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RESCUED!—NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON!

A Thrilling Scene in the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale in this Number. 62-55-58



CHAPTER I.

Missing from School!

BED-TIME, you kids!"

Ern Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, made that announcement from the doorway of the junior Common-room.

"There was an explosion of unusual gravity on Kildare's lips.

"Hain't Talbot come in yet?" he inquired.

"Talbot?" asked Tom Merry, in surprise. "I didn't know he had gone out, Kildare!"

"He must have done," said the Sixth-Former. "The Head's sent for him, on a most urgent matter, and he can't be found anywhere."

"My hat!"

Shall fellows and Fourth-Formers exchanged bewildered glances.

Only a couple of hours before, Talbot had been with them in the quadrangle. He had passed to and fro, discussing the one topic which was absorbing everybody at St. Jim's—namely, the kidnapping of Marie Rivers, the school nurse, by a man named Dawlish, formerly a member of the gang of crooks to which Talbot had belonged in his early days.

"Bad Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth. "I trust Talbot hasn't gone out on the wamble, dear boys!"

"Don't be an ass, Geary!" snapped Tom Merry. "You ought to know Talbot better than that!"

"Yass; but this diversion' business of the kidnaping may have driven him to drink!" said Arthur Augustus. "He was very upset about it, you know. I heard him remark that he couldn't stand it much longer."

"That doesn't necessarily mean that he's gone to drown his sorrows at the village tavern," said Jack Blake. "Nothing could be more ridiculous!" said Kildare.

"Wally, Kildare! I vewy much respect yer remark's bel's' characteristic a, widdulous—"

"Shut up!" snapped Kildare. "Off to bed, everybody!"

The juniors trooped out of the Common-room, and clustered up the stairs to their respective dormitories in a state of seething excitement.

Talbot of the Ninth was missing! In the Head's study, Dr. Holmes and Mr. Rathbone sat waiting. They had been waiting, in fact, for close on two hours.

"There was a sudden tap on the door.

"Ah!" murmured the Head. "Talbot has arrived at last! Come in!"

But it was not Talbot who entered; it was Kildare.

"Have you anything to report, Kildare?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"Nothing, sir! I have made an exhaustive search for Talbot, and I can safely say that he is nowhere in the building."

"How your soul! Can you suggest what has happened to the boy, Kildare?"

The captain of St. Jim's shook his head.

"It's a puzzle, sir," he said. "Talbot was in the Class two hours ago, and he hasn't been seen since."

"Did he have a late pass given him by one of the prefects?" inquired Mr. Rathbone.

"No, sir," said Kildare. "I've questioned everybody. Talbot is certainly out—and he is out without permission."

The Head nodded gravely.

"Thank you, Kildare!" he said. "That is all. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

When Kildare's footsteps had died away along the corridor, the Head turned to Mr. Rathbone.

"What do you make of this, Rathbone?"

"I can only conclude, sir," said the Home-master, "that Talbot has left the school, without permission, in order to search for Miss Rivers. He probably thought that if he asked for your consent it would not be given."

The Head nodded.

"No doubt that is the case," he said. Dr. Holmes then turned his attention to the letter which had arrived for him by the evening post.

The letter was from Jim Dawlish; and it was a most remarkable epistle.

IN SEARCH OF MARIE!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Talbot of St. Jim's, in his search for his girl chum.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

The writer of it informed the Head that Marie Rivers was a prisoner in his hands. He went on to say that the price of Marie's release was a hundred pounds.

Dr. Holmes was asked to hand over this amount personally to the kidnapper.

"Meet me by the slip-post on the Wayland Road on Wednesday," the letter ran.

"You must come alone. I am an armed man, and if you bring anybody with you I shall fire. On receipt of the money Marie will be released."

Jim Dawlish also added that Talbot who had betrayed Marie was the hands of her captors.

The Head did not believe that moment. Neither did Mr. Rathbone. Not for that matter, did Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co.

But there were others who believed Talbot guilty. He was supposed to have quarrelled with Marie Rivers on the evening she was kidnaped; and he said Marie had both been absent from the school at the same time. Talbot had eventually returned alone. All this lent colour to the theory that Talbot had betrayed Marie.

For a long time the Head sat staring at Jim Dawlish's letter.

Both Dr. Holmes and his wife were devoted to Marie Rivers, and the Head was prepared to go to almost any lengths to recover the girl. But he was hardly prepared to meet the insolent representations of Jim Dawlish.

"Of course," a police-trap could be arranged for Dawlish on the night in question. On arriving at the spot post to meet me, he would at once be placed under arrest."

Mr. Rathbone shook his head.

"He would hardly be likely to walk into a trap, sir."

"What, then, do you advise me to do?"

The Home-master reflected for a few moments.

"I think I should be inclined to forward that letter to a private detective in London, and solicit his advice, sir. It is ample time till Saturday, and I mention your will be advised of the course to pursue."

"The Head nodded. "That certainly seems the best plan," he said.

Dr. Johnson turned up the address of a celebrated criminal investigator, to whom he forwarded the letter from Jim Dawlish. "I anxiously await your advice in this matter," the Head concluded.

The message was sealed and dispatched, and until a late hour that night the Head and Mr. Raffles remained in the former's study, recounting the exciting events of the past twenty-four hours.

The lights had long been extinguished in the dormitories of St. Jim's, but Tom Merry & Co. were wide awake, discussing the two things which were uppermost in their minds—the kidnapping of Marie Rivers, and the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Talbot of the Shell.

"Arthur Hacks could not refrain from losing some poisoned shafts.

"To me, the whole thing's as clear as daylight," he said. "Talbot quarrelled with Marie Rivers, and by way of revenge he caused her to be kidnapped. And then—"

There was a wretched chorus from Tom Merry & Co.

"That's quite enough, you said!"

"Of course," sneered Hacks, "you're pals of Talbot's, and you naturally don't like to hear the truth spoken. Talbot had a hand in kidnapping Marie. The letter from Jim Dawlish proves it!"

"We can safely trust the Head not to take the word of a double-dyed scoundrel like Dawlish!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

"But why," continued Hacks maliciously, "why should Talbot suddenly turn tail and run?"

"Because he knew that Dawlish was telling the truth, and he hadn't the pluck to face and face the man!" said Crooke.

"Heaven's!"

Tom Merry's voice rang out sharply.

"If there's another word said against Talbot," he exclaimed, "the fellow who says it will suffer!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He'll be layed alive, hauled in, and what's left of him will be publicly pulverised!" said Monty Leather.

"Ho, ho, ha!"

Both Hacks and Crooke had the sense to shut up. They and their previous anti-Talbot league were very much in the minority.

Tom Merry & Co. could not yet be quite certain why Talbot had suddenly departed, but they knew it was not from motives of fear.

One by one, the occupants of the Shell dormitory dropped off to sleep.

Tom Merry tossed and turned in his bed, trying in vain to court slumber. He was thinking of his absent chum, and of Marie Rivers.

Despite his strong friendship for Talbot, Tom could not help feeling of the rather mean of his share to go off without a word to anyone.

"He might at least have told me of his intentions!" muttered Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell stretched out his hand in order to make his pillow more comfortable.

It was then that his hand came into contact with what appeared to be a letter.

"My hat!" he murmured. "I wonder—"

In a twinkling Tom Merry was out of bed, and had lighted a candle.

There was a drowsy mumble from Monty Leather.

"That you, Tommy?"

"Yes."

"What's the little game?"

Tom Merry examined the handwriting on the envelope.

"Talbot's left a note," he said.

"Oh, good!" said Manners.

And Jim and Monty Leather left their beds, and crossed over to their chum. Tom Merry opened the letter, and this is what the Terrible Three read:

"My dear Tom.—I can't bear to read my book of St. Jim's any longer. Every hour that passes means less chance of finding Marie. I am going out to look for her, alone. I can't let you know any other way than by leaving this note, because at the time of writing you are just in the good with a stack of fellows, and I can't afford to risk being spotted."

"I am convinced that Jim Dawlish is hiding Marie somewhere in the neighbourhood, and I'm going to make it my business to discover where. If Dawlish moves out of the district, I shall follow up the trail.

"It's a bit reckless of me, perhaps, to take this step without permission; but even if it means expulsion, I'm going through with it. Marie must be found. Nothing else matters."

"Whatever happens, I shall not return to St. Jim's until I have achieved my object."

"I dare not give you an address to which you may write, in case this letter falls into other hands than your own. An answer, old fellow!"

"Ever yours,"

"R. TALBOT."

"My hat!" ejaculated Manners. "Old Talbot means business!"

"I guess this was his little game!" said Monty Leather. "Jolly good luck to him!"

"He needn't have any fears on the score of being spotted!" said Tom Merry.

"It's a pretty serious thing to break bounds without permission; but there are extenuating circumstances in this case. Marie's safety means more to Talbot than to anyone else."

"Yes, rather!"

"Whether Talbot succeeds in finding Marie or not, the Head won't sack him," said Manners.

"He'll expel," said Tom Merry.

"Either that, or he won't return to St. Jim's any more."

"Talbot's got heaps of resolution," said Monty Leather. "He's up against one of the stiffest jobs he's ever tackled, and he means to see it through. By Jove! it makes a fellow feel like banking (from the school and joining forces with him."

"But we don't know where he is," said Tom Merry.

"We've luck!" growled Manners. "We might be able to help him, if we knew."

"He's probably dogged himself as a grey-headed old jester with the good!" said Monty Leather.

"It would hardly be safe for him to wander about the district in Etona. He'd be captured."

"A disguise would give him a better chance of getting to grips with Dawlish, too," said Manners.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I feel jolly relieved to have got this note," he said, putting back into bed. "And now we'd better get to sleep, or we shan't be fit for the match tomorrow."

"What match?" asked Manners.

"The Wayland match, of course! We're playing the second eleven of Wayland Ramblers."

"But that doesn't concern me."

"Oh, yes, it does! We shall be without Talbot, and you'll have to come into the team in his place."

"Oh."

"I don't think any of us feel like foster, in the circumstances," said Tom Merry;

"but it's too late to cancel the fixture. We liked the Ramblers last season, and they certainly want their revenge. We must try to push this kidnapping affair to the back of our minds for shortly subsequent to it."

But this, as Manners pointed out, was far more easily said than done.

No football match between Etona and Wayland could possibly launch from the inside of the St. Jim's players the anxiety they felt for Marie Rivers, and for the plucky junior who had set out to her rescue.

CHAPTER 2.

A Chance Meeting.

"BOTHAM this kindly said!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bellowed the collar of his raincoat tightly about his elegant neck as he made that observation.

The junior eleven of St. Jim's were tramping over to Wayland for the match with the Ramblers.

As a rule, they looked forward to their football fixtures with pleasure and anticipation. But on this particular Wednesday afternoon they were not in the best of spirits. The fact that a great deal of permanent damage was falling and set out to their already low stock of cheerfulness.

"I wish it would clear up, or else pelt down like the deluges!" growled Figgion, of the New House. "This is neither one thing nor the other."

"The ground will be like a blasted quagmire!" growled Fatty Wynn. "I shall spend the afternoon on my hand and knees, I suppose."

"It's hardly fit," agreed Tom Merry.

"Ash! it's like the general verdict."

The St. Jim's juniors never quite lost hope that the Wayland Ramblers might consider the weather too hot to turn out. This hope, however, was speedily shattered.

When the footballers reached the ground they found the Ramblers already at practice.

Tom Merry shook hands with Jones, the rival skipper, and the St. Jim's eleven, leaving their raincoats in the dressing-room, lined up for the fray.

The rainclouds, as usual, and the game started before a handful of spectators.

Tom Merry's eleven, even though it lacked the services of Talbot, would have taken a good deal of beating in the ordinary way.

Fatty Wynn was in goal; Figgion and Kerr were at back; Dick Rollers, Monty Leather, and Clive comprised the half-back line; and the forwards—Tom Merry, Manners, Jack Blake, Harry Noble, and the one-and-only Arthur Augustus—were loomed worthy of their side.

With nothing on their minds, that eleven could have liberally "wiped up the ground" with the Ramblers.

Unfortunately, however, the juniors had a good deal on their minds.

They could not concentrate on the game. How could they, with Talbot missing from the school, and with Marie Rivers a captive in enemy hands?

Tom Merry did not lead the forwards with anything like his usual deadly precision. His play was tame and lifeless, and, moreover, in a foster match, is often as lifeless as enthusiasm. The rest of the St. Jim's players fell away, too; and when the first-half ended the Ramblers were a couple of goals to the good.

Jack Blake struck himself like a drenched terrier.

"We've whacked already!" he said dazedly.

"Looks like it," agreed Tom Merry.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 222.

"It's quite impossible to play football at a time like this, dash boys," said Arthur Augustus. "We're not quite ourselves just now."

"And there's the second half to go through yet!" grunted Fatty Wynn.

The St. Jim's goalie was plastered from head to foot with mud. He had brought off many brilliant saves, but he had not received half enough support from the backs. For once in a way, Figgins and Kerr had been half-hearted in their tackling.

In the second half, the sorry state of affairs continued.

The Ramblers were piling on all their energies now.

Tom Merry & Co. were a beaten side long before the final whistle sounded; and when it did sound, and they staggered off the muddy ground, the score was four to one against them. Ramblers had scored their only point from a penalty.

"This is where we hide our diminished heads!" murmured Mopsy Lovelath. "By goodness, who is to back up and get back to the school?" grunted Jack Blake.

"You fellows go on," said Tom Merry. "I've got some shopping to do in Wayland."

"Tuck!" adged Fatty Wynn, with a look of eagerness.

"No; better heads."

"Rotten!" asserted Fatty, in disgust.

The juniors, with the exception of Tom Merry, started on the homeward journey. The captain of the Shell went along to the best manufacturer's in the old-fashioned High Street.

He completed his purchase, and was emerging on to the pavement with the brown-paper parcel under his arm, when a shabby-looking youth plastered himself in the junior's path.

"Stand aside, please!" said Tom Merry, rather sharply.

The shabby youth did not budge.

"Do you hear me?" exclaimed the captain of the Shell, his voice rising.

A smile flickered upon the lips of the fellow who had waylaid Tom Merry.

"Would you quarrel with me, Tom?"

Tom Merry gave a start as he recognized the voice.

"Tallot!" he muttered.

The shabby youth nodded.

"Perhaps it's not surprising that you didn't recognize me," he said.

Tallot was wearing a coat which would have disgraced a tramp. His trousers, too, had seen better days. He had a muffer round his neck, a hat of a color and fit, and a tweed cap was pulled down over his eyes. A slight moustache—which was faded, of course—made him look several years older than he was; and his eyebrows were thicker and darker.

"There was no Sam in Tallot's disguise. He could have run the gamut of a whole crowd of St. Jim's fellows without being recognized.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, drawing a deep breath. "How did you get hold of those tags, Tallot?"

"They were lent to me by the Inspector at the George and Dragon. He says they were originally worn by his grandfather."

"I can quite believe him!" said Tom Merry.

"It'd better not stand jawing here, in case of accidents," said Tallot. "Let's turn off down a side street."

Tom Merry nodded, and a few moments later the couple were out of the range of prying eyes.

"Did you get my note, Tom?" inquired Tallot, at length.

"Yes."

"I simply had to come away from St. The City Librarian—No. 415.

Jim's. If I had stayed on I should have gone mad, I think."

"I understand, old man," said Tom Merry quietly.

"I know the Head wouldn't give me permission to go out and search on my own," continued Tallot, "so I took French leave."

"Had any luck?" asked Tom Merry.

"I've seen Jim Dawlish twice since last night."

"My hat!"

"And he's slipped through my fingers on each occasion. I've tried to track him—tried to find out where he's hiding Marie—but he's too cute for me at present. However, I don't feel half as disheartened as I did. I hope to find out all I want to know in the course of two or three days."

"Good luck to you, Tallot! Where are you staying?"

"At the George and Dragon. I shall have to clear out to-morrow, though."

"Why? Does anybody suspect?"

"Not a soul! But it's a question of Gossip. I wasn't exactly rolling in wealth when I bunked from St. Jim's; and the few shillings I had are exhausted now."

"Let me help you," said Tom Merry at once.

"I can't, Tom. I shall never be able to pay you back—"

"Nah! I insist—"

Tallot flushed.

"I can't swinge on you, Tom."

"Why, you dunder, it's as much for my benefit as for yours! I'm as keen as anybody on Marie being found. Here's a couple of quid. Take it, Tallot, and—"

"I won't touch a penny of it!" said Tallot stoutly.

"You're a silly ass!" blurted Tom Merry.

"I'll remain a silly ass, then!"

Tom Merry gave a snort.

"Your confounded pride almost gets my back up at times!" he growled.

"Now, be sensible! You can't possibly carry on the search without help. You'll starve if you go on like this. If you won't accept money, perhaps you'll accept grub."

Tallot wavered.

"Well, I haven't had a decent meal since last night," he confessed. "But—how can you get the stuff to me?"

"Some of us will have to break bread to-night, and come to the George and Dragon."

"It's running a big risk, Tom," said Tallot gravely.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Do you imagine you are the only fellow who is entitled to run risks?" he exclaimed.

"That's not the point. If you happen to be spotted—"

"We shan't be spotted," said Tom Merry confidently. "A couple of us will come—I can't say who my partner will be at the moment—and we'll arrive at the George and Dragon at midnight. We'll bring along sufficient grub to last you a couple of days; and then, if you're still in the district, we'll rescue our man."

"This is awfully decent of you, Tom."

"Rate! It's up to us to give you what help we can. Do the fellows think about my bunking!" asked Tallot, at length.

"Most of them are with you heart and soul. Of course, the cads are painting you as a black as they possibly can. They're trying to pretend that you bunked because you were afraid of being taxed with the kidnapping of Miss Marie."

Tallot nodded.

"I guessed Ranks & Co. would make

as much capital out of the affair as they could," he said. "But what they say or think doesn't worry me."

"I should hope not!"

"Well, I must be getting along," said Tallot, after a pause. "You'll keep mum about this meeting, Tom—except so far as my shoes are concerned?"

"Of course!"

Tom Merry shook hands with his dimpled-looking chum, and turned on his heel.

"Don't forget to be on the look-out for us at midnight!" he sang out over his shoulder.

"All wrong!"

"Good luck!" added Tom Merry.

And, feeling considerably lighter of heart now that he had seen his chum, the captain of the Shell strode away in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

A Night Adventure!

"BLAKE, dash boy, I insist—"

"You can insist till you're black in the face, Gussy, but I'm going!"

"Wait! I've made up my mind—"

"Pshaw!" said Mopsy Lovelath dramatically. "Here's another item to be added to the list of things we didn't know. Gussy has a mind!"

"-Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three and Jack Blake & Co. were at tea in Tom Merry's study.

Tom had described his recent meeting with Tallot, and had suggested the plan of conveying provisions by night to the George and Dragon.

The plan was heartily agreed to by all present. The only fly in the ointment, so to speak, was the problem of deciding who should accompany Tom Merry on the nocturnal escapade.

Matters quieted to go. He said he had prior claim, though the others were failed to see where the prior claim lay.

Mopsy Lovelath wanted to go, but he said that it wouldn't break his heart's someone else were chosen in preference.

Herrie and Digby also wanted to go; but Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went a step further. They did not merely want to go. They insisted upon going.

"Now, look here, Gussy—" began Jack Blake stoutly.

"You will not wear me by honeyed words!" he said, with dignity.

"As if anybody would want to wear a tame brat like Gussy!" chuckled Mopsy Lovelath.

"-Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wreatly, Lovelath—"

"Why can't we both go, Merry?" inquired Jack Blake.

"Too risky," said Tom shortly. "On an expedition of this sort, the fewer there are the better. I'd go alone, only I shall need somebody to help me carry the grub."

"-Will it be heavy?" asked Blake.

"I should say so. We're going to pack as much as we can into a large hamper. It'll take some getting over to Wayland."

"Strong man wanted!" murmured Mopsy Lovelath.

Jack Blake's desire began to waver. He was very keen on a midnight excursion, but the fact that there was a considerable amount of weight-lifting to be done rather took the edge of his keenness.

"All right, Gussy," he said, at length. "I'll make a noble sacrifice, and stand aside. You may go with Tom Merry."

"I do not withdraw your permission, Blake. I was going in any case."

"If you fellows have finished tea," said



"It is my painful duty, sir," said Kees, "to bring these two boys before you on a serious charge. They were discovered by me, nearly an hour ago, in the act of quitting a law divers (as in Westland, sir)!" The Head started. He glanced first at Tom Merry, and then at D'Arvy. (See chapter 5.)

Tom Merry, "we'll go along and interview Dame Taggles."

"What about pooling our resources first?" suggested Manners.

"That's a good wheeze."

"This is the house of good wheezes," said Manners, tapping his forehead.

The scrupulous of Tom Merry's study turned out their money on to the table.

By far the biggest contribution came from Arthur Augustus, who disgorged three pound-notes.

Tom Merry followed with two, and the rest of the juniors buried the notes beneath a heap of silver.

"Just over seven quid," said Tom Merry, counting the money.

"Almost enough to buy up Dame Taggles' entire stock," said Dicky.

"We'll hand some of it to the landlord of the George and Dragon," said Tom Merry. "It will pay for Talbot's debt. He refuses to take money himself, but he can't prevent us from letting him have it in an indirect way."

Tom Merry pocketed the funds, and the juniors went across to the little tug-ship under the elms.

"Good-evenin', Mrs. Taggles!" said Arthur Augustus, politely raising his cap. "Have you an empty hamper you can lend us?"

"That's the nearest approach to a packed cell that Gussy can think of!" explained Mopsy Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus spun round upon the hamster of the Shell.

"If you persist in indulging in witless remarks at my expense, Lowther, I shall have no recourse but to administer a painful thrashing!" he said, with great heat.

"In that case," said Lowther, "I'd better put myself under police protection right away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, Dame Taggles returned from the back of the shop, dragging into view a spacious hamper.

"That's the sica," said Tom Merry.

"Now, fill it, please, Mrs. Taggles."

"What with, Master Merry?"

"Everything in the nature of solid food you can lay your hands on," said the captain of the Shell.

Dame Taggles surveyed Tom Merry in wide-eyed astonishment for a moment, but she asked no questions. Whilst Tom directed operations, she proceeded to fill the hamper. Cakes and tarts and pies were carefully shoved away inside, and bottles of ginger-beer were added. These were sufficient to relieve a starving garrison by the time Dame Taggles had finished.

"Talbot ought to thrive on this little lot," said Mopsy Lowther.

"Yess, wethah!"

"Let's feel the weight of it," said Manners.

And he and Jack Blake stooped, and lifted the hamper from the ground.

"Phew!" gasped Blake.

He was beginning to feel really glad, now, that he had stood aside in favour of his "eldest study-mate."

"Heavy!" inquired Tom Merry, as the hamper was dumped on to the floor again.

"Rather!" panted Manners.

"Then it will require the strength of

Arthur Augustus Sander D'Arcy," said Mooty Lowther.
 "If he, ha, ha!"
 "Where are you going to leave the hamper until you want it?" asked Herriet.
 "We shall have to cart it along to the shed," said Tom Merry.
 "It won't be safe from raiders there," said Dicky.
 "Oh, yes, it will! We'll lock the door on the outside."

Granting and gasping beneath their burden, Tom Merry and Jack Blake carried the hamper across the Close, the captain of the Shell having duly assisted with Damsie Taggles.

Kilbero of the Sixth escorted the juniors from the School House steps.
 "What on earth have you kids got there?" he demanded.

Mooty Lowther answered for Tom Merry and Jack Blake, who were otherwise engaged.
 "Gosh—glorious grab!" he exclaimed.

Kilbero looked grim.
 "I hope this isn't intended for a midnight feast on the part of you kids," he said.
 "Certainly not, Kilbero," said Dicky truthfully.

"It's for consumption of the premises," said Mooty Lowther; but he did not add the name of the consumer.
 To the juniors' relief, Kilbero did not press for details.

Tom Merry & Co. passed on, and the hamper was at length deposited in the shed.
 "We've looked for a strenuous time to-night, Gussy," said Tom Merry, nipping his bearded brow. "Goodness knows how we're going to get this little lot to Wayland!"

"We'll manage it somehow, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully.
 The sturdy door was then locked, and the juniors adjourned to the Common-room with business.

Kilbero was suspicious when he watched the lights in the Shell and Fourth dormitories, that one occupant of each intended to break bounds that night. And very few of the juniors knew, either.

When eleven o'clock out from the old clock-tower, Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy met by appointment on the landing.
 "All right, Gussy!" whispered Tom Merry.
 "Quite all right, dear boy!"
 "Come on, then. And don't make a row, whatever you do!"

Noisily the two juniors crept down the stairs.
 If they were found absent from their dormitories at such an hour, the chequer would come down with a vengeance. They were taking a very grave risk for the sake of Talbot, who stood in sore need of help, but they decided that the enterprise was well worth while.

CHAPTER 4.

Trouble for Two!

"O H, excuse!"
 There was dimmy in the tone of Arthur Augustus.
 The two juniors had succeeded in carrying the heavy hamper as far as the school wall; but they failed to see how they were going to get it over the top.

"This is a giddy pose, and no mistake!" said Tom Merry.
 He and Gussy placed the hamper on the ground, and exchanged bewildered glances in the gloom.

"We shall have to get help, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus, at length.
 Tom Merry nodded.
 "I'll cut back to the dorm, and fetch Manners and Lowther," he said. "You wait here, Gussy. And mind you keep in the shadow."
 Tom Merry regained the Shell dormitory without being seen, and he explained the situation to his chums, who were still awake.
 "We'll give you a hand," said Mooty Lowther cheerfully. "Come along, Manners!"
 And the Terrible Three quitted the dormitory.
 "Gussy does it!" murmured Mooty Lowther. "We don't want to bump into Talbot!"
 "Or Knur of the Sixth!" said Manners.
 "Follow your uncle," whispered Tom Merry. "and you'll be all serene!"
 The trio reached the school wall without mishap.
 Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus clambered over into the roadway, ready to receive the hamper from Manners and Lowther.
 "Gee-wo!" muttered Lowther.
 "Exerting all their strength, he and Manners managed to raise the hamper to the top of the wall. Wiping hands graped for it on the other side, and hauled it down into the roadway.
 "Many thanks, you fellows!" said Tom Merry. "Now we shall be all right!"
 "Yess, wathah!"
 "Mind your eye!" said Manners warningly. "If you hear anybody coming, drop the hamper and run! Better to lose it than to be sacked from the school!"
 "We'll wait up for you in the dorm," said Mooty Lowther. "We'll give ourselves a good rest, and come sweeping going through a hedge. That's the best method of keeping awake."
 "Why, you see," said Tom Merry, laughing, "that's what you do when you want to go to sleep!"
 "Pardon me," said Lowther, "I've got an uncle at the War Office, and he tells me that he never comes sleep going through a hedge, because it keeps him awake. He's thinking of giving up his job shortly, owing to insomnia in the daytime."
 "It's, ha, ha!"
 "Shush!" cautioned Tom Merry. "We shall be bowled out if we stay here kicking up a shindy! So-long, you fellows!"
 "So-long!" said Manners and Lowther together.
 And they crept stealthily back across the courtyard.

Tom Merry and his companion bent to their burden, and started off on the long, long trail to Wayland.
 How they were ever going to get there they didn't know.
 The hamper was so heavy that Tom Merry was obliged to call a halt at the end of every twenty yards or so.
 "Really, this is too awful for words!" panted Arthur Augustus, at length. "I simply hate the idea of luttin' poor old Talbot down, but it looks as though we shall have to do it."
 "We might as well go on, now we've come so far," said Tom Merry, sitting on the hamper and stopping his streaming face. "It will be just as much fun to cart it all the way back as it will to go on to Wayland."
 "I'm afraid you're wight, dear boy. Psey wait a moment until I have wovehied my breast!"
 And then, fairly on the night air, came the approaching rumble of wheels.
 "Listen!" said Tom Merry.
 The rumbling sound drew nearer.
 "A cart, bal Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

The juniors stayed where they were, and in due course the vehicle rattled up.
 It was a market-cart belonging to a local farmer, who was returning to Wayland after paying a visit to one of his friends.
 "Any chance of a lift?" inquired Tom Merry.
 The farmer pulled up.
 "Have you been on a looting expedition, young gent?" he asked, glancing curiously at the hamper.
 "No," said Tom Merry. "We've made a few purchases on behalf of a pal over at Wayland."
 "Ah, we should deem it a great favor," said Arthur Augustus graciously, "if you would give us a lift."
 The farmer seemed satisfied that the intentions of the two juniors were honorable.
 "Hop in!" he said briefly.
 The hamper was heaved up into the cart, and Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus clambered up after it.
 The farmer cracked his whip, and the cart rattled away towards Wayland.
 "What look?" exclaimed Tom Merry.
 "We're in clover, and no mistake!"
 "Yess, wathah!"
 The chilly night breeze fanned the faces of the two juniors as they were whirled along.

The old-fashioned High Street of Wayland was reached in record time, and the farmer, at Tom Merry's request, pulled up outside the quaint old hostelry known as the George and Dragon.

Arthur Augustus endeavored to press a half-crown tip into the farmer's hand, but the junior's benefactor refused to accept it.
 "You were quite welcome to the lift," he said. "Good-night, young gent!"
 "Good-night!" sang out the St. Jim's juniors, in unison.

And Arthur Augustus added:
 "You're a braver, my dear fellow!"
 And then Tom Merry and his companion found themselves standing on the pavement with the hamper.

It was a serious position, for they were exposed to the gaze of passers-by. And if one of those passers-by should happen to be a St. Jim's master—
 "How does one get into this place?" murmured Arthur Augustus, surveying the lighted windows of the hostelry.
 "Through the door, of course!" said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

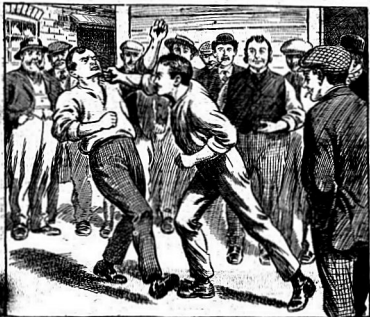
At this juncture, Talbot stepped out on to the pavement.
 Tom Merry knew it was Talbot at once, but Arthur Augustus quite failed to recognize the identity of the shabby-looking youth who had emerged from the George and Dragon.

The wraith of St. Jim's wagged an astonishing forefinger at the new-comer.
 "Go away!" he said sternly. "It is extremely wude of you to stand stawth' as in in that manah!"
 "Gussy, you are—" began Tom Merry.
 "If you don't go away," continued Arthur Augustus, still addressing the shabby youth, "I shall be compelled to punish you with painful emphasis on the nose!"
 "Good old Gussy!" chuckled Talbot. Arthur Augustus nearly fell down.
 "Gwast Scott!" he gasped. "It's Talbot!"
 "Of course it's Talbot!" said Tom Merry, with a laugh.
 "Bal Jove! I thought it was a young street arab!"
 Tom Merry turned to his chum.
 "We've delivered the goods, as you see," said. "Where do you want 'em stored?"
 "Up in my room," said Talbot. "Oh give you a hand."
 The hamper was carried into the hip-

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"Follow it up!" shrieked the landlord. Talbot needed no second bidding. Summoning all his strength he sailed in, and planted a powerful approval beneath Jeremy's chin, and Jeremy's legs gave way! (See chapter 7.)

ledy, and up the stairs to a small apartment on the top landing. Talbot had sailed it a room, but that was a misnomer. It was merely an attic—and a very remarkable sort of attic at that. Nearly all of the available floor-space was taken up by the hamper. The jokers dumped the litter down and sat on it, panting with their exertions.

"This is awfully decent of you fellows!" said Talbot gratefully.

"Wats! We're not gain' to see you go without food an' drink, Talbot, deak boy!"

"You'll need all this!" said Tom Merry.

"I don't think so," said Talbot. "I shall be on the move in the morning."

"Any chance?" asked Tom Merry quickly.

"Yes. There was a fellow in the saloon bar here this evening—eractly one of the kidnapers—and I happened to hear him say that he and his three pals were staying to-morrow on a caravan tour as far as the coast. He also mentioned a lady companion, and I picked up my ears at once. The fellow was impossibly silent at the time—otherwise I wouldn't have spotted the odds. I'm pretty certain he belonged to Dawlish's gang, and that the lady companion he referred to was Marie Rivers."

"Then why the rump didn't you have

him arrested?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"It was impossible. There were over a dozen men in the bar—mostly of the prizefighter type—and they'd have taken the fellow's part like a shot. The only policeman within call was Crump—and a lot of use Crump would have been. He'd have been laid out, and the second would have got away to give the alarm to Jim Dawlish; and I should have made myself conspicuous for nothing. All things considered, I thought it best to let him go."

"You were quite right, deak boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I feel a lot more hopeful now about my chance of finding Marie," said Talbot.

"At first, I had almost despaired of ever seeing her again."

Tom Merry nodded.

"If these merchants are going to move off in a caravan," he said, "you might not find it very difficult to chase them. You'd have previous little chance if they slipped off in a motor-car; but caravaning is a jolly slow method of progress, so we proved on our caravan tour."

"Once I get fairly on the track their game will be up," said Talbot. His eyes gleamed with resolution.

"I almost feel inclined to come with you, old man!" said Tom Merry.

"None bank!" said Arthur Augustus. Talbot protested at once.

"That would be madness!" he said. "It's bad enough for one fellow to bunk from school without permission, and if three did it there would be the very distinct chance of a row!"

"I suppose three would," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But—"

"You're taking a big enough risk, as it is," said Talbot. "You'd better be getting back to St. Jim's. I'm awfully obliged to you for your help."

"Don't march, deak boy!" said Arthur Augustus, as he and Tom Merry moved to the door.

"I'll see you out, if you like," said Talbot.

"Don't trouble!" said Tom Merry. "Good-night, Talbot! We shall expect to see you back at St. Jim's within a day or so—with Marie."

Talbot said good-night to his loyal chums, who groped their way downstairs and along the narrow passage leading to the door.

"Well, we've smuggled the stuff to Talbot all seven," said Tom Merry.

"Thanks to that farmer who gave us a lift. Our luck's in to-night."

"Yess, walloah!"

But the jokers spoke too soon. As they emerged into the street a tall form loomed up in the darkness, and a voice—the cold, condensing voice of King of the Sixth—exclaimed:

"No! You hauled you out at last! Merry! D'Arcy! You will return to the school with me!"

CHAPTER 5.

Saved at the Sea-Head.

"**B**ut I don't!" cried Arthur Augustus to D'Arcy. "Knox, you agree!"

"The prefect's hand descended upon the speaker's shoulder."

"Come with me!" he said earnestly. "I beg to announce your good friends my dearest, Knox! I regard you as a worthy worker."

For answer, Knox gave his victim a savage push.

"I'm not going to stand on ceremony!" he growled. "Get a move on, both of you!"

There was a triumphant expression on the prefect's face as he strode along with his two captives.

Not only had he caught a couple of juniors out of bounds, but he had discovered them in the act of quitting the St. George and Dragon!

"The Head will be very interested to hear this departure from the path of virtue!" said Knox.

"What do you mean?" asked Tom Merry.

"I mean that the game's up," said Knox. "I've suspected for a long time past that you young rascals were in the habit of breaking bounds and visiting a disreputable inn."

"Woolly, Knox, that is a gross untruth."

"You can't deny that you've been to the George and Dragon?"

"And we're not going to attempt to," said Tom Merry.

"It's all the same if you did," said Knox. "My word, as a prefect, would be taken before you. You are a pair of young blazes! When you ought to be just asleep in your dormitories, I find you prowling at a low-down tavern!"

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry, in a wrathful tone.

"You'll tell me next that you didn't go there to drink!" asserted Knox.

"Nonsense!" said Tom Merry.

"You'll find it difficult to convince the Head on that point."

The trio walked on in silence for some moments.

Arthur Augustus was trying to catch Tom Merry's eye, with the object of signalling to him to lend a hand in flourishing Knox. But the captain of the Shell was not prepared to go to those lengths. If a charge of assaulting a prefect were added to that of breaking bounds it would mean "the sack." And Tom Merry was far too fond of St. Jim's to want to leave it in such a summary fashion.

Even so the new charge alone—that of breaking bounds by night in order to visit the George and Dragon—was possible that the Head might pronounce serious acts of expiation.

Tom Merry ground his teeth with helplessness.

The story of the situation was not lost upon him. It was more than probable that Knox himself had been out on the sabbath. And he'd be had promptly punished upon two juniors who were guilty of visiting more serious than covering a hamper of lark to a schoolfellow!

Of course, Knox would disarm suspicion by saying that he went out with the express object of tracking down the two juniors. And the Head would not be likely to doubt this explanation.

"If I'm not mistaken," said Knox as he led them, "this will be your last night here. The boys here are that you will both be asked to leave the morning. And St. Jim's looks—No, no!"

serve you jolly well right! Follows who gambles and smokes at the tender age of fifteen deserves to be fired out!"

"Arthur Augustus fairly burst up at this."

"Woolly, Knox, if you persist in talking such rubbish, tomorrow, I will endeavor to administer a painful thrashing!"

"Dry up, Gasey!" roared Tom Merry.

"I refuse to dry up, Tom Merry! Proud as an peacock, I'm not going to allow Knox to talk to me like that! If he does it again, I shall walk in and slap him!"

Knox did not do it again. He was not so stupid as to let D'Arcy single himself out of courtesy; but if Tom Merry slipped—as he certainly would do—Knox would find the combined strength of the two juniors rather too much for him. So he kept his tongue in his cheek, and plotted to finish the journey in silence.

Late though the hour was, a light still burned in the Head's study.

"You've been not going to take us into the Head now?" speculated Tom Merry.

Knox interpreted Tom's surprise to be lark.

"Of course I am!" he said. "I'm going to take you before the Head this evening, with your officers. The Head will see for himself against you will answer for more concerning more than it would in the morning."

"You and?"

Knox led the way to the Head's study, and his captives followed.

The prefect tapped on the door.

"Come in!"

The Head was tired—very tired—for he had had little sleep of late, owing to the assertion of Maria Rivers' disappearance, followed by that of Talbot of the Shell. But he was not too tired to express surprise at this late hour.

"How very late! All excitement, is the reason?"

"Yes," said Knox. "What does this mean, Knox?"

"It is my painful duty, sir," said the prefect—though he did not look as if he found it painful—"to bring these two boys before you on a serious charge."

"Of what nature, Knox?"

"They were discovered by me, nearly an hour ago, in the act of quitting a low-down inn in Weymouth, sir."

The Head started. He glanced first at Tom Merry, and then at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Both juniors held their heads erect. They did not look like bold bad blades being brought to book.

"Dear me! That is a most serious charge, Knox, to bring against these juniors. Are you quite sure—"

"Ask them, sir!" said Knox maliciously. "They dare not deny it!"

The Head turned to Tom Merry.

"Am I to understand that Knox's allegation is correct, Merry?"

Tom Merry nodded without speaking.

The Head's expression grew very grave.

"Of course, sir," said Knox, "they could only have visited such a disreputable place for one purpose—that of smoking and drinking. Possibly they drank here. I have no evidence on that point, but gambling and strong drink usually go hand in hand."

"You are telling a pack of lies, Knox!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus contemptuously.

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Knox is a dishonest and unscrupulous man," said the Head. "He was quite right when he said that he caught you in the act of leaving the inn—but the George and Dragon is not a disreputable place, as

Knox suggests. It is a fine old English hotel."

"I am not prepared to enter into a discussion on that point, D'Arcy. Suffice it to say that the place, whatever its reputation, is strictly out of bounds to the boys of this school. To visit it in the day-time is a serious offence, and to visit it at night renders the offence doubly serious."

"We should not discuss of gain" these to speak an' gamble, sir—"

"Then what was your object in going?"

Arthur Augustus was silent. So was Tom Merry. They could not tell the Head the facts without betraying Talbot's whereabouts. And it was contrary to their code of honor to do that.

"Your very serious condemnation you!" said the Head. "Had you visited the place with any worthy motive you would not refrain from telling me what it was. I can only conclude that my former faith in you was misplaced. You have behaved abominably, and it only remains for me to punish you as you deserve."

Tom Merry gave a start.

He had hoped that the Head would let a flogging cover the case; but the gravity of Dr. Holman's manner sent an unpleasant thrill through the captain of the Shell. The Head's words seemed to be a promise to sentence of expulsion.

The next moment Tom Merry's face was ashen.

"Knox, you will kindly conduct these juniors to the detention-room, where they will pass the remainder of the night. Unless any extraordinary circumstances come to my knowledge in the meantime, I shall have no alternative but to expel them from the school!"

"But I don't!" muttered Arthur Augustus. And the colour shined from his face, leaving it deadly pale.

This was a terrible and unexpected climax to a hairless adventure.

Even with the prospect of expulsion hanging before them, however, the juniors did not make the explanation which would have saved them. They stood not a word, Talbot, or the Head might order his immediate return to the school, and he would be unable to punish the great for Maria Rivers.

Knox beckoned to the two juniors.

"This way!" he said, with a satisfaction he was quite unable to conceal.

The prefect could hardly credit his good fortune. He had been "up against" Tom Merry and D'Arcy from the beginning, and he had on numerous occasions attempted to get them into trouble. However, they had always been able to render a satisfactory explanation—until now. This time they had nothing to say in their defence, and they had to go.

Knox led the way to the detention-room.

There were a couple of beds made up inside the apartment. Not that Tom Merry or Gasey would have any use for them. They were not likely to visit their eyes that night.

Knox entered the prisoners into the detention-room, and suggested for a moment to glaze at their sorry plight. Then he took his fingers from his eyes, looking the door very carefully behind him.

When he had gone, Tom Merry threw himself, fully dressed, on to one of the beds.

"Here's a pretty go, Gasey!" he exclaimed. "Bucked by Juve!"

"As' all through that bounder Knox!" said Arthur Augustus bitterly.

"The worst of it is, we can't possibly explain to the Head—"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"No, that wouldn't be playin' the game by Talbot," he said.

"It's a pretty hopeless sort of outlook," said Tom Merry.

After which a silence fell between the two—a long silence—while they pictured to themselves the scene on the monitor. There would be a general assembly in Big Hall; they would be arraigned before the Head, and finally cut out from the school. It was, as Tom Merry remarked, a pretty hopeless sort of outlook.

When the first grey glimmer of dawn came in at the window of the detention room the two juniors were still awake, weary-eyed and miserable.

They still carried a faint hope that the Head would reverse his decision; but they felt that it was extremely unlikely.

When at length the rising bell rang out on the morning air, there was great consternation in the Shell and Fourth Form dormitories. It was seen that Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had not returned to bed.

The juniors were alarmed and mystified. And their alarm and mystification increased as the morning advanced.

In the detention room, Tom Merry and his companion awaited the inevitable.

The first person they saw after the opening of the door they, was Killbuck of the Sixth.

Killbuck's face was set and stern as he entered the room.

explaining the situation. But for the timely arrival of Talbot's letter, I should certainly have expelled you both!"

"But Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"I am perfectly satisfied," continued the Head, "that the question of discipline does not arise. That was more supposition on Kipps's part. However, I cannot overlook the fact that you broke windows, and that you consorted with a boy who, to all intents and purposes, has run away from school."

"Was a worthy object, sir?" claimed Tom Merry.

Talbot is tracking down the gang that kidnaped Miss Rivers.

"How am I to know that, Merry? Talbot said no word to me of his intentions. He absented himself from the school entirely without permission. If it should transpire that he went with the object of rescuing Miss Rivers from her captors, I shall, of course, take a lenient view of the affair."

There was a pause.

A great weight slipped from the minds of Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus. They were smiling now, and even when the Head selected a stout-looking man the smile still lingered.

"Mind you your head, Merry!" Tom Merry obeyed, and avoided six stinging cuts. They were painful, but

Dragon, in Wayland. Would you be good enough to call at the place and bring the boy back to the school?"

"Certainly!" said Mr. Railton. "I will try to time."

And he at once set out for Wayland. When the Housemaster reached the George and Dragon, however, he shared the fate of Mother Hubbard.

The cupboard was bare. In other words, Talbot had emptied the larder, and was left on the trail of the kidnapers. And Mr. Railton was reluctantly compelled to return, unaccompanied, to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 4.

Talbot on the Track.

TALBOT was early afloat that morning.

As soon as the new day dawned, he sprang out of bed, and dressed hurriedly in the uncertain light.

He had a haversack with him, and into this he stowed as much food as possible.

His task of finding Marie Rivers was almost to commence in real earnest.

With an expression of grimness on his face, the junior went stolidly down the stairs and emerged into the deserted High Street of Wayland. The millman had not yet started his morning round.

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"You're wanted in the Head's study!" he said curtly.

"But Jove! I suppose we're going to be privately expelled, instead of publicly!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Don't talk to me!" growled Killbuck.

"I've disgusted with both of you!"

"Well, Killbuck—"

"Shut up, and get a move on!"

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus accompanied the captain of St. Jim's to the Head's study. It was their last visit to that sacred apartment, they supposed.

The Head looked up as the trio entered.

"You need not walk, Killbuck," he said.

"Very well, sir!"

Dr. Holmes turned to the delinquents.

"I am very relieved to know, my boys," he said, "that your motives in visiting the inn known as the George and Dragon were not discreditable."

The juniors looked amazed. Something must have happened since they were consigned to the detention room.

The Head's next words explained what it was.

"I received this morning a letter from Talbot," said Dr. Holmes. "It appears that he is staying at the inn in question, and that you two boys conspired last night to bring him back. From an upper window, Talbot saw Kipps take you into his custody, and he at once wrote to me

for how painful that expulsion would have been."

"D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus extended his hand, and received a similar dose.

"The matter is now at an end," said the Head, "except that I require you to give me your word that you will not speak beyond again for the purpose of visiting Talbot."

"I promise you that there shall be no repetition, sir," said Arthur Augustus at once.

Tom Merry gave the Head a similar assurance, and the juniors were allowed to go.

A crowd of fellows watched for them in the Cloak, waiting impatiently for news of what had happened.

Meanwhile, the Head scanned Talbot's letter for the second time.

"The boy must be brought back to the school at once!" he murmured. "If it is correct that he has gone in search of Miss Rivers, his object is a very commendable one. At the same time, I cannot allow him to remain about without permission."

The Head went for Mr. Railton.

"Good morning, sir!" said the Housemaster. "Have you any news to communicate?"

"Nothing, Railton, save that Talbot happens to be staying at the George and

Talbot still selected his disguise. He looked shabbier than ever as he proceeded along the street, and had a polio-scan been in the vicinity, he would certainly have been arrested as a vagrant.

"Wonder when Danliah intends to start for the coast!" ruminated Talbot, as he went along. "He'll get off the track early, I should imagine."

There were two roads leading from Wayland to the Sussex coast. One was a main road, much used by motor traffic, the other was a narrow, winding, bumpy road, the bad condition of which was frequently mentioned in the local Press.

Talbot was quite justified in assuming that Jim Trawick & Co. would take the latter route. There would be less risk of detection that way.

With his haversack on his back, and with an unwearied purpose in his heart, Talbot strode through the outskirts of Wayland until he gained the road he sought.

It was impossible to tell if a caravan had already passed that way, for the surface of the road was as hard as a brick, owing to the frost.

"This must be the road they'll take," muttered Talbot. "Danliah would be simply asking for trouble if he went by the main road."

Feeling overcast, in his own mind that he was on the right track. Talbot stepped out, and for two solid hours he walked straight, hoping to pick up news of the caravan.

By this time the junior was ravenous. He satiated himself on a stilt and started on the contents of the bar-tray.

"Now that my supply of cash has run out, I ought to communicate with the girl," he murmured.

But he found it extremely difficult to do that. The pages of longers were very acute, and Talbot had made a big hole in the provisions by the time he reached his journey.

The books—they were very old books, which he had purchased on part of his first money, looking for a book. He had started off at a good pace, but he found he couldn't keep it up.

Presently he encountered a farm-labourer on his way to work.

"Excuse me," he said, "but have you seen a caravan pass this way?"

The farm-labourer was surprised at the gentlemanly tone of his shabby questions.

"A—*a* caravan?" he said slowly.

"Yes!"

The rustic rubbed his chin.

"Come to think on't, I did see a caravan pass this way," he said.

Talbot's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"You did?" he exclaimed. "When?"

The rustic pointed his eyes towards—

"Last week, it was last Tuesday week!" he said at length.

"Yes—yes!" he whispered.

"Last Tuesday week, or ever was," said the farm-labourer.

It was as much as Talbot could do to refrain from laughing himself at the stolid-looking rustic. The St. Jim's junior was not concerned with what had happened on the previous Tuesday week. He was in quest of reliable, up-to-date information.

"I'm not asking you for details of what happened in the House Age!" he said at length. "I want to know if a caravan has passed this way since Tuesday!"

"This morning," said the yokel, with a bewildered look.

"Yes!"

"A caravan, did you say?"

"Yes!"

"Passed this way?"

"Yes!" shouted Talbot.

The rustic looked astonished.

"Oh should I know?" he said.

Talbot was on the verge of leaving his bar.

"Do you know anything?" he asked witheringly.

The farm-labourer nodded.

"I know *nothing* about everything!" he said.

"Then tell me how far it is from here to the coast."

"Eighteen miles, as the crow flies."

"I'm not a blessed crow!" growled Talbot. "How far is it to walk by road?"

"Twenty-five miles."

"My hat!"

The prospect of tramping a further twenty-five miles, possibly without tangible result, was anything but pleasant.

Talbot already experienced a desire to throw himself down to rest by the wayside. The last three nights had yielded him a maximum of twelve hours' sleep—and he felt far from fit. With a shiver of apprehension, he realized that illness might possibly overtake him before he could complete his quest.

Then his thoughts turned to Marie. For her sake, he must not get ill. He must stick it out somehow.

Even if his provisions ran short—even

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if his feet became like leaden weights—he must not give up. Marie might be enduring worse discomfort.

The farm-labourer, with a fawn as impulsive as a host, bade Talbot good-morning, and trudged on his way.

The St. Jim's junior resumed his journey, occasionally glancing back over his shoulder to see if the caravan happened to be coming along behind.

The sun was up as Talbot entered a tiny hamlet, consisting of a few houses dotted here and there.

The only sign of activity was to be seen in the blacksmith's forge.

Talbot passed for a moment to watch the smith at his work. He was a sturdy-looking man, and he worked cheerily in the cellar who was watching him.

"I suppose," said Talbot, "you haven't seen a caravan pass this way since last Tuesday week?"

The smith stared.

"Why, bless yer 'eart, there was one went past 'em close on an 'our ago!" Talbot's heart beat quickly.

"Did you notice who was in it?" he exclaimed.

"I only saw the cows as was up in front," said the blacksmith.

"Could you describe him to me?"

The blacksmith did his best, and his description, vague though it was, pointed to the fact that the man he had seen was Jim Davitch.

Talbot brightened up.

The weary hours of tramping had not been in vain. He was on the right track!

The junior almost forgot the fact that

he was weary and footsore, and that he was running short of food. News of the sort was infinitely better than a good square meal.

"Can you remember if the horse was in good condition?" asked Talbot.

"Fairish," said the blacksmith. "The caravan was only girls' at a walkin' pace, though."

"Ah, good!"

Talbot could almost have jumped for joy.

Jim Davitch had an hour's start of him. That would represent about four miles.

Talbot felt confident that he would catch up with the caravan long before the noon was reached.

On resuming his journey, however, he found that progress was possibly slow.

At one stopping-place he met a young man, and he stopped to rest for a bit. But his shabby appearance went against him, and the driver—a country squire—threatened him with a taste of the whip.

Talbot tramped on. He pined through scenery which, even at that time of the year, was wonderful.

But the junior was not in a condition to appreciate the beauties of nature just then. He was being hungry again. He had started with some of his food to a couple of parving swallows he had passed on the road, and when he came to examine the interior of his bar-tray, he was alarmed to find that there was practically nothing left.

Talbot looked on as far as the next village, where he was obliged to halt.

It occurred to him for the first time, as he sat down on a rustic bench outside an old-fashioned inn, that he could get into communication with the police at some point further along the road, and request them to intercept and hold up the caravan.

Talbot was actually on the point of going to the village post-office and begging permission to use the telephone, when he suddenly pulled himself up with a jerk.

"Jim Davitch surely he's arrested!" he muttered, to himself. "That wouldn't do at all. If he had to appear in court, he'd represent the post—the old King-Alley shop. He'd bring disgrace on Marie, and on Marie's father. He might even protest that Marie had exposed the gang of her own free will."

This aspect of the case made Talbot realize that his task was doubly difficult.

He had to rescue Marie, if possible, without bringing about the arrest of her kidnappers.

It was marvellous, Talbot reflected, that Jim Davitch and his companions should be allowed to go free. But it was the only way. If they were brought to justice they would certainly make things uncomfortable for him.

Marie's father, who was now leading a straightforward life, would also be annoyed; and so would Talbot, though he was not thinking of himself just then.

No; it would not be good policy to inform the police, Talbot reflected. The most expedient to effect Marie's rescue off his own bat.

If he could only obtain food and drink, and a decent pair of boots, he could overhaul the caravan when it reached the coast.

Meanwhile, it was almost impossible for him to continue his journey.

"Pr'aps I shall feel better after I've had a rest," muttered the junior.

With this reflection, he leaned back in the rustic seat, blinking up at the blue sky overhead, and a few moments later he closed off from sheer exhaustion.

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"Help! Help!" Talbot made his way in the direction of the voice. He discovered Marie standing with her back to the cliff, which she had been vainly endeavouring to climb. He had indeed found his chest; but would those treacherous waters envelop them both? (See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER 7.

A Voice in the Darkness.

"FIVE pounds is the figure!" Talbot opened his eyes in a dawning sort of way at the words flung out to him from the parlour of the village inn.

At the mention of five pounds he sighed drowsily.

Such a sum would be a godsend to him at that moment. He would be able to equip himself with a suitable pair of boots; and what was more, he would be able to indulge in a substantial meal.

"Five pounds!" repeated the voice.

It was a deep voice, and the statement took the form of a challenge.

Talbot pricked up his ears. His sleep, brief though it had been, had refreshed him. The feeling of drowsiness vanished; but the feeling of acute hunger remained.

"Bah! You're a set of cowards! Not one of you will offer to stand up to me, in fair fight, for five pounds!"

Talbot rose to his feet, and glanced through the open doorway of the parlour. A tall, wiry, loosely-dressed man, of the adventurer type, was holding forth to the other occupants of the inn-parlour.

The man, Talbot noticed, was not intoxicated, nor was he altogether sober. He had supplied just sufficient strong drink to make him boastful and arrogant.

"You're a set of cowards!" he re-

peated. "There isn't a man among you! How am I, offering the princely sum of five pounds to anyone who can floor me in fair fight, and you all cower and cringe like frightened rabbits! Bah!"

Talbot observed that the other men in the parlour were undisturbed, weedy specimens. He could quite understand their refusal to close with the tempting offer of the loosely-dressed person. Not one of them looked as if he could say "No!" to a goose.

The landlord, a fat, jovial-looking man, who was serving behind the bar, gave a chuckle.

"Afraid there's nothing doing, Jeremy!" he observed.

The man called Jeremy snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"Well, I'm best!" he said, in tones of disgust. "Five pounds going begging, and no takers!"

"Excuse me," said a quiet voice in the doorway.

All eyes were turned upon Talbot.

Jeremy's face lit up with anticipation. He supplied quite correctly as it happened—that the new-comer was about to accept his challenge.

Talbot's disguise made him look much older than he actually was. He was not so tall as Jeremy; but apart from this the two were, to all appearances, well matched.

"I understand," said Talbot, "that

you are making a present of five pounds to anyone who can put you on your back!"

"That's so," said Jeremy.

"Then I'm on!"

There was a buzz from the occupants of the parlour. The landlord looked astutely at Talbot.

"That's the style!" he said. "Now we shall see some sport!"

Jeremy turned to Talbot.

"Follow me!" he said.

And with a rather unsteady gait he led the way to a stretch of green sward situated at the back of the inn.

The other man followed. Some of them brought their tankards with them.

Last of all came the landlord, who constituted himself master of the ceremony.

"Make a ring, gentlemen!" he exclaimed.

The spectators formed themselves into a circle, whilst Jeremy and Talbot removed their coats.

Taking stock of his man, the St. Jim's junior saw that he had quite a reasonable chance of victory.

Jeremy had a good reach, and when he rolled back his arms he showed that his muscles were in good condition; but he had made too free with the blowing-bowl to be able to do himself justice.

Talbot was ravenous by this time, and he was keeping a little. He knew that

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he could not possibly survive a long and tiring fight. At the same time, he hoped to get off the mark with sufficient energy to floor his tall opponent.

The landlord looked on the combatants.

"Go ahead!" he said. It was obvious that there was to be none of the formality of the National Sporting Club about this encounter.

"One moment!" said Talbot. "I should feel happier if some hot held the stakes."

Jeremy flushed angrily.

"Can't you trust me to pay up like a man if I'm beaten?" he exclaimed.

The landlord intervened.

"He's quite right, Jeremy. It's only fair that I should hold the stakes. Hand over the fever!"

With a very ill grace Jeremy did so.

"Go ahead!" repeated the landlord.

The onlookers craned forward eagerly as the fight began.

Jeremy started off as if he would put

his opponent, but his feet slid with reckless vigour; and had Talbot stopped that baroque blow his village ambulance would have been required.

But Talbot stepped smartly to one side, and Jeremy, his fist wildly sailing the air, pitched forward on his face.

There was a chuckle from the spectators.

"Now's your chance! Polish him off!" said one of them to Talbot.

But the St. Jan's junior stood motionless, waiting for Jeremy to rise.

And when Jeremy did rise, Talbot's tightly-clenched fist caught him fairly between the eyes, and he staggered.

"Follow us up!" shouted the landlord. Talbot needed no second bidding.

Summoning all his strength, he sailed in, and planted a powerful uppercut beneath his opponent's chin.

Jeremy's legs gave way, and this time he went down and stayed down.

The landlord promptly proceeded to count Jeremy out. He hurried over it, too. Evidently the man whom Talbot

had defeated at such an early stage of the fight was not popular.

With an expression of utter bewilderment on his face, Jeremy lay blinking up at the sky.

When the count was concluded, Talbot stepped forward and assisted him to his feet.

He expected an outburst of rage and cheer from Jeremy; but none came.

"Thanks!" said Talbot's recent opponent. "You beat me fair and square."

The boot had been short and sweet, and the lesson had come to Talbot.

The junior could not help thinking that the affair would have ended differently had Jeremy been at concert-pitch.

Still smiling broadly, the landlord handed over the five pounds.

"A neat exhibition," he said; "though I wish it could have lasted longer."

"Look here," said Talbot, "what have you got set in the way of grub?"

The landlord reflected a moment.

"Some cold food!" he began.

"Ripping!"

"And my daughter could cook some apple-dumplings—"

"Bless your daughter!"

"And there's plenty of good brown Sussex ale."

"Thanks! I'd prefer ginger-pop."

"Just as you wish, sir."

And the landlord bustled into the inn to prepare the repast.

There was a table on the outskirts of the lawn, likewise a bench. Talbot sat down, and waited for the meal to arrive.

He had never looked forward to a feed so much in his life.

"Will you join me at dinner, Jeremy?" he inquired.

"Well, I don't mind," said Jeremy, seating himself on the bench next to Talbot. "I'm tired of having my meals in liquid form."

The other men dispersed, and presently the landlord appeared with a laden tray.

Talbot fell to with avidity. He was

not a big eater, as a rule; but Fatty Wynn would have been hard put to it to keep pace with him then.

"Hungry!" inspired Jeremy sympathetically.

"Famished!" mumbled Talbot.

"That fever came in handy—what?"

"It just about saved my life."

"You scared it away," said Jeremy.

"It isn't often I'm beaten so fair as that. You've done something to shoot from the home-base about now."

You've given the knock-out to Jeremy Dale, middle-weight champion of Sussex!"

Talbot took this latter remark not so much with a grain of salt, but with a whole salm-sine, so to speak.

Jeremy's imagination was running riot. He rattled on gaily, expounding his life history, while Talbot attacked the cold food.

The apple-dumplings were disposed of in due course, and Talbot rose from the bench like a giant refreshed.

Jeremy concluded his flow of eloquence, and, crossing his hands in his waistcoat region, he nodded off to sleep.

Talbot paid the bill, nodded cheerily to the landlord, and hurried away to the nearest bookshop.

Here he purchased a pair of stout, comfortable boots, which would stand him in good stead for the rest of his journey.

The short winter day was drawing to its close as the junior again took to the road.

The caravan was probably a long way ahead by this time—how far it was impossible to say.

The united advantages of a rest, a square meal, and a good pair of boots, now made themselves apparent.

Talbot went ahead with a long, elastic stride. Hope had returned to him in full flush—the hope that he would be able to rescue Marie.

Besides, he had money in his pocket. The pang of hunger and thirst would not torment him again.

As he strode on in the winter twilight, his thoughts turned to the fellows at St. Jan's.

They would be at prep now. Tom's Meers & Co. would probably be wondering what had happened to the wanderer—whether he had yet prosecuted his quest to a successful conclusion.

"I'm glad I wrote to the Head," he reflected, "telling him why Tom Meredith and Gussy came to the George and the Dragon. Knox was certain to protest that they had been on the rangle. They might have been asked from the school if I hadn't explained matters."

Talbot maintained his quick rate of progress for a couple of hours or more, and then the breath of the sea came to his nostrils. He must be getting near the coast.

There had been no sign of the caravan; doubtless it had reached its destination.

Talbot made strenuous efforts to discover what that destination was. He questioned every passer-by; he scanned the green meadows on either side of him, to see if the caravan had come to anchor there, and he was ever on the alert for a clue.

But the luck seemed dead against him. No one had seen the caravan. Talbot himself could not see it, and there was nothing in the nature of a clue to guide him.

His former sense of weariness returned to him. It seemed ages ago since he had set out from Weyland on the track of the kidnappers, though it had been only that morning.

Was it any use going on?

The caravan had not been seen. He

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might search all night for it without success.

Why not get a night's lodging somewhere, and renew his quest in the morning.

Talbot was tired, and the temptation was almost irresistible.

But there was Marie. The girl stood in sore need of help, and if the search were postponed till morning it might then be too late.

Talbot decided to keep on until physical exhaustion compelled him to give in.

He struck off along a side road which led to the cliffs. He scarcely knew why he took this road. It was by instinct, perhaps.

A very dark and lonely road was this—deserted save for the junior who trudged wearily along.

Talbot was wondering how far it was to the cliffs, when he was startled by the sound of voices upraised in song.

He stopped short, listening.

Neither the song nor the singing was very dignified. Obviously, the men who were responsible for the vocal efforts were decidedly merry:

"Come, landlord, fill this flowing bowl
Until it doth run over!
For to-night we'll merry be,
For to-night we'll merry be,
For to-night we'll merry be,
To-morrow we'll be sober!"

Whatever their intentions for the morrow, the singers were certainly far from sober at that moment.

The voices appeared to come from a neighbouring meadow.

Talbot, stepping on to the grass which bordered the road, crept along to investigate.

Something white was visible in the darkness.

Talbot's heart beat quickly.

Was the caravan!

"At least," he muttered.

He had reached the end of his quest. So he thought, anyway.

The caravan was pitched in a corner of the meadow, and a short distance away the horse was grazing.

Blankets had been spread out on the grass, and on the blankets sprawled four men.

It was impossible to recognise them in the darkness, but Talbot had no doubt that they were Jim Davlish and his confederates.

They had evidently paused several times on their journey in order to partake of liquid refreshment, hence these sounds of revelry by night.

And where was Marie Rivers?

Peering intently through a gap in the hedge, Talbot saw that she was not with the men. Obviously, she must be in the caravan.

Talbot feebly glowed with delight.

It was all so beautifully simple. The door of the caravan was out of sight of the men. All Talbot had to do was to steal into the meadow, mount the caravan steps, make his identity known to Marie in a whisper, and accompany her to the nearest town—and safety.

There would be little need for much caution.

No one was on guard in the caravan, and Jim Davlish & Co. would be too much occupied with their own pleasure to notice what was going on.

Talbot lost no time.

He was through the gap in a twinkling, and advancing towards the caravan.

Swiftly he mounted the steps, and peered into the dark interior.

No sound, no movement came from within.

"Marie!" whispered the junior.

"There was no response."

"She may be asleep," reflected Talbot; though how the girl could possibly sleep, with such a din going on outside, he could not for the life of him understand.

"Marie!" he repeated.

Still there was no response.

Talbot suddenly remembered his electric torch. He produced it, and its rays lit up the interior of the caravan.

The junior started back with a gasp of dismay.

Talbot's dismay changed rapidly to anger. He felt like striking Jim Davlish by the throat, and demanding to know what he had done with Marie.

As he descended the steps, however, he realised what had happened.

Marie had made good her escape.

The caravan was empty!

Taking advantage of the fact that no guard had been set over her, the girl must have got free.

Talbot was glad to think so, of course; but a measure of anxiety mingled with his gladness.

The hour was late. A strong wind was blowing, and altogether it was not a nice night for a girl to be roaming the countryside without the wherewithal to procure food and shelter.

The average girl would have placed herself under the protection of the police; but Marie Rivers would not do that, for obvious reasons.

Talbot crept back through the gap in the hedge, and followed the narrow, winding road until he reached the cliff-top.

The nearest town—it was referred to as a town, though in reality it was little more than a fishing village—was five miles away. Talbot remembered, as he visited this part of the coast before, and after a good deal of thought he managed to recollect his bearings.

Although the town of Sturmpoint was three miles distant by way of the cliff-path, there was a short cut to it along the shore. It was unwise and unsafe, however, to take this short cut, except at low tide.

Talbot knew this. There had been cases of people being caught by the incoming tide and swept out to sea.

There was no doubt that Marie Rivers had made for the town; but which route had she taken?

Had she proceeded along the path at the top of the cliffs, or had she climbed down the front of the cliffs and made her way over the rocks and shingle?

Talbot stood on the cliff-top, debating this question, when he noticed he heard a voice from down below.

Was anybody down there or was his imagination playing him tricks?

Talbot strained his ears to listen.

Yes, he was sure of it this time.

"Help! Help!"

The cry came feebly from below.

Talbot started violently.

It was the voice of Marie Rivers!

CHAPTER 5.

A Race against Time.

FOR perhaps a moment Talbot remained motionless on the cliff-top, with his heart thumping against his ribs.

The situation dawned upon him like a flash.

Marie had climbed down to the foot of the cliff in order to take the short cut, and she was in danger. With speed and fury, the treacherous tide was coming on!

Talbot pulled himself together, and, commencing to climb down the cliff, he gave an answering, reassuring shout—

"It's all right, Marie! I'm coming!"

It was an easy matter to climb down the cliff, in spite of the fact that the soil crumbled and gave way under his feet.

To climb up, however, once the descent had been made, would be impossible. Talbot had done a great deal of climbing in the course of his career, and he knew that it was easy enough to get down slopes which it was practically impossible to mount again.

Talbot was nearing the foot of the cliffs now, and when he at length alighted on the shingle he saw that the rapidly-advancing tide had already crunched the foot of the cliffs.

"Marie! Where are you, Marie!" The reply came with almost startling suddenness.

"Here, Toff!"

Talbot made his way in the direction of the voice.

He discovered Marie a dozen yards away, standing with her back to the cliff, which she had been vainly endeavouring to climb.

The sea-mark, to which the tide would ascend when it was at its full, was far above the girl's head.

"So you have found me at last, Toff! I knew you would, sooner or later!"

Marie kept her voice wonderfully steady, but Talbot saw that she was trembling. She did not seem to be told of the danger which menaced them both.

For a moment Talbot was silent.

He had indeed found his girl chum; but was she about to be lost to him for ever? Would those treacherous waters envelop them both?

The junior glanced up at the towering cliff.

"Is it quite impossible to climb up, Marie?"

"Quite, Toff!"

"Then it looks as if we must have a race with the tide. The water's only just above our ankles at present. We'll wade along the shore until we reach safety."

"Impossible!" said Marie. "I've already tried it."

"But—but why is it impossible?"

"Further along by the headland the water is much higher than it is here. We are cut off, Toff. When I shouted for help I was hoping there might be a boat of some sort within call. I did not want to bring anyone down from the top of the cliff to share my peril—least of all you, Toff."

Talbot ceased at the frowning waters.

The tide was rising apace, and he judged that in half an hour it would be up to their waists.

To remain there shouting for help would be futile. No vessel which would be in the dark sea at that hour.

"We're in a very tight corner, Marie," said Talbot presently.

"A very tight corner, Toff! It looks"—her voice faltered a little—"it looks as if we must die together!"

Talbot set his teeth.

He was not afraid of death—not afraid, that was, in the sense that many fellows in a similar predicament would be—but he did not want to die yet. There were so many things he wanted to do, so many ambitions he wanted to realise. He had not realised until this moment how great a hold he had on life.

And there was Marie!

Whatever his own fate, Marie must be saved.

If the worst happened to his girl chum, her going would leave a void which would never adequately be filled. Marie was the little sister of the poor; she had brought sunshine into many lives; she had wrought wonder by the radiance of her presence. If one were taken and the

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other left, Talbot prayed that he might be the former. Few would miss him—so he thought, anyway, Marie would be missed by all.

"I must do something!" he muttered. "There must surely be some way out!"

Marie threw out her hands with a despairing gesture.

"There is no way out, Toff! See! The water is already up to our knees! In another hour, perhaps longer!"

"Marie left the water undisturbed."

"What is this about, Marie?" said Talbot.

"There's just a chance—"

"I beg your pardon?"

"There's just a chance—"

"I beg your pardon?"

"There's just a chance—"

"I beg your pardon?"

"There's just a chance—"

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"I beg your pardon?"

"There's just a chance—"

"I beg your pardon?"

"There's just a chance—"

upon the rocks; it was the loss of an attack of cramp, the swimmer's foe.

By sheer energy, however, Talbot warded off this danger.

He ploughed his way through tangled masses of seaweed, and by the time he was fairly out of his depth the exercise had warmed him.

Not for one moment did the plucky junior falter.

All his thoughts, all his energies, were concentrated upon the stern task he had undertaken.

He noticed that there was a strong current running; but, fortunately, it was in his favour. He was surprised at the speed with which he ploughed through the swirling water.

Once his feet came into contact with a jagged edge of rock, causing him to shiver with apprehension. But the danger was soon past, and, with strong, sweeping strokes, he continued his fight against time and tide.

His progress, quick though it was, quickened as he thought of Marie standing face to face with death.

Supposing he was too late? Supposing the rude waters had enveloped her before he arrived on the scene?

For an instant Talbot's brain was in a turmoil, and he was on the point of losing his nerve.

But he pulled himself together with a great effort, and swam on strongly.

Presently, in the distance, he detected a row of gleaming lights, and he was utterly bewildered at the sight.

What did those lights mean?

Five minutes later their significance dawned upon him. They were the lights of Northpoint Pier.

Talbot knew he was nearing the end of his strenuous swim. And he was glad—gladly glad for he felt that his strength was failing him.

How he managed to reach the shore he never knew.

He had vague recollections of wading out of the water on to the beach, and of a couple of kindly fishermen approaching him.

To those men he explained the situation—though he could not afterwards remember the words he used—and they something hot and leaving from a flask was passed down his throat, and he returned to time to accompany the fishermen in their strongest rowing boat.

"Quickly!" he muttered. "Quickly! There's just a chance—"

Talbot's voice trailed off as the boat, manned vigorously by the two fishermen, rose and fell on the bosom of the waves.

CHAPTER 9

Light after Darkness.

"TOO late!" said one of the fishermen.

"Afraid so, mate!" rejoined his companion.

Talbot awoke from a sort of stupor into which he had fallen.

It was some time before he could collect his surroundings. Then he saw that he was still in the boat; that one of the fishermen was rowing as if for his life; and that the other fisherman sat in the stern, supporting the unconscious, hand-made form of a girl.

"Marie!" muttered Talbot.

"What did the fellow mean, Talbot, wondered, by saying it was too late?"

Here was his girl (born safe in the boat, snatched from the jaws of death. He must have been oblivious to what was going on when they rescued her; but that did not matter. Marie's safety was the only thing that mattered. Too late, indeed! It seemed to Talbot that it had been just in the nick of time!

"We'd do our best for the poor kid," said the man who had first spoken.

And then Talbot understood.

An icy fear gripped him. Marie Rivers was hidden just behind the knees of the fisherman, looking so white and still that the meaning of those words, "Too late!" was only too apparent.

Marie had been saved from the devouring waves; but the lump of life was flickering very low. Perhaps it had flickered out altogether.

Talbot turned to white face to the man who was rowing Marie.

"Is she there no longer?" he murmured.

"The fisherman started.

"I don't know you'd come round," he said. "Fisher's better now!"

"Never mind me!" Talbot's tone was almost fierce. "Answer my question! Is there no hope?"

The fisherman peered down into Marie's face.

"I think she'll pull through," he said. But he thought nothing of the sort.

Talbot knew that the man was not speaking sincerely. He suffered a thousand mental agonies as the boat sped over the waves.

Was it all to end like this? All the hardships of the long and weary search for Marie—had they been in vain?

Shortly afterwards the boat lay afloat.

The two fishermen carried the still form of Marie Rivers between them to the shore.

Talbot, in a sort of nightmare, followed behind.

He collapsed on reaching the cottage, for the mental and physical strain he had undergone during the past few days had completely worn him out.

The junior was carried, in an unconscious condition, to one of the bed-rooms. And, meanwhile, the doctor was sent for.

When Talbot came to himself the morning sunlight was streaming in at the window.

Seated by a chair at his bedside was a woman—a plump, rosy-cheeked woman—evidently the wife of one of the fishermen. Her eyes met those of Talbot.

"Back up now!" she said kindly. "Marie's lips could frame only a word. And it was in the form of a question."

"Marie?"

The fisherman's wife smiled.

"She has pulled through. Her life was in the balance when the doctor came, but she's got a fine constitution, and she rallied splendidly! A few days more, and she'll be as right as rain!"

"Thank Heaven!" muttered Talbot fervently.

And, with his mind at peace—with that terrible burden of anxiety removed—he was able to lay his head on the pillows and sleep soundly until noon.

He wanted to get up in the afternoon—but he was not allowed to budge.

Next morning, however, after a long and refreshing sleep, he was his old self again.

The fisherman's wife told him that Marie was making splendid progress, and that he might go in and see her.

It was a dramatic meeting.

There were tears in Marie's eyes as she slipped her slim white hand into that of the fellow to whom she owed her life.

"Toff, it is useless for me to try to thank you. Words are so cheap, and nothing I say could express one-tenth of the gratitude I feel. But for you, Toff, I—"

"Draw it mild, Marie!" said Talbot, smiling. "It's those fisherfolk you have to thank."

"But you want to get help—"

"Any other fellow would have done the same."

But Marie knew only too well that few other fellows would have faced that ordeal of wind and wave and darkness.

"If a tragedy had happened—and it nearly did—it would have been entirely

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my own fault," said Marie. "I ought not to have crossed your wishes in the first place by meeting Jim Dawlish. I might have known he meant no good."

"Don't reproach yourself, Marie. The past is dead and done with now. Jim Dawlish has been allowed to go free, and so have the other scoundrels. But that's unavoidable. If Dawlish should ever approach you again, you will know better than to walk into a trap."

"For some moments a silence fell between the two damsels."

"I'm so glad things have turned out like this, Tull!" murmured Marie, at length.

"So am I, Marie. I could dance with joy to know you are all right!"

"Jarring isn't allowed in this room!" said Marie, with a smile.

Talbot smiled, too.

"I'm going along to the post-office to despatch a couple of telegrams," he said. "One to Dr. Holmes, and the other to Tom Merry. They'll be relieved to know we're safe, I reckon."

And Talbot went out into the morning sunshine with a light step, and with true happiness in his heart.

And as he went, he realized the truth

of one of the most inspiring messages ever written—to the effect that happiness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning!

Joy had come to Reginald Talbot in full measure.

Three days later St. Jim's was electrified by the return of Talbot and Marie Rivers.

There were great scenes in the old quadrangle.

"Heav'ns they come, dear boys!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, baring his brand-new topper into the air in his excitement.

"Three cheers for Miss Marie!"

"And three times three for Talbot!"

Cheer upon cheer rang out as Talbot and Marie Rivers passed through the crowded quadrangle.

They went first of all to the Head's study. It took them some time to get there, for they were hemmed in by the enthusiastic crowd, and their hands were seized and shaken like pump-handles.

"Thank Heaven you have both returned to us in safety!" murmured the Head. "We have passed through a

period of almost intolerable suspense (in your behalf); but that period is now happily over."

There was renewed cheering as Talbot and Marie Rivers emerged from the Head's study; and the couple were escorted to Tom Merry's study in the usual passage, where a bumper celebration had been arranged.

There were two places of honour at the head of the table; and it was superfluous to state by whom they were occupied.

"This is glorious!" said Tom Merry.

"A day of days, by Jove!" exclaimed Monty Leather.

And whilst the feed was in progress, Talbot was made to recount to an eager audience the many and exciting events which had befallen him when in search of Marie!

THE END.

[Another grand, long complete school story of Tom Merry and Co., entitled "Rivals on the Warpath!" Order your copy in advance.]

The Opening Chapters of our Great New Adventure Serial Story.



THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Dick Danby, a stalwart lad of sixteen, obtains the promise of partnership from Captain Morgan Kidd, skipper of the auxiliary schooner Foam, and his daughter Stella, in a treasure cruise to the wrecked vessel Pathan. Dick is the sole survivor of the Pathan, which was torpedoed, and is lying, half-submerged, off an island in the South Seas. In the strong room of the ill-fated ship is two million sterling in bar-gold and money; also the Dragon's Eye—a wonderful diamond.

Otto Schwab, posing as a Dutchman—though in reality the commander of the U-boat which sank the Pathan—and Siah Mendora, a villainous Malay, are their unscrupulous rivals for the treasure.

Harry Fielding and Joe Maddox join the expedition, also Wang Su, a Chinese boy. Dick is relating at supper-time how he had been attacked by Mendora and Otto Schwab, and his plans stolen, when, to the amusement of all present, Wang produces the missing lead.

New Read on The Red Rover.

"WANG, you're a wonder! I might have known that your yellow hand could have belonged to no one else," cried Dick.

"Me you boy?" queried the Chinaman indignantly.

Dick Danby looked from Stella to Captain Kidd.

"Seems to me as though you won't be able to shake him off," laughed the skipper.

Dick Danby winked at his companions.

"All right, Wang, you shall be my boy if you will let me cut off your pig-tail," he announced.

The smile faded from Wang Su's face, his yellow complexion turned a dirty white as he gazed blankly at his new master.

"No makee pool Wang Su entiree pig-tail," he pleaded. "Me Maan Danby's slave. He hit me, he pinch me, he stick nasty knife in me, but no cut-off pig-tail."

Dick was, or pretended to be, adamant, until, finding tears and entreaties of no avail, Wang Su rose slowly to his feet, and, gravely unwinding his long queue from round his top-knot, held the end to Dick, saying, with pathetic dignity:

"Afee lightee! Cut pool Chinaman's pig-tail!"

But Dick could not stand it any longer.

"Wang, I'm a beast to tease you like this. I was only joking, boy! Of course you shall be my servant, if you want to!" he cried.

The Chinaman gazed at him in incredulous delight; then, to the amusement of all present, waved his hands frantically above his head, shouting:

"Heep, heep, hurray!"—the nearest he could get to a British cheer.

Then he began to caper about in some weird kind of dance, turning round faster and faster until, at last, he sprang out to the captain and twirled round like a living top-stone, his pig-tail, arms, and loose clothes flying round him like so many wheels.

This he kept up for several minutes, then sprang to the deck, and, waving swiftly to Stella's side, asked calmly:

"Wang Su changee plate, mess?"

Too astounded to do anything else but nod, the girl watched the Chinaman, as, with deft fingers, he removed the dirty plates and substituted clean ones.

Whatever Wang Su might have been in the past—and despite the most direct questioning, his past life remained a sealed book to all on board the Foam—Wang Su was certainly an ideal waiter. He had the knack of anticipating the wishes of the guests, and moved so quickly, and yet so silently, that they scarcely knew he was present.

By the time supper was over it had been arranged that the boys should return to the *Trader's House* and fetch the two.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 611.

might-be ready to take advantage of the early morning tide to slip out of harbour before anyone was about, and thus get well ahead of Schwab and his accomplices, should they attempt to follow.

As Captain Kidd had intended sailing in a few days on a coira-burting trip amongst the islands, the Foam was already laden with trade goods and provisioned for a long voyage.

Neither had the genial old "Pirate," as he had been nicknamed, allowed the grass to grow under his feet. He had that afternoon purchased half a dozen rifles, as many revolvers and automatic pistols, and a good store of ammunition, so that they would be able to give a good account of themselves if attacked by the savage inhabitants of the island, or the rocky shores of which the Foam had been wrecked, or by other foes.

Not that they anticipated that Schwab and his gang would resort to actual violence, but strange things happen in the more remote parts of the Southern Seas, and it was as well to be prepared.

As midday Harry Fielding, nor Joe Maddox knew the exact position of the ship, which Dick had named Treasure Island, after Robert Louis Stevenson's great book, they went back to study the chart until the rising moon would light them on their journey.

So engrossed were they watching Captain Kidd prick out his course for the morrow, that they did not know the moon had risen until they were startled by hearing Wang Su hail them through the skylight.

"No speak! Come on deck—business quick!" he whispered.

Headed by Captain Kidd, they streamed up the companion-way, and were promptly hoveled into the shadow of the cockpit by the Chinaman.

"Looks their!" whispered Wang Su, pointing towards the farther side of the harbour.

Every eye was turned in the direction of the Chinaman's outstretched hand.

Lying at anchor, where certainly no ship had been when night fell, was a low, rakish-looking schooner, with tapering masts, and a certain indescribable look about her which made the old skipper growl softly under his breath.

"That Mendocino's ship, the Led Lover!" whispered Wang Su.

Wang Su's Report.

As Wang Su's whispered announcement fell on their ears, Dick Danby and his friends gazed eagerly at the beautiful, lovingly crafted craft that rode the water with the buoyancy of a canoe.

"Yes, that's the Red Rover right enough. And a right tight little ship she is, though there is a wicked leak about her I'll allow!" declared Captain Kidd after a few moments' silence.

Dick Danby nodded.

The same thought had entered his own head; but she rode the waves so gracefully that he had hesitated to give expression to what he had felt inclined to look upon as a wild fancy.

"They say she is the latest thing amongst the islands, and now I have seen her I can quite believe it. Certainly her lines are as near perfection as possible," commented Harry Fielding.

Stella nodded and shrugged.

"I don't like her at all; she looks like some beautiful, evil thing lying in wait for its prey," she said.

"A sort of cat-and-mouse stunt, with the Foam as the mouse!" suggested Joe Maddox.

But his effort did not even evoke a smile.

"The presence of that slender schooner in the harbour seemed to have cast a dimper on their spirits.

"Keepe still! Bootee!" warned Wang Su.

The little party held their breath and listened, but several seconds elapsed ere they could distinguish the creak of oars on rowlocks, which had already been detected by the sharp ears of the little Chinaman.

A minute later a ship's dinghy shot from out of the shadows of a palm-lined cove. It was headed for the Red Rover.

Captain Kidd was motion without a huge, old-fashioned telescope, which he carried, as a handman might carry a walking-stick, under his arm. This he focused on the distant boat.

"Mendocino is pulling, and that half-baked Dutchman, Schwab, is in the stern-sheets," he announced, after a careful scrutiny.

"Then the sooner we get the diving suits aboard and slip off, the better!" declared Dick.

"Yes, my boy; though, with that sea churning there, we can't hope to slip our moorings without the swells seeing us. But they may not be ready to sail, so we'll get our start just the same," agreed the skipper.

Five minutes later the three boys had slipped quietly ashore, leaving Captain Kidd and Stella to loosen the sails and prepare the petrol-engines, and get all as near ready for an immediate start as possible, without awakening the seven Kanaka scowmen, who shared the fore-cabin with Wang Su.

They would have taken the Chinaman by surprise, but he had mysteriously disappeared, as while watching for him Stells, they went without him.

Two hours later they returned, accompanied by a score of native workmen. The latter carried a number of heavy cans, which were at once stowed away below.

"Where's Wang?" asked Dick, when the natives had retired, jubilant, with the handsome "dash" their young master had given them.

Stella shook her head.

"He's not aboard, for I have searched every where," she replied.

"There's something blomed fishy about that Chink!" declared Captain Kidd. "What's he taken such a fancy to you for, Dick Danby? You aren't a bad-looking youngster, as boys go, but it isn't because of your bright blue eyes, or your heavenly smile!"

Dick flushed, and stole a quick glance at Stella.

"He seemed out of the way grateful because I had saved him from drowning," he replied.

"I'm not saying Chinks aren't grateful, nor that they haven't queer ways of showing it; but I never yet knew a Chinaman grateful enough to sacrifice his pigtail!" asserted the skipper confidently. "No, lad! You may feel bad me if it is ever as our friend Wang Su again, unless—boarding-pike! What's that?"

Captain Kidd sprang to his feet and reached for a starting-spike, whilst the others drew back, their heads instinctively flying to their hip-pockets, as they gazed in alarm at the fearful apparition that was peering at them over the post-hulk.

It was only a man's head, but a head such as Captain Kidd's great pirate ancestor might have seen any day amongst his most bloodthirsty crews.

Wound round the head was the small headgear—half skull-cap, half turban—beloved of the Malay. A pair of pinc-

ing eyes shone from the dark face, and the mouth was broadened into a wide grin by the blade of the murderous-looking knife held between the teeth.

"The next moment an almost naked yellow body followed the grim head, a hand snatched the knife from the distracted mouth, and a voice said solemnly:

"No shootee! Why killee poed Wang Chinaman?"

"Wang Su!" came simultaneously from five pairs of lips.

The Chinaman nodded vigorously.

"No top-hole Malay!" he grinned.

"You're a top-hole fellow, putting the wind up us like this! How have you been?" demanded Dick half-angrily, half-laughingly.

"Me pay' speets to Mabel Led Lover & Co., Lim'ed!" was the unexpected reply.

"You've been on board the Red Rover?" ejaculated Harry Fielding.

"What on earth for, and how on earth did you message it?"

"Blaise!" replied Wang Su, tapping his forehead sagely. "Me swim."

He checked himself, and added instead: "In lilly Fiji canoe—allee same as this time."

And he pointed to his attire, or, rather, want of attire.

"Me climb aboard. Sittee down waded soil, lockee allee same ethel had laasid. Shippee fell of top-hole had Malay—ten, twenty, tolly, a hundred no goodee out-throat!"

And Wang Su drew the back of his knife across his throat in a way that made his listeners shudder.

"Did you see anything of that leaven pirate Mendocino, and that white-handed Schwab?" demanded Captain Kidd.

"Me chase many road steen," continued the Chinaman. "Machoo along thing." Makee poed Chinaman sleep, Mendocino he come long. He killee many drink Malaymana. Me no move, Schwab he killee poed Malaymana. Me no move. Mendocino he say allee hand-check darren pigge waded, Schwab he say, he dead to world. Me speakee English—no one sabe!"

A glance toward having assured Wang Su that his listeners were strung up to the desired pitch, he grinned urbanely upon them, and immediately fell, or pretended to fall, fast asleep.

"Wake up, you tantalizing little imp!" roared the skipper impatiently.

But Wang Su, in whom the spirit of mischief dwelt, only sneered the louder.

"Well, of all the——" began Dick, when Joe Maddox interposed.

"Now's your chance to get his pig-tail, Dick!" he suggested.

The words acted like a charm.

"What, wazee?" demanded Wang Su, his eyes wide open in alarm.

"Get on with it! It's a complete story, not a serial year's telling!" cried Dick.

"Me no tellee story—me speakee truth!" declared the Chinaman virtuously.

"Pass me that knife, Harry!" requested Dick.

Wang Su sat bolt upright.

"They talkee and talkee of Led Lover. How she sail s'ed Foam, and take her on de high sea!" he continued hurriedly.

"The pirates!" growled Captain Kidd between his teeth.

"They cuttee all thistee one time quere," kept Master Dick and Mrs. Stella.

It was the Chinaman. "Masted Dick he trakee tallee allee wazee it; Miss Stella she milkee Mendocino!"

With a roar that might almost have been heard on board the Red Rover, Captain Kidd sprang to where the schooner's dinghy floated at the stern of the vessel.



Captain Kidd springing to his feet and roared for a martini-quake, whilst the others drew back, their hands instinctively flying to their hip-pockets, as they gazed in alarm at the fearful apparition that was peering at them over the port bulwark.

"Come on, lad, I'll break every bone in that half-bred Malay's body!" he cried furiously.

"I'm with you, sir," agreed Dick.

"And I!" roared the other two.

But Stella, who had gone pale to the very lips at Wang So's rental of the fearful fate to which the villains would have doomed her, laid a restraining hand on her father's arm.

"Steady on, dad! Don't do anything rash!" she cried.

"Bah! Broadbides and bow-chasers, I'll thrash the swab until he won't know his toes from his nose!" roared the old skipper. "I'll—"

"Get the whole lot of you either killed, or knocked about that we won't be able to sail to-morrow, besides getting the authorities wise regarding the treasure!" interrupted his daughter.

Captain Kidd came to an abrupt halt, and scratched his head with the small end of the telescope.

"The girl's right! Tar and turpentine, the girl's right!" he avowed. "Fifty you hadn't been born a few hundred years before, lad! What a—"

Stella placed her hand laughingly over his mouth.

"Yes, dad; we've heard all that before. What we must consider is how to turn the tables on Messrs. Schwab & Wunders. Now that, thanks to Wang So, we know their plans, we can fight them the easier," she said.

Her father nodded then, and with a bang a scowling and half-regretful glance at the Malay's schooner, seated himself and beckoned the others around him.

Cat and Mouse.

IT was with the wild, plaintive moans of the Malay sailors on board Messrs. Wunders's schooner, the Red Rover, coming across the water to where the Foam tugged at her moorings, that Dick Danby and his companions flung themselves down, dressed as they were, beneath the awning over the good ship's stern.

They had determined to slip out on the turn of the tide, an hour before day-break, trusting to the slight mist that always rises before dawn in those latitudes, and the notorious bad watch all Eastern sailors keep, to be clear of the harbor and away before their rivals, in the search for the Pailan's treasure, should know that the Foam had left her berth.

They had set up discussing their plans so late that it had not been worth while leaving in; besides, it was much more pleasant there, with nothing but the awning between themselves and the star-bespangled heavens than down in the comfortable but stuffy little cabins.

All slept soundly, but none of the party required much awakening when the hour for action arrived.

Naturally the Kanakas were awakened, and, the necessity for silence impressed upon them, they cast off the mooring-ropes and thrust the schooner from the wharf with long poles.

As the space between the schooner and the shore grew wider and wider, Dick Danby felt a fierce thrill of excitement cutting through his veins.

They were off at last, on a voyage which would see himself and the loyal friends who were aiding him in the great

adventure, rich for life; or they would never look upon the palm-fringed shores of Fiji again.

That they would fail to find the wreck, or that, finding it, should discover the gold beyond their reach, never entered the gallant youngster's head.

Failure was a word which Dick Danby had carefully crossed out of his vocabulary.

It is true that the Malay schooner, whose flowing lines and slender spars they could just see looming through the morning mist, carried desperate and unscrupulous foes, who would not stop at anything to gain possession of the treasure.

But Dick was not certain he would have had that element of opposition removed.

It added extra spice to the adventure. The race had started; let the best men win.

"That's all very well, lad," growled Captain Kidd, to whom Dick had whispered something of the kind, as the Foam drifted down the harbor, "but the swabs won't play the game. I know that half-baked Portuguese-Malay, Mess-dome, and I've about taken the measure of that Dutch-German Otto Schwab, and I tell you, there's not a mean, low-down trick they won't try on us, to achieve their ends!"

With fast-beating hearts, these on board the Foam watched the Red Rover as their own ship, caught first by one current, and then by another, was carried to within a cable's length of the Malay, and now further away.

But on about of alarm, or awaking feet on board the Red Rover told that they had been seen, and something like a

whispered cheer arose from the schooner's decks as the tide carried them past the low headlands that marked the entrance to the tiny bay.

"Shake out her sails, boys! Look lively!" cried the skipper.

Singing their low, sweet Fijian chanty, the Kanakas grasped the ropes, and soon the Foam was gathering way under the favouring breeze which belled out her huge mastsails.

"North by east!" ordered Captain Kidd.

"North by east it is!" came back in the musical tones of Stella, who was at the wheel.

Half a mile from the harbour's mouth Dick Dandy looked back.

The sea had sprung up with tropical suddenness. Through the slight haze that still hung over the harbour he could see the Red Rover still dragging sluggishly at her anchor.

The port stopped a headland shut the glass ship from view, and Dick turned to the Kanaka crew.

They were Samsons to a man, and Dick marked with pleasure their stalwart, well-set-up frames, and the seamanlike manner in which they handled the sails under old Kao, the boatswain, an magnificent specimen of an ancient native sailor as the eye would wish to light upon.

Ere he had been at sea an hour, he knew that a perfect understanding existed between Captain Kidd and the Kanaka crew, whilst it severely needed the looks of doglike affection they cast upon Stella whenever she spoke to one or the other, or their duties took them near the wheel, to show that they were devoted to her, body and soul.

Now, Dick had been thinking about the island long enough to be wiser than the Kanaka is usually the most loyal creature on earth, and he was confident that, no matter what happened, they could depend upon their native crew.

The schooner was kept like a yacht. Her decks had been polished until they shone again, whilst her sails, as white as the bleaching, sun could make them, were patched and mended.

Every rope was neatly coiled; everything in its proper place.

The only thing which was not in its place was what looked like a huge, flat packing-case, that occupied the whole of the bows, and most somewhat hamper the men working the foremast sail and the jib.

But even this was scrubbed white, and had the appearance of a fixture rather than a movable box.

All aboard the Foam were in the best

of health and spirits, as, bowing gracefully before a favouring breeze, the schooner heeled gently over as she cut through the water.

It was indeed a lovely message that surrounded them.

Here and there could be seen lively islands, crowned with graceful cocoanut-palms. The dancing waves were dotted close inland with native canoes, whilst white-sailed sloops broke the dead monotony of the sea. Now and again appeared a mighty ocean liner, or a steam tramp, leaving heavy trails of dark-green smoke behind her.

A schooner in, perhaps, the earliest ship to handle that side the sea, and so, with every sail set, Stella headed the wheel over to the Kanaka, and joined the three boys and her father in the waist, from whence arose jokes and laughter, interspersed with more serious discussions of their future movements.

"Now that we are well away from Fiji, and there is no likelihood of our touching port until we return, let's tell old Kao what we're up against, and ask his opinion," suggested Captain Kidd.

"What he does not know about the South Sea isn't worth troubling about."

"Wag, tell Kao to step forward," he added, as the others nodded agreement.

As the Samson stepped forward, and saluting the company with the dignified grace that seems second nature to the islander, squatted on his haunches before his skipper, Captain Kidd told him the object of the voyage.

Kao listened without a word until the skipper had finished; then, asked to give his advice, said:

"I know the island of which the Father of his People speaks. It is well to sail by old Kao's advice, for the red gold lies at the bottom of the bay rather than stay an hour alongside that cursed place."

"Why, Kao, what's wrong with it?" demanded Stella.

The old boatswain's wrinkled face softened as he turned to the lively girl.

"Because the men are cursed of cold-pig and—" he began, then hesitated.

"He means they are cannibals," explained Stella.

"Go on, Kao," she added, turning to the Samson.

"The Flower of the Islands will scorn Kao," said the Samson.

"Does one scorn her best friends, Kao?" asked the girl reproachfully.

The ancient Samson raised the hem of Stella's skirt to his lips.

"All the demons of the sea shall not hurt the Flower whilst old Kao lives to protect her!" he said quietly. "When the people of an island are bad the waters round that island are ever the homes of evil spirits. Terrible beings inhabit its

caves, or lie hidden amongst the coral beneath the waves."

"Are you old women, or children, that such idle tales would frighten us, Kao?" cried the skipper.

The old man shuddered.

"I speak not of what I have heard, but of what I have seen," he replied, in awed tones, as he glanced half fearfully over his shoulder.

"And what have you seen?" cried Dick excitedly.

"That which it is taboo to speak," replied the Samson. "But I speak in vain. You British fear neither sun nor elements, and where the Barking Dog leads, Kao and his Samsons will follow!" he added, rising, and moving off with a soft, grimy step that belied his years.

"Not so much of the Barking Dog, Kao!" Captain Kidd called after him.

But though his words were rough, the twinkle in his eyes belied the anger in his voice.

Stella laughed teasingly.

"It's the native's name for dad. The Samsons have many of the same proverbs we have, and 'A barking dog never bites' is one of them," she explained.

"Their name for Captain Kidd is as appropriate as the one they have given you," whispered Dick; and the girl laughed merrily.

About midday a keen-eyed Kanaka drew the skipper's attention to a white sail astern, which grew larger and larger, until at last a low and swift schooner appeared above the horizon.

"She looks like the Red Rover!" declared Captain Kidd unawares, as he focused his glass on it. "It is the Red Rover!" he added, a minute later.

"Come low, she's overhauling us as though she had us fastened in her windlass, and was pulling us back!"

He roared out an order which sent the Kanakas swarming up to the foremast and fore-gallant-topmast to shake out the remaining reefs, and soon the Foam was bowing along under every stitch of canvas she could carry.

Still the Red Rover gained on her.

Captain Kidd stomped about the deck almost foaming with rage.

Wooden-bellied indeed were the throats that passed his lips, and fearful the fate to which he consigned the Red Rover and her crew.

But his choicest flights of eloquence could not stay the Red Rover.

On she came, heeling over until her lee bulwarks were almost under water, and drawing grants of unwilling admiration from the skipper of the outstaid Foam.

Was she did not attempt to attack, it



"Look, my daughter, look well, for these are the marks of the man you wish to marry!"

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fact, never came nearer than a mile of the Foam. Perhaps because there were several in sight, especially a small island steamer that was heading straight for Captain Kidd's vessel.

But she did worse. Sweeping round in a wide circle, she made right round the slower boat, reducing Captain Kidd—who loved his vessel as a good sailor ever does the ship he commands—into a state of almost speechless rage.

To make matters worse, the transport came within hailing distance, and her captain, looking over the weather-works, he said:

"Morning, Kidd! Best respects to Miss Stella! What's Mendocino doin' flyin' ring-a-ring 'o' roses with ye?"

Captain Kidd's answer sent Stella rushing into her cabin with her hands clasped over her ears, and the boys tugging about the deck choked with laughter.

Long after the steamer was out of earshot Captain Kidd was telling his laughing brother-captain what he thought of him.

"That's how to take 'em fore and aft! Followed him at a single broadside! Dick's got loose a shot after I opened fire!" said the old skipper complacently, when at length forced to desist.

"Hain't a chance, had he, dad? I'd give something to be at the club when he has tied up to-night, and hear his account of the meeting," laughed Stella through the skylight.

"You would, would you, you nancy miss!" roared the skipper. Then, his short spell of anger over, he burst into a hearty roar of laughter, in which even the Kanakas joined.

"At any rate, the pitinas has cheered off. Maybe they won't go to the length of attacking us, after all," said Harry Fielding, pointing to the Red Rover, which, cowering her gratings, was sailing swiftly northwards.

Captain Kidd smiled grimly.

"Ever seen a cat playing with a mouse?" he asked.

"Well, yes; but—" began Harry, when the skipper interrupted him.

"That's just what Mendocino is doing. He was just showing us what he could do. There's too many craft about, and we're bound to make the grunts for him to try his piratical tricks just yet. But he'll do as nary as eggs seen's molasses. And he'll get more than he reckons on," he added, with a grim chuckle.

Captain Kidd Takes the First Trick.

THAT night a sharp look out was kept, the boys taking watch turns and turns about.

But nothing happened until towards morning, when the Foam ran into a calm.

But before she lost way Dick, whose watch on deck it was, had aroused Captain Kidd, and in less than a minute the Kanakas were furling and lowering the sails, whilst one of their number hauled below and started the auxiliary petrol engine.

Soon the little vessel was plunging through the smooth, mist-hidden water at a steady eight knots an hour.

"Swarm up to the foretop, Dick, and have a look round," ordered Captain Kidd.

With a cheer "Ay, ay, sir!" the boy obeyed, and was seen seated astride the mast, with his legs dangling over the top-gallant spar.

A strange sight met his eyes. Below, the mist hung so thick over the sea that it had been impossible to see a dozen yards ahead. Here, it was as though he was suspended high above a limitless waste of clouds, altered by the

rays of the sun shining from a cloudless heaven.

At first he could see nothing, but some half-hour later he saw what looked like two low-flying birds, shimmering, half buried in the mist.

"Below there!" he cried, pointing through the fog on to the deck.

"Ay, ay!" came the skipper's voice.

"I can just see the tracks of the Red Rover's masts approaching, a mile or so away, and three points over the port bow," Dick reported.

"Good lad! Report progress of the hullover from time to time," replied Captain Kidd.

"Stop the engines! Get up all rifles

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and ammunition. Unsmack the Bull Pup!" Dick heard him order a few seconds later.

The skipper's last sentence brought a puzzled frown to Dick's forehead, but he soon forgot all about it as he watched the black specks—which he knew to be the tops of the Red Rover's masts—grow closer and closer.

After the first subdued battle, as the Kanakas and Dick's crews obeyed the skipper's orders, not a sound arose from the Foam's deck.

Anxiously the boy watched the Malay vessel's approach, knowing that, hidden by the fog, was a hundred, or perhaps more, bloodthirsty Malays, led by men who, though they boasted themselves white men, were as savage at heart as the piratical crew they commanded.

At first, it seemed as though, despite their care, the foe would find them, for the two small specks, from the track of the foremost of which he could see a long,

slender pennant lying idly down the mast, were heading straight for them, and it seemed as though they must run foul of the Foam.

But just as he was about to slide to the deck and warn those below of their danger, the Red Rover veered to port, and Dick could hear the creak of her guns as she passed her prey, almost within pistol-shot, without seeing her.

Swiftly the tops of the Malay's masts fell astern, and at last Dick ventured to take his eyes off her and glance ahead.

"The next moment he was sliding swiftly down the standing rigging.

"Harrak! The Malays are a mile astern, and there's clear water just ahead! Let her rip!" he cried excitedly.

Then he gazed in amazement at the vessel's bows.

The structure near the bowsprit had gone, and in its place stood a short, squat piece of ordnance that looked for all the world like a whale's harpoon-gun.

"That's my Bull Pup, lad!" cried Captain Kidd at his elbow. "Aren't she a beauty? I applied for a gun when the ordnance firm got about; but a Naval brass, with more gold lace on his cap than brains under it, said he was afraid I might find her very too strong for me, and turn pirate."

"Then I happened to be at Sydney when the Bull there blew four inches off her muzzle, and managed to get hold of her—never mind how. I just had the four holed inches sawn off, saw nights put on by a naval gunner I came across, and there she is, a nice little surprise-packet for Schwab, Mendocino, & Co."

"Will she shoot?" asked Dick doubtfully.

"Will she shoot!" repeated the skipper scornfully. "The gun's knock in the knee of a 2y at five miles, as she used to; but she still makes good shooting at anything up to a mile, and I'm just dying to get a good shot at the Malay boomers."

A wind blowing in their faces at that moment heralded the disappearance of the mast, and shortly afterwards the Foam was joggling peacefully along as fast as her petrol engines could thrust her through the water.

Half an hour later they saw the Red Rover coming after them, looking more rakish and piratical than ever.

She was also able to sail closer to the wood than the Foam, and, aided by her sails, was rapidly overtaking them.

But Captain Kidd did not wait to be overtaken.

Great must have been the Malay's surprise when the gallant little Foam turned round, like a lion at bay, and drove straight at her.

A howl of anticipated triumph burst from her dark-skinned crew, for they thought that their prey, not knowing their numbers, was rushing on to certain destruction.

Their shout of triumph was turned to cries of rage and dismay when the Bull Pup heaved, and a shell went whistling between their masts, cutting the running rigging, and bringing one of their sails down with a run.

Another shot few wide, and, realising that unless he could stop them within the next few minutes the Malays would be aboard, Captain Kidd, who was his own gunner, scurried up close to the padded breech-block, aimed at the bows of the cowering ship, and pulled the trigger again.

A blood-curdling shriek of rage followed the shot!

(Another long instalment of this spic-and-d adventure story will appear in a Wednesday's issue of THE GEM. Order a copy now.)



THE GREYFRIARS HERALD.

There is pretty nearly always something to report in life, and, personally, I regret most sincerely the necessity of postponing the publication of the "Greyfriars Herald" from Tuesday, October 23rd to Tuesday, October 28th, but it had to be done.

The demand for the "Greyfriars Herald" is so enormous that it was found impossible to print off enough copies by the earlier date. A handsome Free Plate will be given away with Number 1. This Plate is very special indeed, for it is a portrait of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, with the Prince's signature at the foot. I fancy all my friends will frame the magnificent portrait of the Prince, who has endeared himself to everybody all over the world.

It will be a pleasure to look at the handsome, manly features of our Prince of Wales, our popular Prince, who takes the tremendous duties of his exalted station so seriously, always thinking of others, and never of himself. In more than one way the Prince, as a man, as a soldier, and as a statesman, has shown that in him this country possesses a real leader who is following in the steps of his father, our beloved King.

A GOOD START.

Well, the "Greyfriars Herald" will have a magnificent start under auspices second to none. It will be nulli secundum all along the line. As I say, I am sorry for the week's delay, but, after all, a week is not so very long to wait, and I know my friends will overlook a detail which it is in no sense available justification as it were.

If you saw the work to be done at the vast printing establishment you would understand how the land lies. The business has been enormous, for orders have come in from all over the world, and, although the original date could not be kept, everybody will be satisfied in the end.

As somebody used to say, it will all come right in the week, otherwise on Tuesday morning, the twenty-eighth, of jolly old, not-brown October, Tuesday! Don't forget the day! Tuesday is celebrated all the way round. Queen Anne took tea on a Tuesday, and then it is really the day of Mrs. which brings it into larger association with the young Prince, who is every inch a soldier and a man.

THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL.

Another word, too, about the "Holiday Annual." I am sure you will not think. One can hardly say too much about a good thing. The "Annual" will be actually on sale as soon as this issue of the Gem—that is, on October 15th. The book will supply a record in literature, and will be a lasting testimony to the increasing popularity of the companion papers.

AN INCREASE IN SIZE.

Yes, that's coming along as well, or, rather, it has come. The "Magazine" and Gem are enlarged to twenty pages, and I know this move will please all my friends. I have long wished to get the companion papers all back on a fair old footing as in size, but one had to wait. But, as you see, the change has come at length. There will be longer tales, most of everything that is good. No longer shall we be cramped up and squeezed for lack of space.

I trust I shall hear from my friends about this matter. They have all already told me it was the one thing needed.

BAGGY TRIMBLE AT HOME.

The Frenchman calls it "chez lui," but there is nothing like English, after all. This is apparently what a great number of my readers want. They write and suggest stories which, I am sure, would be extremely interesting stories showing Baggy Trimble, for instance, unseated in his family anarchy, or dabbled in the family cabbage, or helping to hang out the clothes in the Horse Park of Bagley Hall. Or, perhaps, you should put it Baggy Trimble expiating the third fool's oath for some disgraceful deduction of duty.

It is clear, anyway, that the more Mr. Martin Clifford writes the more he has set to write. I appreciate such letters as those to which I have referred. They show such tremendous looseness in the yarn. But there are limits, of course. We cannot have the family histories of everybody. The printer would be sure to go on strike if anything like that were attempted. Otherwise, of course there could be full details of the early life and struggles with the rattle and spelling-book of the celebrated Mr. Baggy Trimble.

We might look for complete information as to his sensations when he first sipped a bun, or tasted the glowing delight of toffee, or sugar-sticks. All this would be enthralling, and would bring the great wit only Baggy more home to us. Possibly, however, there are those who would sooner not have Baggy brought home to them! He would be a terror in the house, and the ladies would not be safe unless you stored it in a Chubb's safe.

But the point is that the more detail is given the more is asked for, and I shall try to meet this demand as we go on. Naturally, we cannot give everything. If I accepted the suggestions of all my correspondents I should have to describe the aunts, uncles, sisters, cousins, and ancestors of all the popular characters, and what they thought and did for their [living]. Still, we get a glimpse now and then of the world outside.

But as with the companies, all this is limited. Neither Mr. Martin Clifford nor Mr. Frank Richards can do all with all

the characteristics and picturesque "interiors" of, say, the lady house-keeper of Lord Kestwood's; whether she wears curls and likes roast beef for her Sunday dinner, or the follies of Tom Merry's grandeur on his mother's side, for, though the latter was, doubtless, a very noble old gentleman, he does not come into the story.

NEW IDEAS FOR THE WINTER.

A correspondent writes me an ambitious scheme the other day for a correspondence club, and I know there is a good deal in it. The only thing is whether there is at present enough steady continuity knocking about for the successful prosecution of such a notion.

In brief, it was to help in the learning of foreign languages by means of correspondence. We have to go slowly, to let fellows see where the utility comes in. That is as far as any wide appeal goes. For a few friends to work up a little correspondence club with readers abroad all should be plain sailing. And it is an excellent start, so to speak.

The war has broadened things, generally, and there is no reason why a fellow busy in London, should not have a correspondent in Paris, or elsewhere in France. It is a good thing for both sides.

You can take a trip to France.

Your wisdom to enhance.

Or, maybe, such a visit is out of the question. Passports are not the easiest things to obtain these days. Moreover, that extra 50 per cent on all fares!ingers long, like the celebrated Leo, and travel is made a costly business.

But, for all that, there is no reason why a go-ahead chap should not master the French tongue any more than there is reason for guttapercha trousers. French is a sort of key to a vast deal of special knowledge in the world of science. It is particularly valuable to any man who is going in for chemistry.

I was asked the other day whether I thought correspondence colleges were good? I should say they were. They render immense assistance. The lad who is mastering a foreign language will be able, thanks to the hints of a college, to sound off his knowledge.

In the ordinary way, too, the exchange of chatty letters with a reader who is domiciled in another country is warmly inviolable. I am disposed to think that during the coming winter there will be tremendous work done in this way. There are more opportunities now for getting into touch with people across the sea, and I know my readers will not show any lack of enthusiasm in this line.

Your Editor