentlemen," he said respectfully. They looked at him.

"The cab!" said Arthur Augustus.

"But I ordered the chauffeur to return to Wayland, after delivering our bags," said Arthur Augustus, puzzled.

"Yes, sir. The car you take in has gone, but I have ordered my master's car to take you back to the school," explained the Swiss.

"But we are not going back."

"After what has happened, sir, I thought you would hardly care to remain."

"Wubbish!"

"Ahem! There can, of course, be nothing like a holiday now my poor master—"

"Do you think we are thinkin' of a holiday, yee deffah?" Lady coloured.

"Ahem! The police would prefer to be left in the house by themselves, I understood," he said.

"That is not for you to decide, Judy," said Arthur Augustus lily. "I am really afraid that you have forgotten your place. Pray go and send the cab back to the garage!"

"Then—then you are not going, sir?"

"Certainly not!"

"But, sir—"

"Pray don't talk any more! Go and do as I tell you!"

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

Lady retired.

"Seems to me that Swiss chap is taking a lot on himself!" growled Wally.

"Yess. You may rely upon me to keep him in his place, however."

"I wonder what the inspector's up to?" said Horace.

"I don't see that he can see more than we pointed out to him."

"I'm afraid he's rather an ass," said Tom.

A little later the voice of the inspector was heard in the hall. He was speaking to the butler.

"Who is in authority here during Captain Cleveland's absence?" he was asking.

"The house is in my charge, sir," said Lady's smooth voice.

"Had Joss?"

Arthur Augustus jumped up, and strode into the hall.

"Pray remember your place, Judy!" he exclaimed angrily. "Inspector Skeat, Captain Cleveland's sister is present, and I am Captain Cleveland's cousin!"

Lady bit his lip.

"Captain Cleveland's sister is merely a child—a school-girl," he said. "She is quite overcome, too, and the housekeeper is looking after her. I am Captain Cleveland's trusted servant, and am in charge of the house during his absence. You may address yourself to me, inspector. I understand that you do not wish a number of schoolboys to remain on the premises, under the circumstances?"

Inspector Skeat nodded emphatically.

"The police will remain in charge, of course," he said.

"I shall leave a constable here. I am going to undertake a search for the missing gentleman. It is quite plain that he has been removed from the room by way of the window and the balcony, and I have every hope of finding him shortly. Meanwhile, these boys had certainly better go back to school."

"We shall please ourselves about that," said Tom Merry curtly.

"Master Merry!" exclaimed the inspector, with his sternest look.

"We are going to remain here," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "We have not the slightest intention of leaving!"

"Rather not," said Wally.

"THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 37.

"Under the circumstances, I should think you would take Miss Cleveland away," said the inspector tartly.

"Miss Cleveland is too anxious about her brother to think of leaving," said Tom.

Mr. Skeat shrugged his shoulders.

"That is not my business. I have given the constable strict orders that no one is to be allowed to enter Captain Cleveland's study."

And the inspector walked out with an air of great dignity.

Through the open doorway Arthur Augustus spotted the lights of a waiting car.

"You have not sent the cab back to the garage yet, Lady!" he exclaimed.

"No, sir. I thought you would change your mind, after hearing the inspector—"

"You had no right to think anything of the sort."

Arthur Augustus walked out on the steps.

"Chaffeur!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take the cab back to the garage. It will not be wanted to-night."

"Yes, sir."

Arthur Augustus came in again with a pink spot in either cheek. The butler's assumption of authority had roused his anger, and he was annoyed. The Swiss was evidently annoyed, too, but he was disappointed without another word.

CHAPTER 7.

Hammock is Suspicious.

THE evening to which Tom Merry & Co. had looked forward so keenly was one of the worst of their experience. They sat down to supper late, but even Patsy Wynn did not do it justice. Cousin Ethel remained in her room.

The Swiss butler had not worried Arthur Augustus any further; he waited on the juniors with unflinching urbanity, apparently reconciled to the trouble of having them in the house. Over supper the Co. were glad and almost silent.

The baffling mystery of Captain Cleveland's disappearance worried them deeply. The spots of blood found in the study seemed to point to a tragedy, and yet that the captain could have met with a tragic fate seemed incredible. Who should wish to harm him? Yet—what had happened, and why? The juniors puzzled over it till their heads ached with the effort of thinking.

"He'll be found," said Hammond at last. "And he's going to be found alive and kicking. Nothin' to be afraid of that!"

"I wish I could feel such, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus, with a sigh.

"It's a dead cert," said the Cockney schoolboy confidently. "If the captain 'ad been murdered, they wouldn't 'ave taken the trouble to take his body away. We'd 'ave found him in the study. Because he ain't there, that shows that he's still alive!"

Tom Merry nodded in assent.

"It certainly looks like that," he said. "Whoever the villain was, they couldn't have any motive that I can imagine for taking a dead body away. He must be alive!"

"Yess, it seems very queer, now that you put it like that," said Arthur Augustus, with a breath of relief. "I'll tell Ethel that. But what could they want to kidnap my cousin for? That's what beats me!"

"It's a glib mystery!"

"That's what we've got to find out," said Kerr determinedly. "As soon as it's daylight we'll search the grounds for a sign. There's been so much rain lately that we ought to be able to pick up traces, if the rascals have left any. That's where our Boy Scout training will come in."

"And we can 'ave another 'act in the study," said Hammond.

"The bobby's been ordered not to let anybody in," said Wally.

"The inspector had a right to do that."

"We'll speak to him," said Tom Merry. "I don't suppose we shall find any clue we haven't found already; but it's horrible to be sitting and doing nothing."

"Yess, wubbish!"

But the juniors found the policeman adamant. He was stationed in the passage outside the door of the study, and his words had been liberally supplied by the Swiss butler. He shook his head when the juniors spoke to him. Mr. Skeat had given him orders to see that no one entered the study, and it was his duty to carry them out.

Tom Merry & Co. retired defeated.

"Oel right," said Hammond. "More than one way of killin' a cat. Let's get up to bed now."

There was nothing else to be done, and the janitors retired to their rooms. Lady showed three upstairs with his most respectful manner. Four communicating rooms had been prepared for the janitors, so they were still together.

The butler retired and left them to themselves. The hour was late, but the schoolboys were not in a humour for sleep. As soon as they were alone Hammond went to his overcoat and took out a folded newspaper.

"What's that, dash boy?" asked Arthur Augustus shyly.

"I was reading this this morning," said Hammond. "There's an article on German spies. See what it says."

He read out a paragraph, and the janitors listened with careless attention. They were not much interested in the subject of German spies just then.

But as Hammond proceeded they grew interested.

"Leakage of information to the Germans," said Tom Merry, as Hammond finished. "Supposed to be still spies loose in Sussex. Search being made along the South Coast for secret wireless installations. But what—"

"Look 'ere," said Hammond, in a low voice, glancing round him, as if he was afraid that the walls had ears, "can you believe that any reason why Captain Cleveland's as been took away?"

"That's a general shaking of heads."

"Who'd want to 'urt him?" went on Hammond. "Not anybody belonging to this country?"

Tom Merry started.

"He was a 'ero," said Hammond. "He'd been through the thick of it in Belgium, and he was 'ome, wounded. Now, I waster ask you something, Gassy. Wat did your cousin take this 'ouse for?"

"Wrealy, Hammond, what has that to do with the matter, dash boy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

The other janitors looked surprised, too—excepting Kerr. The Scottish janitor was looking at Hammond, with a very intelligent expression in his eyes, and he nodded.

"Never mind that. Do you know why he took it?" asked the Cockney janitor.

"He was got'n to reside in the country, and have a good 'ome," said Arthur Augustus.

"Quite so!" agreed Hammond. "But as this 'ere part of the country seems to be a 'appy 'unting-ground for German spies, ain't it possible that Captain Cleveland was got'n 'ossessed by 'em?"

"I ain't got no objection to that," said Tom Merry. "The captain was knocked up for fighting; but he would want to do anything he could till he got back to the front. But—"

"Well, likely or not, that's the only reason you can think of why anybody should want to 'et him," said Hammond.

"Be 'ove!"

The janitors were looking keenly excited now. Whether Hammond had hit on the correct explanation of Captain Cleveland's disappearance or not, it was an exciting theory.

Kerr nodded again very thoughtfully.

"There's something in that," he said. "If some rotten foreign spy looked that the captain was on his track that would account for it."

"By 'ove, it would," said Figgins.

"Another point," went on Hammond quietly. "This 'ouse belonged to a German afore the captain come here—"

"Not belonged to him," said D'Arcey. "The place has always been let furnished for youks, I believe. The place has always been let furnished for youks, I believe. The place has always been let furnished for youks, I believe."

"I don't know," said Hammond. "The place has always been let furnished for youks, I believe. The place has always been let furnished for youks, I believe."

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there might be a 'ashed 'iding place known to the German jobber wat 'ad lived 'ere."

"'Gross Scott!"

"Hammond's his 'ill!" said Kerr quietly. "His reasoning powers are as high-class as his hair."

"Oh, dash you be funny!" said Hammond. "When I was a kid in Bethnal Green, afore my father made his pile, I knowed something of German and German spies. They're as thick as flies in the East End—or was then. Barbers and tailors and sich."

"But—but if the captain is hidden somewhere about here," said Tom Merry excitedly, "that means that the German, Hoffmann, hasn't cleared off at all, but has been hiding in the neighbourhood all the time."

"You bet!" said Hammond.

"He couldn't do that without accomplices," said Kerr. "He would want food and things."

Hammond grinned.

"I kind of remember that the butler was werry anxious to get rid of everybody out of the 'ouse," he remarked.

Tom Merry jumped up.

"Lardy!" he exclaimed.

"But—but he's not a German," said Blake. "He's a Swiss."

"Might be a spy and a traitor, for all that, I 'pose!" said Hammond. "There's sich vermin in all nations, ain't there?"

"I—I suppose so."

"We can't do anything till the mornin'," said Hammond. "I reckoned getting up early and 'astin' waded the place for a sign of the captain. It'll be somethin' to do, sayway. Wat do you say?"

"'Heer, hear!"

And the janitors turned in, hope renewed in their breasts by Hammond's suggestion. But it was long before they slept.

CHAPTER 8.

No Clue!

TOM MERRY & CO. were down at the first gleam of daybreak.

They found the maids downstairs, but Lady had not appeared, and as breakfast was not ready they went out at once into the grounds.

The idea of playing detective and seeking the missing captives appealed to them very strongly. They started with an examination of the outside of the study. Inside, the window had been fastened, and the door locked. The thick curtains within covered the easement and prevented them from seeing into the room. The hallway and the iron staircase were examined, but there was not a spot of blood to be discovered, and any other "sign" they could scarcely expect to find.

In the grounds they searched for footprints with all the looseness of Boy Scouts. But the search was disappointing.

The ground was still damp from recent rain, and there were footprints to be discovered, but they told the janitors nothing.

Inspector Sheat had been over the ground before them, and had doubtless left traces behind him. These faint hope of picking up the trail of the kidnapers faded away very quickly.

Then they extended their search. There were, as Hammond said, any number of good and crannies among the ruins. The Towers had originally been a very large residence, and only one wing—still very extensive—was in repair and inhabited.

One other wing, and the remains of an ancient tower, had shattered by time. The janitors plunged into the ruin in eager search.

Many a nook and cranny they explored; but after an hour's search they had to admit that they were no further than when they started. There were cellars under the old place, and they explored the cellars diligently, but they were dark and dank and empty. They came out at last disappointed.

Hammond's brows were knitted. He had thought out his theory very carefully, and had come to believe in it, to the extent of feeling almost certain that some clue to the missing captain would be discovered in the ruined wing.

The total failure of the search was a blow to him.

"Looks as if we were on the wrong track, dash boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"We ain't finished yet!" said Hammond obstinately.

"I've got an idea!" said Hercules, who had been buried in thought for some time.

"Get with it, Hercules, dash boy!"

"What about Towsee?"

"Sh!"

"My buldog," said Hercules. "If you like, I'll send back THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 365.

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to the school to-day, and fetch Towser, and start him on the track. That will make a dead cert of it?"

"Wah!"
"Look here, D'Arcy—"
"For goodness' sake, don't let's have Towser sprung on us now," grunted Blako. "Trouble enough without that?"
"Why, you are—"
"Good-evening, gentlemen!"

The juniors were suddenly silent. It was the smooth, silky voice of Lady, the butler. They looked at him rather unconsciously, wondering whether the Swiss gazed their reason for being in the deserted way.

"Breakfast is served," said Lady. "Miss Cleveland asked me to look for you! I trust you have had a pleasant walk, gentlemen?"

"Yess, thanks!"
"You are interested in the rains, sir?" asked Lady.
"They are much interesting. In my lawyer master's time, archeologists used to come down and see them, and make photographs of them. Part of the building dates from the reign of Stephen?"

"Your former master," said Tom Merry, as they walked back to the house, "Mr. Hoffman?"

"Yes, sir; a German gentleman!"
"He has gone back to Germany, I suppose?"
"Yes, sir," said Lady. "It was somewhat hard upon him, as he was quite a baroness, a terrific gentleman. But, of course, the British Government had no choice in the matter, as these are certainly very spicy in the country. Poor Herr Hoffman was quite alarmed, and he went back to Germany at once!"

"And the 'use has been empty since then?" asked Hammond.

"Excepting for myself and the housekeeper and a maid!" said Lady. "We stayed on to take care of the house, and the good Captain Cleveland was kind enough to keep us in his service when he took the house. The other servants were brought here by him. We are all very much distressed by what has happened, gentlemen. Captain Cleveland was a very kind master, as we found, although we had only known him a few days. It is terrible that this should happen to him on the very night he was prepared to give his first entertainment!"

"Rotten!" said Dig.
The Swiss did not appear to notice that some of the juniors were scanning his face keenly. His manner was respectful and concerned when he spoke of his missing master. The vague suspicion they had felt towards him melted away immediately. If Lady knew anything of Captain Cleveland's disappearance, certainly he had a nerve of iron.

Cousin Ethel was at the breakfast-table when the juniors came in. The girl greeted them with a pale smile. The pallor in her face, and the dark lines under her eyes, showed that she had slept little. Her anxiety for her brother was keen, and occupied all her thoughts.

"No news?" she said.
"No, dear girl!" said Arthur Augustus. "I think I had better wish for Aunt Adeline. Ethel, you want somebody to look after you!"

"You do," said Ethel. "I shall be glad to have some thing with me. I—I feel horribly wetted! I cannot help thinking what may have happened—!" Her voice broke.

"There's plenty of 'ope left," said Hammond. "We've got an idea that we may be able to find the captain, Miss Cleveland."

"Crash!"
The juniors looked round from the table in surprise. Lady had just come in with a huge tray, and it had fallen from her hands with a crash to the floor. Eggs and tasters and broken plates rolled in all directions.

Lady stood over the wreck, staring at them. His fat, ruddy face had gone white.

"Erny, excuse me!" he said, recovering himself in a moment. "I am exceedingly sorry to trouble you!"

"All right!" said Arthur Augustus. "Did your feet slip, Lady?"

"Yes—!—I think my feet must have slipped!" stammered the Swiss.

"Pray, don't worry!" said D'Arcy kindly. "You can easily get some more eggs and washbas, I suppose!"

"Oh, certainly, sir!"
The butler hurried out.

"Peer follow, he looked quite white," said Cousin Ethel.

"Yes, didn't he?" said Hammond, with a suppressed chuckle. "He said 'not I said as 's come in, you chaps—that's what made him drop that tray!"

"But, Jove!"
"Oh, draw it mild, Hammy!" murmured Dig.
"But why—" began Ethel, in surprise.

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"Ugh!" said the Cockney junior. "You see, we've got an idea, Miss Ethel, only we've kept it dark from that foreign trash!"

"About—about my brother?" asked Ethel eagerly.

"Yes," Hammond explained in a low voice, with one eye on the door. Ethel listened, her cheeks flushing, and her eyes very bright.

"I think you are very clever," she said at last. "It is possible," Hammond turned pink with pleasure. "It is quite possible! I can tell you something—I know that my brother has been connected with the Intelligence Department since he was invalided home. I know that he had a special reason for coming to live here, though he did not explain to me, of course, what it was; and I did not ask questions. It is quite possible—quite possible—that what you suspect is true. But you say you have searched the rained wing, and there is no sign?"

"Well, that's so," admitted Hammond. "But, of course, there may be some nook or cranny—we've not finished yet, Miss Cleveland. But—saaaa—the word!"

Lady entered again. The juniors finished their breakfast, and Arthur Augustus sent his telegram to Aunt Adeline. A little later Inspector Skeat arrived. The inspector was not looking good-tempered. It was easy to read in his face that he had had no success so far in his quest. He did not come alone. A young gentleman dressed with the most exquisite taste, with floose hair parted in the middle, and an eyeglass in his eye, was with him; and the juniors discovered that this was Mr. Varney—from the War Office.

Evidently, the disappearance of Captain Cleveland had caused a little commotion at headquarters, and the exquisite young gentleman had been sent down to see into matters.

The exquisite young gentleman listened to all that the inspector said to him, and said "Aw—jaaa!" several times, with an air of great wisdom. He turned his eyeglass in all directions in the captain's study, and said "Aw?" again, more wisely than ever. Then he departed in the big motor-car which had brought him down, and disappeared at a terrific rate.

If the juniors had been inquired for information, the exquisite young gentleman would have made them smile.

Inspector Skeat seemed to be in a troubled mood. He made a new examination of the study, and was seen peering about the grounds for some time. Then he came in, and revealed his orders to the constable to see that he was ordered the study—a point which seemed very important to the good inspector. As he was about to depart, Tom Merry asked him if anything was discovered yet.

The inspector shook his head.

"Nothing so far," he said. "Captain Cleveland has been spoiled away. I can, of course, tell you nothing, but we have every hope. I think I may assure you, Miss Cleveland, that we have really every hope of discovering whose your brother is hidden. My duty forbids me to say more than that!"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Skeat!" said Ethel. "You are searching for him now?"

"The country is being searched in every direction," the inspector assured her. "Not a stone is being left unturned!"

Lady came up respectfully.

"No news of my dear master, may I beg to ask?" he said kindly.

"Not yet, my man!" said the inspector. "But shortly—shortly, I hope!"

And Mr. Skeat departed.

The butler looked after him, with an expressionless face. Then he went back to his own quarters, and Tom Merry & Co., accompanied by Cousin Ethel, went out to renew their search.

CHAPTER 9.

A Telegram from the Head.

THE juniors came in for lunch tired and troubled. They had ransacked the deserted wing over and over again without the slightest success.

Cousin Ethel's hopes, which had risen, sank again to zero—and the juniors had little faith left in Harry Hammond's suggestion. But the Cockney schoolboy stuck to his theory. None that came during their search the butler had appeared in the grounds, as if he were interested in their proceedings. His face, always smooth and respectful, gave no clue to his inward thoughts—if he had any. Some of the juniors doubted if he had any. Jasper Lady did not look like a man who was much given to thinking.

Kerr was the only fellow who seemed to place any faith now in Hammond's idea that the captain might be hidden somewhere close at hand. The keen, canny, Scottish junior

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had agreed with Hammond all along, and he did not fail him now. Aunt Adeline arrived early in the afternoon, and Cousin Ethel went to her rooms with her; both of them in a state of nerves and worry; and Tom Merry & Co. were left to their own devices. While the rest of the juniors were wandering in the grounds, Harry Hammond and Kerry paid a visit to Mrs. Toddy, the housekeeper, in her room. The street, comfortable housekeeper had been there for years, and it had occurred to Hammond that she might be able to tell them something of the former tenant of the Towers. If Herr Hoffmann had carried on any teaching work there, it was certain enough that he had not taken his household into his confidence, at least so far as the native part was concerned. The two women found Mrs. Toddy quite ready to talk—and she told them a good deal of her former employer. Herr Hoffmann had been a scientific gentleman, who did experiments in the study—of what sort she didn't know—and he was a kind master, and she had been sorry when he fled the country after the outbreak of war. But, as far as suspecting that he had been a rascal in any sort of way, that thought had evidently never entered the good dame's head; and it was evident, too, that if Hoffmann was still in England Mrs. Toddy knew nothing about it.

Mrs. Toddy was a talkative old soul, and she ran on quite cheerfully, the juniors listening, Hammond interjecting a remark every now and then. The old lady had not the faintest suspicion that she was being peeped.

"And I suppose Mr. Hoffmann will be coming back after the war," Hammond remarked.

"I'm sure," answered Hammond.

"And his name Lady used to help him with his experiments, didn't he?" Hammond said carelessly.

Mrs. Toddy nodded.

"Yes, Mr. Lady was a good deal in the master's study," she said. "Sometimes they was shut up together for hours, an' when I used to ask Mr. Lady, he would say he was helping the master. A very nice-mastered gentleman, Mr. Lady!"

"Very?" asked Kerry.

"I suppose he came to England in the first place with Mr. Hoffmann," asked Hammond.

"I think so," said Mrs. Toddy. "Mr. Hoffmann thought a very good deal of him, and always treated him more like a friend than a servant, which I am sure he deserved."

"I'm sure he did," assented Hammond.

The juniors took a friendly leave of the good old housekeeper a little later. There was nothing more to be learned, Hammond's brow was accented with thought as they tramped out into the grounds.

"Well," said Kerry, looking at him.

The Cockney schoolboy compressed his lips.

"I'm more sure of it than ever," he said. "Of course, that simple old lady knows nothing. It would be their guess to have perfectly innocent servants in the house, and to keep them in the dark. But Lady knows something; I'd bet on that. And if he's got a secret, he must be keen to get us out of the house, and have the place a buzzed. You know how he tried to get rid of us. And if he tries again—"

"Gussy will guess him," said Kerry, with a smile.

Hammond shook his head.

"He may be too deep for Gussy," he said.

"How do you mean?"

"He's got old Skeet on his side. Skeet is a first-class duffer, and Lady isn't afraid of him. Suppose we get an order from the Head to go back?"

Kerry started.

"You don't think—"

"I think that if Lady is guilty, he will get rid of us by Skeet or by crook," he said. "That is, if we let him."

Kerry passed his lips thoughtfully.

"If the Head should tell us to get back in St. Jim's, I suppose we should have to go," he said slowly.

"And here that Swiss rascal to carry on his little game? Skeet can't do anything with him—he doesn't think of suspecting him, even. Lady has been battering him up. We're not going—we shall have to work it somehow if we're called back. But—now we've got to think it out what's become of Captain Cleveland. I tell you they never took him away last night. If a kidnapped man had been taken away, even Skeet would be able to find out something about him—a carriage or a motor-car would have to be used, and they'd be seen; they could be traced!"

"But if he wasn't traced, where is he?"

Hammond grunted.

"That's what we've got to find out."

It was about an hour later that Tom Merry & Co. came in search of the Cockney juniors, who was thinking the problem out with various brows. Tom had a telegram in his hand, and it was from his home.

"Bottle down," he said.

Hammond looked quickly at Kerry.

"From St. Jim's?" he asked.

"Yes. The Head says we're to go back. He's heard of what's happened; it's in the morning papers, of course."

Hammond and Kerry read the telegram. It was from Dr. Holmes, and it stated briefly that, under the circumstances, it would be best for the juniors to return to the school, and he would expect them that evening.

"Wotton?" said Arthur Augustus. "I'm not going, any way."

Cousin Ethel looked distressed.

"But you cannot disobey the Head, Arthur."

"Inspector Stone must have called to see the Head, or 'phoned to him," said Monty Lomax. "He's told Dr. Holmes that we're in the way here. Just like the blessed Jones!"

"I fancy Lady put it into his 'ead."

"Shouldn't wonder. We've got to go," said Dig.

Hammond shook his head.

"Is Miss Cleveland going?" he asked.

"Certainly not," said Ethel. "I shall stay here till my brother is found."

"But you don't want to stay 'ere alone with only your own maid?"

"I should be very glad if you could all stay, of course," said Ethel. "I want you to very much. But Dr. Holmes—"

"That can be worked," said Hammond coolly.

"How?" asked Tom Merry. "We can't tell the Head we don't want to go. And if we stay without permission, he'll send a master or a prefect to fetch us."

"It won't come to that. Miss Ethel can work it."

"I would gladly do so if I could," said Ethel wistfully. "It will be dreadful for me here when you are gone. Miss Holmes will expect me to go back also, but I cannot do that. I must stay."

"Just so," said Hammond. "What you've got to do is this. Telephone to the 'Ead at St. Jim's and ask 'em to let us stay because you're nervous of staying 'ere without your friends, arder wet 'at 'appened."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Figgins, in great relief. "The Head would let us stay like a shot, if you put it like that."

Ethel brightened a little.

"It is quite true," she said. "I should be very nervous. You are right. I will telephone at once."

She made a movement to go into the house. Hammond detained her with a gesture.

"Oh, no, miss. You can't telephone in the study; it's locked up."

"There is a telephone in the housekeeper's room," said Ethel.

"Yes, I know," said Hammond. "But there's a telephone down in the village, too, at the post-office, I'm sure."

"But why—"

"Don't you see?" said Hammond. "I tell you that Lady has fixed this up for us to be called 'ome'! Well, don't let 'em know that we're getting' out of it. He ain't 'posed to know anything about it, but if he fixed it up, he'll expect some sign of 'em' get' out, and then we shall know for certain if he fixed it up—no? And if he did—"

"That will settle the point whether he's got an interest in getting rid of us," said Kerry quietly.

"Bill on Lady?" said Blake.

"Yes," said Hammond—"still on Lady. I believe that Swiss knows where Captain Cleveland is. It wouldn't be so good 'ating that to Mr. Skeet, but I feel sure of it. And if he's trying duffers to get us out of the 'ouse, that'll settle it, in my mind at least."

"I will go down to the post-office," said Cousin Ethel, with a nod.

And Ethel walked away with Figgins, and the rest of the party proceeded once more to a renewal of the search in the grounds, but the winter dusk came down, and heard them still unsuccessful.

CHAPTER 10.

Hammond Hits It.

OURIN ETHEL came back with her cheeks rosy from the walk in the keen, winter air. Aunt Adeline was presiding at tea, and Fatty Wynn, at least, was doing full justice to a bread-and-butter cake. The girl did not speak about the matter that was in all their minds; the good Aunt Adeline was not in the secret. But after tea the whole party went out for a little walk. Lady was hovering in the hall, and the juniors noticed that he looked at them very curiously, but he did not speak. It was not till they were at a safe distance from the house that Ethel spoke.

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Every Saturday, 2

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THE EDITOR.

"It's all right," she said. "I telephoned to the Head, and told him that I wanted you all to stay for the rest of the week as it was arranged at first. I told him I should feel sorry at being left here with only Aunt Addina. Dr. Blakewas very sympathetic, and he said at once I could tell you all that you could stay. He says you are to be married not to give Inspector Skout trouble in any way, that is all."

"Good!" said Hammond. "That means that it was Skout's pet idea to have you all to stay for the rest of the week as it was arranged at first. I told him I should feel sorry at being left here with only Aunt Addina. Dr. Blakewas very sympathetic, and he said at once I could tell you all that you could stay. He says you are to be married not to give Inspector Skout trouble in any way, that is all."

"Yes, wotah, the wotah?"

They were in it good time for dinner, and fessed the butter in the hall. He looked at them very queerly.

"Will the gentlemen be staying to dinner, Miss Cleverland?" he asked, in his smooth voice.

"Certainly," said Ethel. "At dinner, the ladies every now and then glanced at Lady. His manner was strange and inquisitive as he seated upon them; but it was easy to see that he was in a state of surprise and amazement.

After dinner, as the evening passed on, the ladies felt the time hang heavily on their hands. They had no heart to amuse themselves in any way while the shadow of tragedy hung over the House. They discussed the situation in low tones, and Hammond smiled with a certain amount of amusement for the moment, which he guessed would come, when Lady would betray his surprise openly that they were not going.

The butler was not seen for some time, but at last he made an appearance at the door. The gentlemen had consented.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "shall I order the car?"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyes upon him.

"The car, Lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"I do not wish to have expressed any doubt for the car," said Arthur Augustus, with a pointed look. "Have any of you folks wanted the car this evening?"

"There was a general shaking of heads.

"Yes; what did you understand, Lady?"

The ladies hesitated.

"But, sir—"

"Yes?"

"I—understand—"

The Swiss coloured unconsciously, in spite of his professional impassiveness.

"Yes; what did you understand, Lady?"

"I—I understood that you young gentlemen were returning to the school this evening." Lady blurted out at last.

Arthur Augustus looked astounded.

"But Jove! What could have put that idea into your head, Lady?"

For a moment Lady's eyes glared.

"That—the inspector thought so," he stammered.

"Dish me! He was quite mistaken. I wouldn't why the inspector thought so!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Then—then it is a mistake!"

"Quite a mistake. You may go."

Lady went.

He closed the door behind him, and Harry Hammond stopped quickly to the door and opened it again. In the hall Lady was standing with a face convulsed, his hands clenched hard, and his eyes burning. Alone there, he had given expression to the rage in his breast. The sudden and unexpected appearance of Hammond made him start violently, and his fat face became crimson.

"Anything the matter?" asked Hammond.

The Swiss gave a gasp.

"N-no, sir," he stammered.

"You looked quite ill," said Hammond, staring at him.

"Do you have fits?"

"Oh, no—no, sir."

The Swiss hurried away.

Hammond smiled, and turned back into the drawing-room and closed the door.

"That chap knows that we suspect him," he said, in a low voice. "He will get rid of us by hook or by crook if he can. But he won't find it so jolly easy."

Convinced Ethel said good-night to her friends, and retired with Aunt Addina. Tom Merry & Co. remained down a little longer, but finally they went to their quarters. They were in a very thoughtful mood. They had little doubt now that Harry Hammond's suspicions were well-founded, but they realized at the same time that it would be useless to explain them to the self-satisfied Mr. Skout. That gentleman was conducting a vigorous search for the missing captain outside

the walls of the Towson. He would undoubtedly post-pook the idea that the captain had not been taken outside the walls at all. Indeed, he could hardly be blamed for doing so, for if the captain was still in the vicinity, where was he hidden? On that point the juniors, keen as their suspicions were, could furnish no clue.

"May as well go to bed, I suppose," said Tom Merry, as Hammond stood staring gloomily into the fire in the bedrooms. It was curious how the whole party had come to look upon the *non-vittis* of Cockney as leader. Hammond shook his head.

"No bed for me," he said.

"But what's to be done?" asked Digby.

"Look 'ere," said Hammond, "we've got it down pretty fine now. That Sorta losses what's become of Captain Cleveland?"

"We can't prove it."

"We've got to prove it some'ow," said Hammond.

"That policeman is still on guard. You've

scared the way-finder is looking after him and

battering him. He's being led to

the fat of the land, and made a

fare of. When the reporters

came here this morning, he led them into

the study, but he won't let us in. He's

got a bed made up in the next room to the

study, and the study door is locked. Lady

guesses we might dodge in there some

night, I suppose.

He's jolly keen to keep us out, now that he knows we suspect

him. It looks to me as if there were some more signs to be

picked up there if we could only find them. That's what

Lord must be afraid of."

"But we went over the place pretty thoroughly," said Tom

doubtfully.

"I know we did; and we're going over it again," said

Hammond.

"We can't get in," said Blake. "The door's locked, and

the lobby has the key."

"There's the window."

"That's fastened on the inside."

"It's only a catch," said Hammond. "I've looked at that. I

could open it with a pocket-knife."

"Suppose it's bolted inside?"

"That's all right, too. You've noticed it's loaded glass? I

could cut with a piece easy enough."

"The juniors locked very grave."

"I say, that's a jolly serious thing!" said Tom Merry.

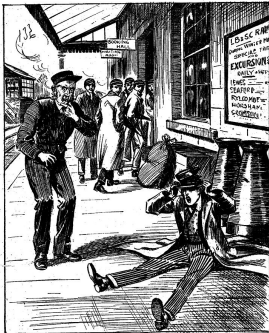
"It's a serious one," said Hammond grimly. "Captain

Cleveland's a prisoner somewhere, and we've got to find him."

"Yes; but—"

"I tell you the root of the matter is in that three room.

That's where the captain was collared, and where he put up a



"Great Scott!" Arthur Langston sat gasping on the platform, and Blake, with a final swipe, squashed his stick hat over his eyes. Then the indignant juniors walked out of the station. (See Chapter 8.)

fight. That's where he was taken away through the window—"

Hammond passed suddenly. A strange expression came over his face.

"My 'at!" he ejaculated, in a deep breath.

Tom looked at him inquiringly.

"Well!"

"Idiot!" said Hammond, smiting his forehead. "Fat-head!"

"What are you callin' yourself names for, Josh boy?"

"Not to think of that before!" said Hammond. "Cross me!"

But you fellows don't think of it, either!"

"Of what?" exclaimed Tom.

"Fwy explain yourself, Josh boy."

"Don't you see?" Hammond exclaimed, in a suppressed

voice—"don't you see? There were spots of blood on the floor! We found them! But the carpets at the window—there weren't any spots on them, and they hadn't been disturbed or torn in any way. Those weren't any stains near the window. There weren't any on the balcony outside. Don't you see?"

"Blessed if I do!" said Horrie. "What the dickens are you getting at?"

"The captain had been wounded in the scarp. He was

bleeding. Yet all the stains were inside the room, where he

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had put up the light. Now near the window, and nose outside, whispered Hammond excitedly. "He wasn't taken near the window at all."

"What?"

"That idiot Skeet concluded that he was taken out of the window, and so did we, because we are idiots, too," said Hammond. "But he wasn't."

The juniors stared blankly at him.

"But he can't have been taken out by the door," said Leother. "That was simply impossible with a house full of people."

"I know that."

"Well, I suppose you don't suggest that he vanished up the chimney? There was a fire in the grate, too."

"No, I don't, sir."

"Then what—"

"He wasn't taken out of that room at all," said Hammond, with conviction. "Don't you see? He couldn't have come out by the door, and he didn't come out by the window, and—"

"And so he's there still. Is that what you mean?" grunted Hake.

"Fahsed! There's another way out—a way we don't know of."

"My hat!"

"Gwint Scott?"

Then the juniors looked at one another in silence, utterly startled by Hammond's suggestion.

CHAPTER II.

A Startling Discovery.

"**B**ut I Jove!" said Arthur Augustus at last, breaking the silence. "I woaldy believe that Hammond is on the track!"

"But—but it's rather thick," said Tom hesitatingly.

"Why?" said Hammond. "In that room, with a paneled wall, it would be easy enough. If that man Hoffmann, who lived here, was a German spy, you can depend on it he had a way open to dodge if the police got after him. He could do as he liked with the place. He was here as tenant for years. Nothing would be easier for him to conceive, and you bet he did it! And if Lady is carrying on his rotten game, you can guess how well-organized he would be when the house was taken by an officer connected with the Intelligence Department. Even if Captain Cleveland hadn't found anything, you could've carried on their spying with lips in the house. So he had to disappear. And he disappeared."

"But—"

"The key of it all is in that room, and I'm going to find it out," said Hammond determinedly. "I can get into the room by cutting out one of the leaded panes. That's easy enough. I worked for a lead-light man once, when I was a kid in Bethel Green. That's my little game."

"You're not going alone?" said Tom Merry.

"Better," said Hammond. "A crowd of us would only get spotted. Kerr can lend me his electric torch. It won't do to turn on the light there. I'll get out of a window at the back of the house, and then there's no danger. Lady will be in bed and fast asleep when I get to work, and the bobby sleeps like a top."

"But—but if you find—"

"If I spot the secret, I'll come back and tell you at once, since I go ahead," said Hammond. "We shall all be wanted if there's a scrap to go through."

"Fawwage you had better leave it in my hands, dear boy," suggested Arthur Augustus.

Hammond grinned.

"Bov-wo!" was his reply.

"Waldy, Hammond—"

"Hammond's right," said Kerr. "He's handled it all so far, and we can leave it to him. But mind, old man, if you spot the secret door—if there's any there, you don't go through it. You come back."

"Wot-oh!" said Hammond.

"I don't like your going alone," said Tom Merry uneasily.

"Wot's the danger?" said Hammond. "The room's locked up, and the bobby's got the key. Lady couldn't get at me, even if he knew I was there; and if I wanted I could call the bobby. He's in the next room."

"Yes, that's so."

"And he'd see us if we made a sound," said Hammond.

"It's safer for one to go. You leave it to me."

"But suppose you don't find anything?"

"I'll find it if it's there to find," said Hammond. "And anyway, Skeet will be here again to-morrow, and we can give him the idea. He might have sense enough to search for it himself then."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "THE PRIDE OF ST. JIM'S!"

It was settled, and the juniors turned in. Hammond lay down in his clothes. He did not intend to go until he was sure that the whole household was asleep. It was past one in the morning when Hammond slipped from his bed.

Tom Merry woke.

"That you, Hammond?"

"Yes. Not a word!"

Hammond, with Kerr's electric torch in his pocket, and socks pulled on over his boots, quitted the room silently.

Tom Merry lay awake for some time, but finally he dropped off to sleep again.

He expected to awake when Hammond came back, but the dawn was streaming in at the windows when he opened his eyes at last.

He started up in bed and rubbed his eyes and glanced towards Hammond's bed, which was near his own.

The bed was empty.

"Hammond?" called out Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus woke up.

"But Jove! A wakin, dear boy!"

Tom Merry bounded on of bed.

"Wheer's Hammond?"

"Gwint Scott! Ham'n he come back!"

"He's not here."

"But Jove!"

"Woke up, you fellows!" called out Tom Merry.

"Hammond hasn't come back."

"My hat!"

The juniors were quickly out of bed.

There was always in every lane now. Hammond had not returned from his midnight expedition. Was it possible that he was still searching in the mysterious study, careless of the fact that the time had passed and a new day had dawned? Or—

Tom Merry was very pale. A dark fear was in his mind.

"Nothin' can have happened to him," said Arthur Augustus uneasily. "The bobby was in the next room, you know."

Tom Merry was handling on his clothes hurriedly. The other fellows followed his example.

They hurried downstairs. At that early hour only a housemaid was awake, and she looked in surprise at the juniors.

"Have you seen Hammond?" Tom Merry asked breathlessly.

"No, sir."

The juniors hurried out of the house. In a couple of minutes they were crowding up the iron stairs to the balcony outside the study. The window was closed, and a pane of the leaded glass had been taken out, and through it they could see into the room. The casement was not fastened, and Tom Merry pushed it open. The juniors crowded into the room.

It was empty.

The door was still locked, as Tom Merry ascertained. The missing pane in the leaded window told that Hammond had entered, as he had planned. Where was he now?

"But Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus. "He's disappeared, dear boy!"

"Hammond?" shouted Tom Merry.

"He's not here, but—"

"Look round!" said Tom desperately. "The secret door—if it's here, we'll find it; and it must be here."

The search commenced instantly. The juniors examined the polished paneled walls. They pushed and squeezed and thumped upon the panels, in the hope of discovering one that would move. But it was in vain. Every panel that was thumped sounded solid; there was evidently the stone wall behind. The hollow sound they had hoped to hear was not to be detected.

There was a sound of the key turning in the lock, and the countess looked in, with an angry face. The noise the juniors had made had awakened him.

"Young gentlemen, you've got right 'ere," he exclaimed. "You know the inspector's orders."

"Gentlemen—gentlemen!" exclaimed Lady, who had appeared behind the countess. "This is not right. Mr. Skeet will be very angry."

"Our chum has disappeared!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"What?"

"He came here last night," said Tom, fixing his eyes upon the fat face of the Serv. "His didn't come back."

Lady looked astonished.

"But he is not here," he said.

"We've come to look for him," said Hake.

"But—but how did he get in—how did he get it, gentlemen? The door was locked."

Tom Merry pointed to the window.

"Inspector Skeet will be very angry when he sees that."

said Lady, as his glance turned upon the cut-out space in the leaded window.

"Hear Inspector Skeat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Where is Hammond?"

"Indeed, I do not know, sir," said Lady. "I had an idea that he had done this thing. Is he not in his bedroom?"

"No."

"You can see that he is not here," said the Swiss. "I must beg you to leave this room, gentlemen. Inspector Skeat—"

"Come, gentlemen—" said the constable.

"What?" said Arthur Augustus. "We're going to stay here as long as we please. You will kindly remember that this is my cousin's house, Judy. And you remember it also, Effie."

The constable looked puzzled. He sensed the matter by going back to his room.

"You will please yourself, of course," said Lady, biting his lip. "I shall telephone to the inspector at once."

The Swiss retired.

Tom Merry & Co. remained in the room, pursuing their search. For a long hour they pursued it, but in vain. Then Cousin Ethel appeared in the doorway.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

Tom Merry explained.

"Hammond—disappeared!" said Ethel, with pale cheeks.

"Oh, this is terrible! But—how—when—"

"I believe there is a secret door in this room," said Tom.

"Hammond came to look for it, and it looks to me as if he had found it, and the constables have made away with him to keep it dark— Ah, here's the inspector!"

Inspector Skeat came in, looking very angry. Tom Merry did not take any notice of his black looks. He told him what had happened. And the inspector, in spite of his self-satisfaction, gave a start at the mention of a secret door.

"You young gentlemen can leave this study," he said shortly. "You had no right to come here. But if there is a secret door, it shall be found."

The search had been vain, and the juniors, worried and depressed, left the inspector in possession of the study. It was a despondent party that gathered at the breakfast-table that morning, and even Fatty Wynn seemed to have lost his appetite. One thought was in the minds of Tom Merry & Co.—where was Harry Hammond, and what had happened to him!

CHAPTER 12.

The Wisdom of Wally.

THAT morning was a busy one at the Towers. The disappearance of Harry Hammond had completely changed the aspect of affairs.

Inspector Skeat, self-satisfied and somewhat obtuse as he was, did not fail to follow up a possible clue. He had concluded that Captain Cleveland had been taken from the study by way of the window by his kidnappers. But the second disappearance gave him much food for thought.

Why had Hammond been taken? His disappearance was a proof that the men who had dealt with the captain were still as the spot, and that Hammond, in penetrating to the study, had somehow been in their way, had apparently made some discovery that endangered them and made it impossible for them to leave him at liberty.

Even the inspector could not doubt any longer that the key to the mystery lay within the walls of the Towers.

And the inspector, once settled on the track, was energetic enough. He questioned Lady clearly as to the existence of a secret door, but the Swiss declared any knowledge of such a thing. Mr. Skeat was a little discouraged, but he pursued the search with vigour. Workmen were sent for to examine the room, and several of the panels were taken out bodily. But only the solid stone walls were revealed behind them.

Tom Merry had not informed the inspector of the suspicion the juniors felt towards the Swiss. They knew that he would look upon the idea. That stout and respectable butler appeared always suspicious to the inspector's eyes, and the "buttering-up" process had not been in vain. At every step the inspector took, in fact, the Swiss butler was consulted.

The handsome old study had been almost completely dismantled, but nothing had been discovered.

The inspector gave it up at last.

He could only suppose that Hammond, like the captain, had been taken away by the window. Lady had suggested to him that perhaps the unknown men had returned to commit a robbery in the study—perhaps some of the captain's papers were their bait—and that Hammond had met them there unexpectedly, and so they had seized him, and taken him away with them.

The inspector, at an older loss, jumped at that theory. The study, looking in a very desolated state, was looked up again, and the inspector departed.

Tom Merry & Co. were in a state almost of desperation.

They had little fear for the life of their missing cousin; but it was barely possible that the unknown men who had carried him off might do him injury. Their anxiety was keen.

What was to be done was a puzzle. Inspector Skeat had frantically advised them to return to their school—advice which they had not the slightest intention of taking. They missed now the keen brain of Hammond of the Towers, who had taken the lead so far. The Cobden subsidy was gone—and they had to find him. They thought it over till their heads ached.

They saw little of Lady. Blako had desperately proposed seizing the man—for they were assured none of his guilt—and dragging him till he told them what had been done with Hammond. But that desperate idea was hardly feasible.

"What's to be done?" said Tom Merry miserably, as the winter dusk set in. "We've made matters worse instead of better."

"But Jorro! I wish I had gone instead of old Hammond!" sighed Arthur Augustus. "They must have taken him by surprise."

"And they wouldn't have taken you by surprise, fat-head!" snorted Wally.

"I trust not."

"Bye-bye!" said D'Arcy wisely.

"Wally, Wally, this is not a time for your cheek—"

"I've been thinking about it," said Wally. "When you fellows have done jiving, perhaps you'll be willing to listen to me."

"Oh, wally!"

"This is where legs start up," growled Lowther.

"Yes, dry up, kid!" said Tom Merry. "We've scolded, Tom knew."

Wally started.

"I tell you I've been thinking—"

"Well, go on thinking, and don't talk," said Fatty Wynn.

"Listen to me," said Wally, unheeding. "I've worked it out in my head how they came to catch Harry. He got into the room all right, and started looking for the secret door—we know that much."

"Yes, we know that already."

"Then the question is, how did they come down on him?" said Wally. "There's a secret door—you can bet on that. But suppose Harry found it? He promised to come back for us; he wouldn't have gone on investigating by himself into danger. Well, then, how did the villains know he had found it—did he find it?"

"Wally, I cannot say—"

"Might have opened it, and found one of them just on the other side," said Barnes.

"Rot!" said Wally unceremoniously. "What should one of them be just doing on the other side of the secret door? They had no business there. And if Hammond found the secret door, why can't we find it—especially as the inspector's men have been dragging the room almost to bits? I don't believe he found it."

"Then why should he be collared?" said Lowther.

"That's it," said Wally. "Why? Because he found something else—something else, I should say."

"You young ass! What are you driving at?"

"Oh, you shall follow can't think?" said Wally contemptuously. "You ought to leave that to the Third. Look here, we've agreed that Captain Cleveland is being stowed away somewhere—a prisoner—"

"Wally!"

"Well, I suppose he's not being starved to death. Besides that, we suspect Lady of carrying on some spring game here—perhaps along with his old master, who may not be gone at all. That means that these men were secreted, which can be reached from the study, doesn't it—at least, some place where Captain Cleveland is being kept a prisoner. Well, then, if Lady's the guilty party, he's bound to go and see him sometimes, isn't he—if only to take him food, and see that he's safe?"

"But how?"

"—and if the secret entrance is through the study, Lady would have to go that way, wouldn't he?" pursued Wally.

"I suppose he would," said Piggins. "But the door was locked, and the lobby had the key."

Wally smiled.

"Do you think Lady hasn't another key that would fit that door?" he growled.

"My hat! Very likely."

"Yes, wally! It's pretty certain," said Arthur.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Augustus, with a nod. "I wonder that I did not think of that."

"There you are, then," said Wally. "Suppose Lady was coming in the middle of the night to pay a visit to his presence—going through the trap—in suddenly Gude Hammond there. How's he going to explain coming to the study—with a second key to the door—in the middle of the night? He may even have suspected that Hammond had found out the secret door, or he may have opened it himself before he saw Hammond, if Hammy heard him coming and scooted into cover. Well, then, there was nothing for him to do but to collar Hammy, and rusk him away into the secret hiding-place. That's how I work it out," said Wally triumphantly.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I dare say you've got it right, kid," he said. "But I don't see that it gets us any further."

"Oh, you don't see anything?" said Wally despairingly.

"Look here, you shabby young waster—"

"Don't you see?" persisted Wally. "Oh, you can see, Kerr—I can tell that by your shivvy!"

The Scottish justice grinned.

"Quite so," he answered. "Wally means to point out that if Lady has some secret game on, and if he goes to see his presence, and take his food, he'll have to go again; and, of course, he'll have to go in in the night-time. And he can be spotted if he does."

"But Jove!"

"That's the idea," said Wally. "Hammond was caught in the room, and collared. But suppose one of us was to hide in the room, quite out of sight, and watch? Then the next time that Swiss villain comes—"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's easy enough to get into the room now, anyway. I'll watch these tonight."

"You jolly well won't!" exclaimed Wally indignantly.

"It's up to me, as I thought of it."

Tom shook his head.

"Don't be an art, kid! You leave this to your elders."

"Bairn?"

"P'raps be reasonable, Wally. This must be left in my hands," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"Oh, don't you begin, Gem!"

"You young waster—"

"Put it to the vote," said Blake.

It was put to the vote, and it fell to Tom Merry. D'Arcy minor grunted, and gave in with a bad grace.

"Well, said you don't make a muck of it, you Shell bouncer?" he said. "It would be safer in my hands."

"That's all right," said Tom. "And now, not another syllable about it—we don't want Lady to spot us."

And that they not another word was said on the subject. But the juniors waited for the night with intense anxiety.

CHAPTER 13. Caught Napping!

MIDNIGHT!

Tom Merry stood in deep darkness. The echoes had been carried out, so far, without a hitch. When all the household was buried in silence, Tom Merry had stolen noiselessly from his room, leaving his clothes weak and anxious. By a window at the back of the house he had stealthily gained the grounds, and crept round to the balcony. The night was intensely dark, with hardly a star glimmering in the sky. Tom Merry had easily opened the nearest window, crept in, and closed it behind him. The study was dark and deserted, with loose papers leaning against the stone wall, as the workmen had left them.

Tom did not advance into the room. He had closed the window softly, and stood between it and the heavy, dark curtains. With his penknife he made a hole in the hangings, by which he could see into the room as soon as a light was shown. Then he waited.

He did not intend to search for the secret door. That had been searched for already in vain. He was there to watch.

The long, slow hours of the night passed.

Tom Merry, standing behind the dark curtains, with all his senses on the alert, waited. His limbs grew cramped, but he did not stir. It seemed to him as if hours and hours

had passed. What was the time, he could not guess, but he knew that the dawn was not yet near, when he heard a slight sound in the silence.

The door was opening.

Tom Merry's heart gave a sudden throb.

He listened, noiseless, he listened with strained ears.

The door closed again, with scarcely a sound; but in the dead silence he could detect it. There was complete silence again.

But Tom Merry knew that someone beside himself was in the room.

After a few moments he could detect the sound of breathing.

He could see nothing—the darkness was intense. But a slender light shot through the room.

Through the little slit in the curtain he could see now, though with dimmed eyes.

An electric lamp was being flashed about the room by a stout man, who held it in his hand, and Tom Merry set his teeth hard as he recognized the Swiss butler.

Keeper Lady scanned the room as he flashed the light to and fro. Then suddenly it was extinguished.

Tom Merry listened without a movement. Whatever the Swiss was going to do, he was going to do in the darkness, that was certain. Tom Merry had only his ears to depend upon.

He heard the slight movements of the Swiss. There was a dragging sound, and he knew that one of the tiger-skins had been moved on the floor. Then a click!

Tom Merry checked his teeth to keep back an exclamation of triumph.

He understood now.

The secret door was there, but it was not in the paneled walls. It was in the floor!

Click!

The door had closed again—he knew it! But he did not move. He allowed ten long minutes to pass before he stirred from his place. Then he pushed the curtains aside, and stepped into the room. He struck a vest, and looked round him quickly. The room was empty save for himself.

But a tiger-skin, which had laid close by the writing-table, lay now a yard to the left of it. The patch went out, and Tom Merry did not strike another. He had been enough.

Slightly he quitted the room by the window, and made his way back to his bed-room. He came quietly into his room, where his comrades were waiting for him, still fully dressed, and breathing excitement.

"Awake!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Yes, bet!"

"Have you seen?" began Blake.

"Yes," Tom Merry explained, hurriedly and breathlessly.

"But Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I wonder I did not think of that!"

"I thought of the floor as well as the walls," said Kerr.

"But there wasn't a sign. It must be jolly well hidden!"

"Well, we're on to it now," said Tom. "Come on, before the rotter comes up again. I'll take the poker from here, in case we need it."

"And I'll get one out of the next room," said Blake.

The next minute the whole party of juniors were creeping cautiously down the stairs. They dropped one by one from the window at the back, and crept round the house to the balcony before the study.

The room was still in pitchy darkness, as Tom Merry pushed the door open from the balcony. It was barely a quarter of an hour since he had quitted it. There was no doubt that the Swiss had not come back yet. For the tiger-skin was still where Tom had seen it. He turned on the electric light.

"We must have a light," he said, in a low voice. "But don't make a row; we don't want to wake the hobby in the next room. This is our show."

"You bet!"

Tom Merry dropped stealthily on his knees, and examined the floor. The smooth, polished boards showed no trace of an opening—no trace of a spring. Evidently the secret trap-door opened with a spring. Tom Merry remembered the click he had heard. But, watch as they would, they could not find it.

Half an hour passed by, and still they were baffled. They had a admit that they were beaten, and they looked at one another in disappointment and wrath.

"N. G.," murmured Blake.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"We can't find it," he said. "But the rotter must come back this way—he's got to get back to his room before dawn. We'll wait for him here, and collar him as he comes

ANSWERS

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up, before he can close the trap. Get one of the blind-cords to tie us up with. There are enough of us to handle him when he comes."

"Yes, watch!"

"Put out the light, then," said Blake. "We'll squat round this bit, and wait for him. Mind he doesn't take the alarm, and dodge down and close the trap, that's all." The light was extinguished.

Then the juniors waited—in silence, or speaking in faint whispers. Their excitement was at fever heat. Sooner or later the rascal must come up through the trap, and then—

A faint sound below made their hearts throb.

Click!

Their eyes were so accustomed to the darkness by this time that they saw, dimly, the square of the door rise, and a dim head and shoulders came through. A man stepped out, and uttered a sharp cry as he trod on Arthur Augustus, and there was a yell from the wall of St. Jim's.

"Geeah! Cofah him!"

"Mein Gott!"

Tom Merry and Blake were already grasping the shadowy figure. Kerr, ever quick-witted, turned on the electric light. Then all the juniors gazed on the struggling rascal, and he went to the door. The mouth of the Swiss—for it was Kasper Lady—was open to scream, and Kerr jerked his feet into it, and the scream died away in a gurgle.

"Gag him!" said Tom Merry. "We don't want a roar—yet!"

The Swiss, powerful man as he was, was utterly helpless under the swarm of juniors. Three or four of these were kneeling on him, the rest grabbing him and holding him. Kerr doubled up a handkerchief, and jammed it into his mouth. The Swiss tried to shut his teeth, but the Scottish junior playfully twisted his nose till he consented to open his mouth again. He was gagged and bound hand and feet with the blind-cords. Then he lay on the floor, helpless, only his eyes burning with rage and hate.

CHAPTER 14.

The Secret of the Tower.

TOM MERRY panted as he released the captured Swiss.

The rascal's eyes burned as he glared up at the juniors.

In the floor three appeared an opening a couple of feet across, where the hidden trap-door had risen on its unseen hinges. Below was the thick stone floor, but a square block of stone had slid downwards, leaving an orifice corresponding to that in the wooden floor above. Below was darkness, but the juniors could make out the iron rings of a perpendicular ladder.

"So that's the giddy door!" murmured Blake. "We're on top it now."

"Watch walk on you, Junkey, old man," grizzled Arthur Augustus. "But you'll soon be nice and comfy in prison, you know."

Kerr went through the pockets of the captured Swiss coolly and thoroughly. He turned out an electric flash-lamp and a big bunch of keys.

"We may want these," he remarked.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry.

"Hold on! We don't want to risk this rascal getting released before we come back. We'll fasten up the door."

Kerr put the back of a chair under the lock of the door, and jammed it in tightly. It was impossible for anyone to slip the rascal away by the door. The eyes of the Swiss blazed with rage as he saw it. The idea had been in his mind of attracting the policeman, somehow, when the juniors had gone, and getting released before the facts were known to the "bobby," but the Scottish junior had forestalled him.

Tom Merry led the way down the trap. Whether the Swiss had an accomplice, still concealed in the mysterious recesses, they did not know, but it was probable enough, and they were very cautious. The ladder, both upright, was a long one, and Tom Merry felt his way down, rung below rung, carefully.

It seemed to him that he was descending into the depths of the earth. He passed once to flash on the light of the electric lamp; it revealed only the close, narrow walls of the perpendicular tunnel. It was barely two feet wide. Tom guessed that it had been excavated in the thickness of one of the large, ancient walls of the building, for it had evidently to pass through the floor below to reach the level of the ground. He reached the bottom at last, and stood in a narrow passage.

There his chains joined him, breathless with excitement,

and crammed together in the narrow space. The tunnel ran horizontally now, and Tom Merry led the way along it, for a short distance, where it ended suddenly in a wall of stone. But upon the wall were fastened a series of iron rungs, one above another, forming a perpendicular ladder, and leading up into darkness.

"Up again?" murmured Monty Leather. "Where the deuce does that lead to?"

"We're going to see," muttered Tom.

He put the electric lamp into his pocket, and, still holding the poker he had brought with him, he began to climb, rung above rung. After him went the juniors, one after another, wondering where their strange journey was to end.

The darkness was intense, the silence absolute. The narrow tunnel through which they were again climbing was almost suffocating them. Tom Merry felt his head in free air at last. He drew himself from the last rungs into a room of some sort.

Still the darkness was unbroken.

"Come on, you claps!" whispered Tom Merry. "This is the finish, so far."

There was a sudden startled gasp in the darkness.

"My 'at! Tom Merry?"

Tom spun round.

"Hanswood!"

"Wot? Put on a light, if you've got one."

Tom Merry turned on the light.

He was in a small room, with stone walls. On the farther side an iron door was closed. But in the room—within a few yards of him—two figures lay on blankets on the floor. One was Harry Hanswood, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's; the other was a stalwart young man, with a bandaged head, whom he knew at once as Captain Cleveland.

There was a disk of metal on the two prisoners set up and blotted at him in the light.

Each of them was secured by a strong steel chain, locked round the waist, and fastened to an iron staple in the wall. Kasper Lady had not done his work by halves.

"Tom Merry!" muttered the captain.

"So we've found you," said Tom. "We'll soon have you out of that!"

"Which I loved 'em best!" grinned Hanswood. "Didn't I, captain! And I've got a kapp on my 'ead to show for it!"

The juniors came up, one after another, with great glee. Kerr tried the keys he had taken from Lady in turn upon the padlocks on the chains, and soon found the right one. The two prisoners stood up free.

"This is where we show, I think," remarked Wally.

"Hush!" said Captain Cleveland. "I take it that you have secured that villain Lady, or you would not be here?"

"Yes, watch, old chap!"

"But the other?"

"We haven't seen any other," said Tom Merry. "But we felt pretty certain that the rascal had a confederate—most likely the German who used to live here!"

Captain Cleveland nodded.

"I think that's the man," he said. "I know he never shows himself outside this den; but every night since I have been a prisoner Lady has come up and passed through that iron door. Several times I have heard voices, and a curious humming noise. Something is going on."

"Snying of some sort," said Kerr.

"In a way, yes," said the captain. "The other case must be secured. He is more important than Lady, who is only his helper."

The captain sank down on the side of the bed. He was evidently in a state of weakness from his imprisonment.

"You are wounded?" said Tom anxiously.

"Yes. It is not much, though it bled freely at first—a cut on the head," said Captain Cleveland.

"How did they catch you, dear boy?"

"I was in my study," said the captain, breathing hard. "I had no suspicion. But Hanswood has told me of all you had discovered. It is true that my chief object in taking this house was to discover if I could the German spies in this district who have been conveying information abroad. There were suspicious circumstances in connection with the German Hoffense, who disappeared after the outbreak of war, and I was far from satisfied with Lady. Whether he thought that I suspected him, or whether it was simply that my presence in the house prevented him from communicating with his German friends, I do not know; but I was attacked suddenly in the study. Lady had come in with a pretended message. He seized me, and while I struggled with him the other rascal leaped up through the trap in the floor. I fought hard; but I was stunned by a blow that laid my temple open, and when I awoke to I was chained up here!"

"But Jess?"

"I shouted at first, but I soon learned that these walls shut out all sound from the outside world—otherwise he would have gagged me, I suppose," said the captain. "I had been here, as it seemed to me, for centuries, when Hammond was brought here, and then I knew that at least I was being punished for."

"I know you would come in time," said Hammond. "I let that Swiss getter get the better of me; but, you see, I wasn't expecting 'em. I was in the study, a-searchin' for the secret door, when he came into the room suddenly-like, and almost walked over me. I had finished goin' over the walls, and was examining the floor, and grapples he showed I was on it. Anyway, he hit me a clip over the 'ead on the spot where I could say a word or call out to the bobby, and I ain't a chance to struggle. Then he must 'ave brought me 'ere—not that I remember anything but a thunderin' 'cud-der!"

"But Jere! He is a thorough wassol!" said Arthur Augustus. "You proves that they were all wassols to deal with anybody who gave them trouble. They must have had these chains heah all woady. But what is their little game? They must be playin' some awfully witten trick heah to take all this trouble to keep it dark?"

"That's what we're going to find out," said Tom Merry. "We've got one villain, and now we're going to collar the other."

"Yess, waddah?"

Captain Cleveland rose to his feet again. His face was very pale, but it was very determined.

"The door is locked," he said. "Lady always locked it after him."

"I've got his keys here," said Kerr. "Take care," said the captain anxiously. "The German is a powerful man, and he will be desperate. I cannot allow you to run risks!"

"Wah!" said Arthur Augustus. "That's what we're heah for, doah boy. As you are wounded, you had better keep behind, and leave it to me!"

"Row-ow!" said Kerr. "Let the captain go fast, and we'll be ready to back him up. I think this is the key!"

The key turned in the lock. Tom Merry put the light out quickly. The door was softly opened, and there was nothing but darkness beyond.

But as the juniors looked into the deep gloom they were aware of a glimmer of light that came from beneath a door at a little distance. There was a narrow passage before them, barely wide enough for two to proceed abreast. As they pressed on stealthily into the passage, there came a low, buzzing sound from behind the door in front of them.

Captain Cleveland uttered a low exclamation.

"It is as I suspected!" he muttered.

"Lead on, sir!" said Blake, grasping his poker.

The captain felt over the door before him, and turned the handle, and swung it suddenly open.

A bright light gleamed upon their eyes.

Before them was a small, round room, fitted up as a laboratory, lighted by electricity.

The buzzing sound was louder for a second, and then it suddenly ceased. A burly, blond-bearded German leaped up from an instrument and spun round, his face going white.

The captain rushed forward, forgetting his sword and his weakness.

"Surrender, you scoundrel!" he cried.

The German uttered a fierce oath.

"Yes!"

He dragged a revolver from his pocket.

But at the same instant Blake heaved the poker, and it

struck the scoundrel full in his face, and he reeled back with a yell of agony.

Before he could rise the juniors were upon him.

Tom Merry's poker descended with a crash upon the head that was going the other way, and the German shrieked again, and let the weapon fall.

But he struggled furiously as the juniors grasped him.

"Pile in!" gasped Blake. "The boat's as strong as a horse!"

"Aah!"

"Collar him, doah boys!"

"Pile on him!"

The crowd of juniors piled on him in deadly earnest. The German, burly as he was, was simply crushed under the weight of numbers. Folly Wynn plumped down on his chest, and the unfortunate rascal gave a gasp and collapsed.

In a few minutes the juniors had bound him hand and foot with handkerchiefs, twisted for the purpose.

The German lay panting.

"Aah! I see it is all over!" he muttered. "Aah! But I had served some 'Valerian'!"

"What the deivens was he up to?" exclaimed Wally.

"Wireless," said Captain Cleveland quietly.

"My hat!"

"Wireless telegraphy, by gum!"

"And we have suddenly cut off the message he was sending," said the captain grimly. "It will be a surprise for his friends at the other end—in Berlin, or wherever they are!"

"But Jere!" said Arthur Augustus, in almost an awed voice. "Except the wassol heah able to send messages from heah to Berlin?"

"Easy enough with wireless," said Kerr. "It was a jolly cute dodge. This place is quite hidden in the roof. It must have cost them hundreds of pounds to fit it up. And it was fitted up long before the war, the Germans had it all ready. And I shouldn't wonder if there are a dozen places like it, too, scattered about the country, sending off information to the scoundrels in Berlin!"

"This one is stopped, at any rate," said Tom Merry. "It will be rather a surprise for Mr. Stout-to-morrow. In his sudden wireless he didn't think of anything like this. I want to see his face when we tell him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Inspector Stout was indeed surprised on the following morning.

But he was more satisfied than surprised. He cheerfully took off Kasper Lady and Herr Hoffmann to prison, and before he had got them there he was pretty well satisfied in his own mind that he had handled that case remarkably well, and that if he did not receive promotion for it, it would be because really capable men always were passed over by the powers that be.

Cousin Ebbel was even more delighted than the worthy inspector. His brother had come back safe and sound, though the cut on his head was painful and troublesome. Hammond, too, had a lump on his head; but he did not mind. It was an honorable war, received in doing his "little bit," as he called it, against the common enemy.

Kasper Lady and Hoffmann went to their just deserts; and the secret of the Towns, being a secret no longer, the house-keeping took place after all.

And, needless to say, Tom Merry & Co. were made very much of at the house-warming, and they had the time of their lives; and when that good time was over they were consoled by the prospect of the aviation that awaited them when they returned to St. Jim's.

THE END.

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IT PLEASED THEM.

Artist: "Did you take my picture to the exhibition?"
 Pictor: "Yes! It seemed to please the gentlemen very much."
 Artist: "Oh, that's good! What did they say?"
 Pictor: "Well, they didn't say anything, sir; but they laughed that 'carty!'—Sent in by Cyril Osborne, Malvern.

SURROUNDED.

"Heard the latest news?"
 "No. What is it?"
 "The British Fleet is surrounded in the North Sea."
 "What, not by the Germans, surely?"
 "No, by water, of course. Good-day!"—Sent in by L. Newcastle, Haynes Park.

"THOUGHT."

Private —, of the —th —, was sitting in his trench, and making the most of his opportunity by writing a letter to home.
 Suddenly he looked up, with a puzzled frown, and inquired:
 "Say, mate, how do you spell 'fert'?"
 "F-o-r-t," said one.
 "No; that's not what I mean," said Private —.
 "F-o-r-t," suggested another.
 "No; that's the fort we capture. What I mean is the fort we funk with."—Sent in by Miss L. Barrows, Clanton, Cardiff.

THEIR MISTAKE.

A party of sailors from a British battleship, stopping at Samoa before the war, went ashore to the German Consulate and demanded liquid refreshment.
 "This is not a hotel," said the offended official.
 "Well, if it's not a pub, what's that black feul being outside for? Ain't it your sign?" inquired the spokesman.
 The "sign" was the German eagle—the consular coat-of-arms.—Sent in by E. Thomas, Southend, Essex.

MYSTIFYING.

The day before a total eclipse of the sun in the Southern States of America, an eminent astronomer sought out his old black servant, and said:
 "Sure, if you watch your chickens to-morrow morning, you'll find that they will go to roost at eleven o'clock."
 On the morrow the old negro was very surprised to find that all the astronomer had foretold came to pass, and, considerably mystified, he went to his master and asked:
 "Pardners, how long ago did you know dat dem chickens was goin' to roost in de mornin'?"
 "Oh, about a year ago," replied the professor.
 The negro looked very worried for a moment, and then blurted out:
 "But, massa, dem chickens was not 'atched a year ago!"—Sent in by A. A. Smith, Lewisham, S.E.

LIFE'S ILLUSIONS.

It was Johnnie's first day at school, and as there wasn't a desk for him, the teacher told him to sit in the front seat for the present.
 When the class was dismissed, Johnnie still remained seated.
 "Well, Johnnie," exclaimed the teacher, "why haven't you gone home?"
 "Please, miss," piped Johnnie, "you told me to sit here for the present, and I'm waiting for it. I want to take it home."—Sent in by F. Wright, East Cotes, I.O.W.

HIS REASON.

Quilriver timidly approached his boss's desk, and testified greatly that he would like to have a day off next Wednesday.
 The boss turned a fierce glare upon him, and growled sternly:
 "Look here, you know perfectly well that we're frightfully busy! Why on earth do you want next Wednesday off?"
 "Well, you see, sir, I was going to be married on Wednesday, and I—I should like to be there."—Sent in by M. Eastman, Westcliff.

THE GREATER NEED.

The schoolmaster wanted to know whether the boys had an understanding of the duties of a consul in a foreign country.
 "Supposing," he said, "someone took you up in an aeroplane, and after a long, exciting flight dropped you down, thousands of miles from home, in a foreign country, what place would you seek out first?"
 "A hospital, sir!" shouted a smart youth in the back row.
 —Sent in by H. Marshall, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

TAKEN LITERALLY.

"I can't get to sleep at night," complained the boarder to his landlady. "There's been a terrible shuffling and bumping in the room above mine for several nights past. Last night it was worse than ever."
 "Oh, that's all right," replied his landlady. "It's only me 'sleping takin' his medicine. The doctor told him to take it two nights running, and skip the third night. You needn't be alarmed."—Sent in by L. Enderby, Grimsby.

MARHOMET AND THE MOUNTAIN.

The conductor stretched out his hand and stopped the "ban. He painfully twisted his neck and looked up the stairs, but nobody seemed to want to descend.
 The weary conductor slowly pulled himself up on top, and addressed an absent-minded individual in one of the back seats.
 "Exc, you," he said, shaking the thoughtful one, "don't yer want Westminst'ere Abbey?"
 "Er—yes," replied the passenger, with a start.
 "Well, you'd better come down for it. I suppose yer don't want me to bring it up 'ere, do yer?"—Sent in by W. Briggs, Bradford, Yorks.

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SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS.

Bob Hall, a fine, strapping young fellow, succeeds in joining a famous hussar regiment known as the Die Harde. After Bob has been in the regiment some time, his no-or-do-well cousin, Captain Lascelles, joins also. Bob feels that, far from being friendly, Lascelles is constantly endeavouring to get him into trouble, with the object of having him dismissed from the Service in disgrace. Bob, however, with the help of his many friends, is successful in defeating the villain's schemes. The Die Harde are ordered to Ireland, and while the regiment is in Dublin, Bob comes in contact with the Earl of Dalkey, who believes that our hero is some connection of his family, and promises to have investigations made. Shortly after this the marriage takes place, and Bob is given the duty of outpost, and has to give warning of the approach of a body of the enemy. He is dragged by men in the employ of Captain Lascelles, and, while he is unconscious, is taken from his post. The opposing body got past the line of outposts, owing to Bob's absence, and the captain in charge of Bob Hall's detachment is furious. Trooper Hall is in deep disgrace!

(Now go on with the story.)

The Cry on the Moor!

The sergeant, hurrying back from the front, stopped abruptly, and his face grew comically dismal.

"We've been had!" he grunted. "How is the world—Why, bless my life, if them ain't the Light Bobs right looked for!"

"There's been a big mistake," Dyball explained crossly. "Lieutenant Groves tells me he came over the mountains on the left. What have the boys been doing? They ought only to have stopped this lot."

Baxter wheeled round, and started razzing the length of the outposts. Every man was at his post as he roared along; and, what's more, seemed wide awake and alert.

"Cut along back to the reserves!" he bawled as he passed his section. "You're doing outpost duty for the blessed enemy! They've fairly walked round us!"

Every soldier gazed blankly after the sergeant, hardly believing their ears. He scolded on breathlessly until he came to the spot where he had posted Bob. The lad, of course, was no longer there, and Baxter gazed around amazedly.

"Hall let 'em through!" he grunted. "Hall, as I pined my faith on. The young cur! The lazy, idle, looting scoundrel! Where is he, anyhow? If I knock up against him I'll not care to try to keep my hands off him, the whelp!"

Baxter tramped about, bawling out Bob's name, but no answer came from the boulder, heather, or shrub. Trembling with rage, the sergeant stamped back to the spot where the soldiers were now gathering in a body.

"Well, have you found out anything?" Dyball inquired sternly.

"Yes, sir. The enemy got past Hall. He's to blame!"

"There is he?"

"Looking about here somewhere, I s'pose. He'd left his post when I got there."

"Ha! I'll make an example of him! Call him out, and let the men see you. They'll hear what I think of him."

"Private Robert Hall!" Baxter bawled.

THE GAZETTE—No. 262.

There was no answer.

"Private Hall, ye thaidin'!"

Dent and Hosty had been whispering eagerly, and now they both advanced.

"Go back!" yelled Baxter. "Don't ye know your names, that ye come out of the ranks like a pair of sheep, silly old women? Get back, and thank yer stars!"

Dent saluted, and advanced doggedly.

"I want to speak to the captain," he began. "Hosty and I—"

"The captain don't want and truck with ye," Baxter rapped out. "He's trookin' enough as it is. Stand back, there! Private Hall! Private!"

"It's about Hall!" Dent said his voice. "We suspect—"

"Garn! How clever ye are! I don't suspect any longer; I know! Where is he? Why don't he step forward! If he's wryk to bid—"

"He's not here!" Dent shouted. "Can't ye listen, sergeant? If the captain will only allow us to—"

"Come forward, men!" Dyball cried. "What's this ye want to say? Look sharp; we have to be getting on the move at once."

Dent and Hosty passed Baxter, and stood before Dyball and Groves.

"This 'ere lockst belongs to Hall, sir," Dent began harshly. "I found it in the shanty yonder when we rashed in. I'd know it anywhere. We suspect foul play, sir. And as Hall ain't here, and as he's about the last to leave his post when on duty, we believe something has happened to him."

"Foul play!"

"Yes, sir."

Dyball looked at Groves and Baxter.

"Hall was on duty at the end of the line, and he was close to the ruin," Baxter began. "If anyone—"

"But who would try to injure the lad? Why—"

"He's got enemies, sir!" Dent continued firmly. "The night afore last they tried to drown him, and only for Hosty and myself they would have succeeded. That's why he turned up late at Paddyshaws. I'm certain he's in danger; and, if you'd allow Hosty and myself to make tracks after a cart as passed as a while ago—"

"I remember!" Groves interjected. "It came round the road just as we started to cross the hill. You don't think that these fellows were up to mischief, do you?"

"There were cart-tracks in the ruts where I found this 'ere lockst," Dent replied gravely. "The horse and cart must have been backed in where the side wall had fallen. That's a queer business itself, for there was no roof and no shelter for a horse there. I'm certain some Hall ain't to blame for being from his post. We've known him and chummed with him ever since he joined the regiment, and—"

"I trusted Hall," Baxter remarked dolefully. "I never thought he'd go an' play a low trick on me like that. It's because I reckoned I could rely on him that I put him at the far end of the line."

"Well, he's not here, and that's enough to justify me in sending you after him," Dyball decided. "Follow up that cart, you men, and see if you can get any news about him. Arrest him, if possible, and bring him back to camp. Let's hope he's not to blame for bringing this disgrace on us; and, also, I trust you'll find that he's safe and sound. It's a bad

business, however one looks at it; but I'll hold back my report on the off-chance that we may be able to clear certain snafus. — Here comes Haines. Now we're ready to start."

Deat and Hesty mounted their chargers and rode around to the deserted shanty. There they got on the tracks of the cart, and forthwith started in pursuit. The road led them round the mountain-side and out on to a wild, bleak country, reclaimed in small patches, but mostly strewn with stones and covered with heather.

On and on they rode, until the sun sank and darkness was rapidly closing round. Every few minutes now one or other of the troopers dismounted, the better to see if the cart-tracks were still evident, and at last Hesty had to strike a match to make certain.

Deat groaned severely.

"We're about played out," he growled, looking through the gloom across the bleak moorland. "Four odd Bob! I feel certain he's in trouble, but what can we do to save him? If only the light had lasted for an hour longer we might—"

The wind was rising, and a gust swept across from the west as Deat was speaking. Borne on the breeze came a pleading cry, and both soldiers started and listened eagerly. Again it was repeated:

"Help—help!"

A Friend in Need.

"Help! Help!"

Once more the cry reached across the moorland, and Deat and Hesty, leaving their chargers, raced with a common impulse from off the road over a ditch and on to the marshy ground. They had tracked down Bob, but would they be in time to save him? Moments now were precious.

Struggling along, slipping in the oozy marsh now to the right, and now to the left, they hurried up and down the bleak expanse, afraid to shout for fear the lad's enemies might catch their feet and work the sooner; listening anxiously for a guiding voice, and hearing only the moaning of a rising gale and the shrill cry of a curlew croak.

From one of a small thicket a hundred yards away two figures sprang suddenly, and raced before the approaching troopers. They made for a belt of stunted trees on the far side of the marsh, and Deat and Hesty let them go. For underneath that thicket they knew they would find Bob, and, trembling as they thought what their search might disclose, they covered the intervening distance in a solemn silence.

"Bob!"

Deat knelt down and lifted up the lad's head and rested it on his knee. The face was pale, and the eyes were closed. His hands were still warm; otherwise he gave no sign of life.

"There ain't no marks of violence about him," Deat whispered. "This is no more'n a faint, though. What ever shall we do?"

Clatter! Clatter! Klip, klip, klip!

A horse's hoofs were pounding the road that fringed the marsh, and Deat looked eagerly at his chron.

"Stop that bicker, whoever he is," he suggested. "Commandeer his trap! We'll have to get Bob out of this scrape, so don't stand on ceremony. Just you—"

Hesty sprang to his feet and sped across the marsh. He jumped the ditch in his stride, and a horse harnessed to an old-fashioned gig reared up in startled surprise as the trooper landed close to its head. A volley of angry abuse was hurled at the soldier.

"Hallo! Stand back there, you scoundrel! You nearly had us in the ditch, you thieving rascal! I'll warm your jacket for you! FU— Ah! Would you? Then take that—and this!"

The thong of a whip whistled through the air, and Hesty, to dodge the blow, caught the horse by the bridle, and stood at his head. It plunged forward as the thong fell on its neck, but the trooper held it with a grip of steel.

"All right, gas'ard! Keep your word on!" he shouted. "Serry to bother you, but there's been foul play around here. I'm a soldier, and a man of mine is mortal bad out on the marsh yonder. We want help. So I run across to stop you."

"What's the matter with him? If you want me to lend a hand you might be more civil. Hi, there, Pat, you lazy vagabond, jump down and catch hold of the mare's head! If that fellow tries on any of his games just knock him into the middle of next week. There, that's right! Now, my bold highwayman, look sharp, and no hawking! Dr. O'Rafferty has got a handy pair of fists, as perhaps he'll show you afore he's done."

A stout figure, enveloped in a heavy frieze coat, had bounded out as to the road, and now advanced, showing a

round, good-humoured, weather-beaten face and a pair of twinkling eyes. For all his dire threats the Irish doctor was the embodiment of good humour.

"You're a doctor?" Hesty cried. "Then you're the bloke we want. My chron is unconscious!"

"I thought everyone knew me! I'm the dispensary doctor in this district, and I'm on the road night and day," O'Rafferty growled. "Small pay I get, too, for driving to every odd woman as thinks she's got a pain or an ache. However, if there's anyone as I I s'pose I'd better look after him. What ails your friend? This is a rum place for him to be, anyhow."

Hesty was nudging back across the moor, the hard-worked physician following and grumbling as he slipped about on the soft slush, but when he saw Bob his manner changed on the instant. He felt the lad's pulse, listened to his heart, then touched the globe of his eyes with his stethoscope.

"Lift him up and carry him along to the trap as fast as you can!" he commanded the trooper, resting back sharp! "It's three miles from here to my dispensary! Foul play, did you say? I s'pose you're right. It's touch and go with the lad whether he ever comes back to consciousness again!"

Deat and Hesty needed no second bidding. Lifting Bob between them, they ran across the marsh and placed him in the gig.

"Come along the pair of you, as fast as you can!" the doctor shouted, as he sprang into his seat and seized the reins. "Keep up, if you can; if you can't you must follow on anyhow."

The horse sprang forward, the gig wheels clattered over the loose snow, whilst the worthy doctor cracked his whip and yelled to the team to quicken its pace. Up hill and down dale he tore, whilst the troopers, resting back sharp to their chargers, vaulted into their saddles and galloped madly after him. The strange procession raced through a village, to the surprise and consternation of the quiet folk, who peeped their heads out of the windows, hawking to one another to know the cause of the row; and raising in the horse at a neat but insignificant cottage, O'Rafferty hurried through the door, and bade the soldiers carry Bob in without delay.

They stretched the lad on a sofa, and the doctor at once adapted all restorative measures possible. He poured water over Bob's face, gave him all volatile, and for half an hour worked hard to induce artificial respiration. Deat and Hesty, under O'Rafferty's instructions, administered first-aid, and two anxiously and laboriously doing all they could, and watching in a tense silence for the first symptoms of returning consciousness. At last, to the rebounding joy of the troopers, Bob's eyelids flickered, and with renewed energy his resuscitated the work. Another hour had passed, however, before the crisis struggle was over, and the doctor was able to pronounce the lad out of danger.

"Phew! It's been a fight, and no mistake!" O'Rafferty sighed, as he sat down exhausted and mopped his forehead. "Let him be as he is for a spell, poor chap! When you've had a breather we'll carry him upstairs and put him to bed. And now let me how it happened that he got a dose of leadenism."

"What?"

"I said leadenism. That's what's been the matter with him."

"The ears?" Deat growled. "They tried to take his life?"

"Who?"

"I don't know their names, but Bob Hall yonder has had a set of villains on his track ever since we landed in Ireland."

"Bob Hall! Is that chap yonder Bob Hall?" the doctor cried, rising in undignified amazement, and staring first at Deat and then at Bob. "Jupiter! If this isn't an astounding business! Then I've s'posed—"

O'Rafferty stopped abruptly, and stared long and fixedly at the prostrate lad. "You fellows had better scud back to barracks," he said at last, coming out of a reverie. "Hall must stop the night with us. It wouldn't do to send him on a journey after what he's gone through."

"You know something about him?" Deat began. "You know—"

"Never mind what I know," O'Rafferty interjected. "I'm his friend, and I'll look after him. Lift the poor chap up, and carry him along the passage and up those stairs. He can lie on a bed, I'll be a lot to think of, and I don't feel like nursing him. I'll have a pipe and put on my considering-cap. Crambs! So that lad is Bob Hall! Well, I'm blomed!"

Deat and Hesty rode back to camp, and O'Rafferty, making up the fire, sat down in an armchair and prepared for a night's vigil. Bob slept peacefully, and the doctor, smoking his pipe, mumbled frequently with many expressions of surprise, and now and then stooped to the bedside and looked down at his young patient.

The long hours dragged through slowly; dawn broke, and the sun was in the heavens before Bob opened his eyes, greeted

wonderingly around, and then stared at the stout, strong figure lashed up in the archaic.

"Where am I?" the lad gasped.

"Dr. O'Hafferty is my name, the advice out of his pipe. This is my house, and you're in my bed, and I hope you find it comfortable. Your name's Bob Hall, ain't that so?"

"Yes, Hal."

"Well, Hal, I'm glad to see you, and you're welcome to stay here as long as you like. Your father and I were old friends. I knew him long ago, when he was a big pot and I was only a youngster.

Bob struggled to rise, but he was feeling so weak that he could do no more than rest on his elbow.

"You knew my father?"

"Rather: You're in luck, my lad. Why, you're the heir to five thousand a year! You've only to come along and put your fist on the scale. Lie quiet, there till you have some breakfast, and then we'll go off and fix the business up."

"But how is it that I'm here?" the lad inquired again, as he sank back on the pillow. "This is all so wonderful! I never saw you before, and now I'm in your house, and you ask me your name, and—"

"A couple of troopers stopped me as I was driving along by Windy Crossway last night, and I walked over the moors and found you lying there half-dead," O'Hafferty explained. "You were dragged! You may have been foul enough to try to injure yourself, or some scoundrel may have attacked you, for all I know. Anyhow—"

"Ah, I remember!"

The lad struggled to get out of bed.

"I must get back to camp; I'm supposed to be a doctor!" he cried. "I was on duty—on outpost duty—and I fell asleep. I don't remember any more until I awoke to find a couple of villains holding me down, and—and I must go at once. Don't try to stop me; I tell you I must go!"

"You can't go; you're not fit to make the journey."

O'Hafferty replied, as he laid his strong hand on Bob's shoulder. "Don't worry, my lad; your doctors here grow back to the camp, and they will explain your absence. Stay quiet there till you have some food. Then I'll give you a tonic that will set you up, and you and I will drive into Dublin. Who knows? Perhaps before the day is over you

may buy yourself out of the Army, and be glad to be quit of it, too."

"I'll never do that—not likely?" Bob scoffed indignantly.

"I'm none proud of the King's uniform than anything else in the world! If I had a million a year I'd be a soldier still! Hatter! No fellow worth his salt would leave the colors once he has the luck to join 'em!"

"Well, you're a true soldier, anyhow!" the doctor grinned admiringly. "I like your grit, and the way you look at things, too. Here comes the breakfast, so fall to whilst I go downstairs and have mine. I won't let you up until you've made a square meal, so there's no use groaning. I'll be back before long."

An old woman had carried in an appetizing breakfast, and Bob needed no second bidding to comply with the doctor's suggestion. He was ravenously hungry, though his head still throbbled painfully. The meal strengthened him considerably; and when O'Hafferty, later on, gave him a tonic, his head ceased, and he felt as fit as ever. Tossing out of bed, he got into his uniform, and descended the stairs, to find the doctor sitting in the gig and awaiting his arrival.

"Jump in!" he cried cheerily.

"I've got him!" Bob cried.

"You have! Then the wonder to me is how you haven't come into your money before now!"

THWARTED!

Lascelles sat gloomily in his room, gazing into the fire. He had come back to Dublin on furlough. On a small table at his side lay a stack of letters, and he shivered as he glanced at them.

"Retired—retired!" he groaned. "I'm bankrupt; and disgraced, unless—unless—"

There was a knock at the door, and his orderly Cole entered the room. That scoundrel's eyes were glistening with excitement.

"Mr. Herbert Betts, the solicitor, has called to see you, sir," he whispered eagerly. "He's coming up the stairs, and—"

Lascelles sprang to his feet.

"Show him up, and hold your tongue, you fool!" he hissed. "Clear out of this, but keep close, so that you can hear me if I ring for you. Don't look as if you suspected anything. Get out before he reaches the landing. Go!"

The private hastily obeyed the officer's orders, and in a couple of seconds more he opened the door again, his face now as solemn and void of expression as a funeral's.

"Mr. Betts!" he announced. Then he closed the door, and Lascelles and the lawyer were left alone.

Lascelles still stood on the hearthrug. By a powerful effort he had conquered his feelings, and now he gazed languidly at the lawyer, as if the latter's intrusion was far from welcome. Betts was a man about fifty years of age, grizzled and hard-featured, with a mouth like a steel trap. His small, grey eyes hastily scanned Lascelles, and, despite the command he had over his emotions, a faint look of surprise crept into his face as he saw the indifference with which his arrival apparently had been received.

"How do, Betts!" Lascelles drawled. "Take a chair, and make yourself at home. I can give you five minutes, not more. Then I must clear out to keep an appointment. Shocking weather, isn't it?"

The shrewd lawyer glanced at the table, littered with letters from creditors demanding immediate payment of their accounts, and then he allowed a faint smile to flicker for an instant around his leather lips.

"Don't let me detain you, Captain Lascelles," he replied softly. "My business will do at any time, and I can call again."

The shot told. Lascelles was startled out of his pretended indifference; and, to hide a grin, Betts rubbed his mouth with his heavy hand.

"No, no; I'm not in such a hurry as all that!" the officer rapped out eagerly. "Get on with the business, Betts. There's matter if I'm a bit late."

"I've called about young Robert Hall," Betts again.

"Oh! I'm not interested in him, as you know well," Lascelles rejoined, with a mocking smile. "I've employed you about my own affairs, and not to speak about the business of other people. I want you to raise a loan of ten thousand pounds on my property, and I hope you'll be quick about it. You have good security, and there ought to be no delay."

"Your right to the property depended upon a contingency," the lawyer replied, watching the officer's face with false alacrity.

"I subscribed it under the will of my uncle, Alce Hall."

"Yes, provided his son did not live."

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"Quite so."

The two men gazed at one another fixedly.

"Bob Hall is alive!" Betts whispered.

Lascelles, white to the lips, staggered back and clutched the mantelpiece for support.

"Impossible!" he gasped. "Haven't the fools done their work properly? Haven't— Come, man, let us throw all this sort of talk to one side; I had hoped that you had come here to tell me that the young 'un had been found on White Common, and that the police had been called in."

"Yes; and, bearing that Hall was out of your way for ever, you ought to have a high hand with me, the rascally lawyer asserted. 'Your game was to profess that you had not employed me to do your dirty work. If all was found out, you were resolved to throw me to the wolves and grab the money. I saw that in your face when I came into this room. I know you now for what you are!'

"Have the police been informed? Does Hall know who arrested him? Could he identify the man?" Lascelles cried, trembling with fear. "Confound it, Betts, you tell me nothing! How was it to be managed to escape? Who rescued him? Speak, man! Can't you see that this apprehension is more than I can stand?"

"A couple of his chums in his regiment suspected, and followed the man," Betts replied, wincing at his dry lie. "Your fellows saw 'em, and made a bit of it. That middle-sized 'un O'Rafferty was going by, and came to their assistance. He took the youngster to his house, restored him all right, and now the pair have gone to Lord Dalkey's. If it had been anyone else it wouldn't have mattered, but O'Rafferty knows all. It's tough and go with you now, and I've come to warn you that you'd better scotch!"

Lascelles drew forth his handkerchief and wiped the damp moisture from his forehead. His hand shook, but yet he showed signs of returning resolution.

"Where can I go to?" he demanded. "I've got no money, as you know well. I've staved off my creditors as long as I can, and since that confounded race over the bookies are down on me, I can't go—I won't go!" he continued angrily. "Yes and I see in the same boat, and you'll have to stand by me. Ah, I see what you mean! Well, what's your price? You hold the trump card now."

"You're concerned, I know, that all along, but I would have made my terms easier if you had showed any inclination to run straight with me," Betts rejoined grimly. "Yes, you're right to say you're in my power; and I mean to drive a hard bargain, too, but one that's fair as between us, all the same. O'Rafferty owns 'em; that young Hall is the key of the property, but he can't lay his hands on the proofs, can he? Ha, ha, ha! No one but Herbert Betts can do that!"

"The proofs—where are they?" Lascelles cried feverishly.

"Give them to me, and—"

"I make my own terms first," Betts interposed haughtily. "Don't waste your breath on promises, Captain Lascelles. I've got as hard for 'em. There's a document, sign it, and as soon as you do you'll have no more fear from young Hall. Not all the lawyers in Ireland could ever guess that he had a right to the property, if I didn't choose to speak up!"

Lascelles stepped a pace forward; his eyes were gleaming dangerously.

"You have the proofs with you?" he cried. "They're in your pocket! Show 'em to me. Let me feel sure that I'm safe, and then I'll sign anything that's fair. Show me—"

Betts retreated nervously.

"One thing at a time," he blustered. "I'm not going to trust you or any other man there'n I can help. You sign the paper, and then—"

"Ah, you've got 'em!"

Lascelles sprang forward like a panther as he spoke, and gripped the lawyer by the lapels of his coat. Betts struggled desperately, raising a shout as if he were to shake off his assailant. The twain bent and swayed; now the lawyer was almost free—now Lascelles had clutched him again and was forcing him backward, one hand gripping him by the throat and the other buried in his coat-pocket. The faces of both men were convulsed with wrath. They staggered backward. Betts tripped, and fell heavily; and Lascelles, leaning on the senseless lawyer's chest, drew forth the proofs of Bob's parentage and jumped exultantly to his feet.

He stepped to the hearth, where the bright coals shot up in a mass of fire. Fervently drawing some documents from an envelope, he scanned them for a few seconds. Then he flung them on the fire, and grasped the poker with which to hold them to the flames.

An arm shot over his shoulder, snatched the papers from the fire, and lifted them out of the danger. A hand at the elbow moment seized him by the neck, and flung him to one side. With a hoarse cry of baffled rage and alarm, Lascelles

looked up, to see a tall, burly man coolly shoving the documents into the capacious pockets of a loose, homespun jacket.

"You cur!" the officer gasped. "How dare you! These documents are mine. Give them back to me, or else—"

"They'll do where they are for the present, captain, whoever owns 'em," the intruder replied coolly. "I knocked twice at the door, but you an' the gent as is stretched out there was so busy clawing one another that you took no notice of me, so I introduced myself, so to say. Not that I mean to apologise for coming to these 'ere comfortable quarters of yours, for ye know my business well. I'm after my own money as ye owe me, and I don't go till I get it. Mobbs these 'ere documents may come in handy if ye turn rosy and don't part up. That's straight talk, anyhow."

The burly, horse-looking individual tapped his chest where the proofs of Bob's parentage now lay concealed, and grinned slyly, as Lascelles, rising to his feet, advanced with closed fists as if he would fell him to the floor.

"Give them back!" the villain bawled.

"No fear! Just you stand your distance, or I'll let fly, as sure as my name's Gus Brand! You owe me five thousand over the race the other day, and if you don't pay down on the nail I'll put you up as a blocking. When you was paid, and now I've got to have my own!"

"I'll pay, you fool!" Lascelles urged. "Let me have those papers, and there'll be no difficulty about getting you the money. You don't know what they mean to me. Don't be an ass, Brand! Give—"

"Oh, that's the rap, is it? Them if they're as valuable as that, I guess they're so useful in my pocket as yours. You'll have 'em back when I get my money, not before. Ha! Ha! The old cur is getting on his legs again. I wonder what he'll have to say about this rumpus!"

Betts had slyly and painfully risen to his feet, and now was gazing, wild-eyed, at Lascelles and Brand.

"The papers!" he gasped. "Did you—"

"They're all right, guv'nor; I've got 'em," the book-maker replied coolly. "Yes're Betts, the solicitor, ain't you? So I thought. Dublin is not such a big place that a chap don't know pretty nearly everyone else. Well, just permits the captain here to do the right thing by me, and— Sakes! Here's Lord Dalkey! How do you lord?"

The old cur had advanced into the room as the bookmaker spoke, and Lascelles and Betts exchanged a look of blank despair. Behind the man walked Bob and Dr. O'Rafferty. Brand picked up his hat, smugly set on to the hanging and down the stairs, and neither Lascelles nor the lawyer dared to step him.

"Ah, Lascelles! I'm glad to find you at home, and also to see that Betts is here?" the old cur cried cheerily. "What do you think? Young Hall is your cousin. Dr. O'Rafferty and I have made certain of that. Betts, you have the proofs, I believe. I left them with you yesternight. Fetch them, like a good fellow, and then we'll welcome the son of my old friend back to his own again. Five thousand a year! Why, he'll be one of the richest men in the regiment!"

"The proofs! They've been stolen!" Betts gasped.

"They're lost—they're lost!"

O'Rafferty Behaves Like a Tramp.

Betts's statement was succeeded by a tense silence, except for the deep breathing from the five men in the room. The old cur blinked, almost stupidly, at the lawyer; the doctor gripped his stick, and his honest face grew purple. Bob went a little pale; but Lascelles for the first time began to look at em.

The villain's clever brain had at once seen how to make use of the predicament for his own evil ends.

"Yes, the papers have been stolen from Betts, and the poor chap came here in a terrible state to ask my advice. He knows that I'm interested in Hall," Lascelles began. "It's a bad business, but let's hope it will come right. Betts tells me that he locked the documents up in a tin box, and that he hadn't looked at them for years, as, of course, there had been no occasion. When he went to fetch them this morning he found they were gone. He has hunted everywhere in his office, and so far without success; but probably they are only mislaid. I've advised him to have another thorough search, as it's quite likely he put them in his safe, or in some other receptacle, long since, and has forgotten the incident."

"That's quite possible!" Lord Dalkey cried sagely. "Bill, Betts, you ought to have been more careful, and if these papers are lost I'll hold you responsible—mind that! Go back to your office, and—"

"Why should Betts have come here?" Bob demanded.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 267.

"Why should he console you, Captain Lancelotti? I've no reason to think that you are a friend of mine!" The earl turned quickly, and stared at the lad. There was a strange ring in Bob's utterance—one of scorn and disbelief.

"Why—of course do you mean?" Lord Dalkey cried, agitated. "Of course Lancelotti is interested in you! He's your cousin; he's—"

"It's a plot!" Bob cried huskily. "It's a vile trick! The papers have been destroyed! Lancelotti knew well that was what was being done! He hoped to gain by his villainy! He's had a hand in this business, and—"

"Hail, how dare you say that!" the earl shouted. "You forget yourself! You're carried away by anger, owing to what's happened; but, all the same, you should be ashamed to make such infamous assertions against an innocent and an honorable man!"

"An honorable man! Lancelotti an honorable man!" Bob scoffed indignantly. "You don't know what a scoundrel he is! It goes that he might inherit what's due to me, he'd stop at nothing! He set his villainous upon me to drown me some night or other. It's he that tried to do for me on Winkley Common!—he's a blackguard, a liar!"

"Silence!" Lord Dalkey thundered. "Don't dare to speak thus to your cousin before me! I won't have it, sir! I won't listen to it! You must be mad. You can't be reasonable for what you say. Lancelotti is my friend, and before long he'll be my son-in-law. I'm surprised at you; more shocked than I can say. If it wasn't that I believe you to be a son of my old father, I'd—"

"You're going to allow your daughter to marry a car like that!" Bob cried, in horror. "You're going to sacrifice her, to throw her away on a worthless, heartless scoundrel! Think again before you do it, Lord Dalkey. I can bring proofs in substantiation of what I say."

The lad's chest was heaving; his face was flushed with scorn and indignation; his eyes glittered with passion. The earl, too, was trembling from head to foot with anger. An upright and high-spirited man himself, his honest heart rebelled against any aspersion on the character of one who was his friend.

"You say you have proofs," the earl replied, striving hard to control himself. "I give you one choice before I wipe

you off my hands. Bring forward your proofs; I'm prepared to listen to them, though my heart and my common-sense tell me that I'm a fool to do so."

Bob paused. A feeling of dizziness crept over him. After all, what proofs had he got? The Falzes were fighting against him, and now he was about to lose the only true and careful friend he had made.

"Yes, I'd be very glad to see the proofs this insolent young scoundrel possesses," Lancelotti drawled. "I hope he'll produce them without delay. He has greatly incensed his superior officer before a room full of people, but I waive that; I won't repeat him. Come, Private Hall, produce your proofs at once!"

"Before long I'll have them," Bob retorted defiantly. "You're a very clever villain, and it's not easy to outwit you, but I'll do it. In a few days from now—"

"Enough!" the earl interposed loudly. "You have spoken disgracefully, and now you're trying to wriggle out, instead of frankly acknowledging the absurdity of your accusations and tendering an abject apology to the man you have wantonly insulted. As I said before, I think you must be mad to speak as you have done. For my part, I decline to take any further interest in you or your affairs until you come to your senses again. Mr. Betts, I'd be glad if you'd accompany me to my carriage. I want a few minutes' conversation in private."

Without deigning to look at Bob, the old earl walked away, followed by the lawyer, and the lad, gripping down a great surge of anger, was about to wheel round and march out of the room, when Dr. O'Hafferty laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Hail a mo'!" and the doctor went on. "You may not if anybody else is. You haven't yet told me, Captain Lancelotti, how it is that Betty came to you with the news that he'd lost the proofs of Hall's brightness. Betty is a wrong 'un; every chap in Dublin knows that. What business of yours was it to meddle in this lad's affairs?"

Lancelotti had gone grey in the face as the sturdy doctor addressed him.

"I don't know you, and I don't want to!" he retorted. "These are my rooms, sir, and it's a good piece of impertinence for you to intrude. Since you are here, however,

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We welcome any inquiries, and will send money back if you are not satisfied that Coal-Ore, promptly applied, will effect a saving of 50 per cent. Remember these things!

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"I'll tell you that I had nothing but the blindest feeling for this lad, and for some I had been hunting for my cousin."

Dr. O'Rafferty grinned expansively. "I don't believe one blessed word you've said," he replied cheerily. "My profession brings me in contact with all sorts of queer folk, and I'm not easily surprised, but I saw up that for cool cheek and readiness as a liar you fairly take the biscuit! Come on, Bob; we'll get out of this row, and leave that languid duke to cool down! The game's set up yet; I've something in my head that will surprise that scoundrel!"

Shaking his blackthorn in Lascelles' face, the doctor strapped out of the room, followed by Bob, and, hiding an outside car, he took the jerry drive straight to College Green Police Station. There he alighted, and, entering the charge-room, he added to an inspector sitting at a table:

"Come out of that, Austin Driscoll!" he shouted. "I want to have a word with you."

The inspector flung down his pen, and, advancing, he warily shook hands with the doctor.

"Here an' ages!" he cried. "Why, doctor, jowl, it's a long time surely since I clapped eyes on you! What can I do? I'm always at your service, as you know."

O'Rafferty led the way out into the street, and there he explained what he wanted.

"You know Betts, the attorney?" he began.

"O' course I do!"

"The biggest thief as ever walked down Dame Street!" O'Rafferty stated, in his blarney fashion. "I want him watched, Driscoll. He's in league with a Captain Lascelles, another scoundrel, to rob this young fellow here out of a fortune. This youngster's name is Robert Hall, the son of an old and respected friend of mine, called Alce Hall, who died years ago, leaving a will, by which Lascelles was to come into his money when he was thirty years of age; it this young chap died in the meantime. The lad so far can't prove his parentage, and Lascelles will be thirty in a month or so. Betts had the proofs of Bob's parentage, and now he says he's lost 'em. We found him to-day in Lascelles' quarters in the barracks, and there and then we heard that pair. You're a policeman. What do you think of it?"

The inspector grinned. "The way you put the matter makes it look very fishy," he replied.

"And it is fishy!" O'Rafferty affirmed hotly. "So I want you to keep an eye on Betts and on Brand, the bookbinder. He was coming out of Lascelles' quarters as we walked in, and we all know what sort Brand is. Seems to me, the paldest captain ain't over particular as to the company he keeps in that old slydog, you know, old chap. There's a law in that old saying, so there it is. Well, we must be off now, I'm—"

A soldier on horseback was clattering down the street, and Bob gave a cry of surprise as he recognized him.

"It's Bob!" he yelled.

The trooper reined in, and laughed when he recognized by whom he had been accused.

"That you, Bob?" he shouted. "Have you heard the news?"

"No!"

"The regiment is coming up to Dublin. A troop was sent ahead, and I'm doing orderly, I'm on the way back to barracks from the castle with despatches. We're off to foreign parts, see now, and the chaps are in high glee."

Bob's eyes grew round with surprise.

"To, to!" Bob cried, as he started off again. "Dest and the other chaps have come up ahead; you'll find 'em in barracks saying down. They've got there by this time, I reckon. I'm on duty, and I'd catch it hot if anyone twigg'd that I'd stopped on the road."

"That means that I won't be able to prove my rights," Bob remarked, turning to O'Rafferty. "Lascelles will soon, and I'll have to give up trying to beat him."

"You'd better get furlough. Tell you what it is—I'll lay you out," the doctor cried excitedly. "Hanged if I'd stop at anything!"

"I won't be bought out; I'll go wherever the regiment goes," the lad interrupted firmly. "The property may be lost—I s'pose it will—but I'd sooner be a private all my life than chuck the Service. I've joined it, and I'll stick to it through thick and thin."

"The lad's right," O'Driscoll assented heartily. "I'll help you all I can, O'Rafferty. Let him go where duty calls. You and I will work together, and we'll never rest until we expose the villain."

"Agreed!" cried the doctor. "Shake hands on that, Driscoll! Bob had better go and see the world."

(Another instalment of this fine yarn next week. Get your copy of the GEM now.)

IT MUST BE GOOD



"Flora, what will you turn round that corner of 'Chuckles' in the window? Me and Bill have read the funny page, and now we want to see the weekly outdoor cinema at the back."

IT'S "CHUCKLES."



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON E.C.
 OUR "THREE COMPANION" PAPERS!
 "THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.
 — LIBRARY — — POPULAR — — 1/2 — —
 EVERY MONDAY EVERY FRIDAY EVERY SATURDAY

For Next Wednesday—

"THE PRIDE OF ST. JIM'S!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next Wednesday's story of St. Jim's, entitled as above, is in every respect a masterpiece, and, although Mr. Clifford has turned out stinging tales of school life many a time and oft, he has certainly excelled himself on this occasion. A well-known travelling circus comes to the district, and Mr. Ruffell, the obstinate, obnoxious Housemaster, resolutely refuses to allow his charges to patronise the show. Needless to say, the indignant juniors take the law into their own hands, and trouble ensues. The enterprising heroes of the New House arrange with the circus proprietor to take the part of Prussian Guards, and in this safe disguise they succeed in leading "Ratty" a terrible dance. Amusing though the story is, however, there are incidents which give it a very high tone indeed. Especially fine is the chapter which tells how Figgins, the long-legged New House junior, with a heart of gold, performs a deed of unexampled valor, which stamps him for all time as

"THE PRIDE OF ST. JIM'S!"

PRAISE FOR THE PRINCE OF PAPERS!

It has fallen to my lot to receive many interesting and encouraging letters of late, and I only wish that space permitted me to reciprocate fully the kind sentiments of any many chaps who are considerate enough to drop their Editor a cheery note now and again.

The following bright missive from a girl friend came to hand recently:

"Chalk Face, Penbury.

"Dear Editor,—At last I have mustered up sufficient courage to write to you, hoping my news will give you pleasure.

"I am at present staying at a farm for my health, and about three miles from a town where some six thousand soldiers are billeted. As the land round the farm is considered ideal for sham-fighting, we see a good deal of the soldiers, with whom we are very friendly. Both the officers and men drop in for lunch occasionally.

"Some weeks ago we gave the men a parcel of books, into which one of my 'Magnets' had slipped. Next time the Tommies enter they asked for more news, as the story they read, 'The Fight for the Camp,' proved so enjoyable.

"As I buy the 'Magnet' and 'Gem,' every week, and my brothers read me the 'Penny Pop' and the 'Dreadnought' regularly, I of course, had quite a number of books, having been here some four months when the soldiers came.

"All the soldiers are very enthusiastic over the good old 'Gem' and its companion papers, and declare they are ripping reading matter. Needless to say, I heartily agree with them.

"Wishing you every success, I am, yours sincerely,

"R. L."

Many thanks, Miss R. L.! Yours is the sort of spirit which readers try daily to be congenial. I am very grateful to you for your kind support, and your brothers deserve something more than a passing word of praise for supplying you with the "Dreadnought" and "Penny Popular" each week. Thankful follows, these:

I trust that the pleasant air of Penbury will speedily restore you to a state of perfect health, and that you will continue to derive a large and lasting measure of enjoyment from the "Gem" and its world-renowned companion papers.

MASTER CARLTON APOLOGISES.

"MY CONDUCT WAS THAT OF A CAD!"

I was not without hope that Master Robert Carlton, the leader of the recent agitation against "The Gem" Library, would see the folly of being at loggerheads with so popular a journal, and apologise accordingly, and my hope was well founded. His apology, although belated, is none the less welcome.

Here is Master Carlton's letter:

"Manchester.

"Dear Editor,—I am not prepared to write this letter out of any motives of fear. It is a sincere expression of regret for the attacks I have repeatedly made on your paper.

"I have lately been doing some hard thinking, and now realise that my conduct was that of an utter cad. The League of which I was president has been dissolved, and my friends wish me to say that we found no fault with the 'Gem,' but were simply set to gain notoriety. I know how selfish this sounds, but there is an benefit to be derived from conceding the truth.

"It is perhaps too much to expect, after the way in which I have treated you, that you will cease me hereafter as one of your staunchest supporters; but, believe me, I will gladly do my best to repair any injury I have done to your journal, and my friends second this.

"I should like to add that we consider you have dealt very leniently with us, and your good-sensured advice has stood us in good stead.

"Believe me, yours respectfully,

"ROBERT CARLTON.

"P.S.—You may publish this letter if you wish, that all your readers may see that I am thoroughly ashamed of myself."

Thank you, Master Carlton. I am very glad that you have played up like a man and admitted your folly. Your frank letter will do much to restore you in the good graces of all Gemites, and you have my free and unreserved pardon for acting as you did.

The past is done with now; the future is your own. You seem to me to be a fellow possessing a great measure of influence for good or evil, and I advise you to look, not on what you may have done in the past to harm, but on what you can now do to help.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"'Gem' Advertiser"—I know of no remedy for the ailment you name.

"A Kirkwall Reader"—Thanks for your suggestion. I will bear it in mind and act upon it if possible.

"Inquisitive" (South Hackney)—Talbot's Christmas cards are Reginald, and his age is fifteen. Reeves' fixed Indian ink and their "H.P." cartridge paper are the best material for black-and-white sketching. You should write to these for their catalogue, Chesingode, London, E.C., in their address.

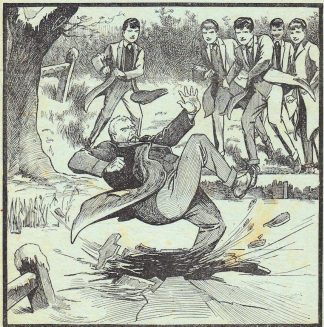
Wm. E. Deveraux.—Will you please let me know your correct address, as a letter sent to the one you gave has been returned through the post?

"A Young Girl Reader"—Many thanks for your interesting letter. The story dealing with Arthur, Augustus & Lucy was entitled "Through Thick and Thin," but I am sorry to say it cannot now be obtained from this office. Best wishes.

"A Manchester Reader"—Thank you for your letter. The St. Jim's team which did service on the occasion you mention was: Wagon, Hako, Noble, Lovell, Figgins, Mansons; F'Arcy, Dight, Mory, Glyn, Tallist. The oldest boys in the Shell and Fourth are Gore and Leeson respectively.

THE EDITOR.

Secure a Copy of our Companion Paper TO-DAY!



"One, two, three!" sang out Bob Cherry. "GO!" Whiz! The German spun in the air, crashed down on the frozen pond, and through the thin ice. "Grooogh! Huhhhhh!—(A Roaring Scene in the long complete school tale contained in the magnificent issue of the MAGNET LIBRARY, Now on Sale.)

ON SALE THIS FRIDAY!

The Penny Popular

**3 GRAND
COMPLETE
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NUMBER 123
VOLUME 5



HAS ANYBODY HERE SEEN GUSSY?

(An Amusing Incident in "Boaring the School"—one of the Three Complete Tales in this issue.)