

**A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL READERS**

**The GEM** 1d  
2

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**WHAT WILL BE HIS FATE?**

*(A Thrilling Incident in the Splendid Long, Complete School Tale in this Number.)*



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers.  
Address: Editor, "The Gem," The Fleetway House,  
Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

### CHRISTMAS.

Of course, it is the very easiest thing in the world to write about Christmas. You just wish all your friends a Merry Christmas, and take on a Happy New Year at the end, and all is done.

But the fact is I feel it to be almost unnecessary to say even as much as that, for all my chums know right well that I do wish them the Merriest and Jolliest Christmas possible, and the best of New Years. We take that as read.

Still, there is any amount to be said about Christmas. Have you noticed that Christmas comes but once a year, but when it does, it brings—and however often it did arrive, the thing would be the same—something fresh to be said concerning the season with all its tender memories, and its wonderful teaching to everybody as to how the game of life should be played.

Still, it is Christmas, and this is a terribly rushed world. Friends come together again, and there is a forgetting of old feuds. Away with the Fendal System, as some wag said. We do not want to quarrel, more especially at Christmas-time.

This Christmas finds us all more in trim. The world is settling down. It takes some time about it, but that is inevitable. This country is coming into its own.

One likes to think of Christmas somehow—just think about it. Christmas does not want any long speeches. It is Christmas, and those chums of mine who are of older growth know what it is when memory begins to play on the strings of life.

We think at Christmas of those who have gone on. Those good fellows would not have our Christmas any the less happy because we think of them; but, anyhow, we must think. And then Christmas brings a host of other reminders, and I do not fancy any of us would be without them.

People have very different ideas about Christmas. Some like to picture old England in the grip of the frost—the frost you get up in the dales and further North—stinging white roads on which the horses' hoofs clatter, and a pale blue sky, with scarlet hips and haws bobbing in the bare hedges, and the ring of the skates on the village pond, while from far away across the valley comes the clash and crash of the Christmas bells. Others love the soft, mild Christmas with spring whispering at the door. It is all according to taste.

But Christmas means peace. Let's hope this year it spells a lot more happiness than has been the case of recent years, with a nice roaring fire for everyone, and a jolly story to read, and some music, and a whole heap of cheery wishes all round.

Personally, I like to conjure up Christmas in the mind's eye. One sees the happy-go-lucky business at the markets,

and folks buying things by the pound and hundredweight, and getting their baskets and string bags choc-a-bloc with useful articles.

One likes to think of the steaming pudding mother made, and the happy, dancing firelight in the dear old home where the fellow who had been away doing his bit is welcomed back with a handclasp which sums up all the friendly feeling in the world.

There are thousands and thousands of things associated with Christmas—things which are very near to all our hearts. It is well to remember, and it is just as well to feel the new spirit of Christmas which is there; for the youngsters, who look upon Christmas as the best bit of the year. For quaint old Father Christmas comes rambling down the chimney, and the pantomimes put forth their best, and town and country sports holiday wear.

One would have liked to have had Baggy Trimble in pantomime. He would have done well in the harlequinade, anyhow, but even though the young scion of Trimble Hall is not seen on the boards, I am pretty certain he will be remembered this season. For Baggy figures well among Gem readers, though they are free to condemn him as a Paul Pry, and a glutton.

There is another point, too. A great number of my readers will not see my good wishes until long after the season has gone by. I am thinking of my friends in the Far South, away in Australia where they enjoy warm, sunny weather at Christmas, which is no bad idea. Still, they will understand!

No need to ask you to remember the Companion Papers' Christmas. I have done my best to give the very best earnings this time, though I know for certain there will be letters dropping in during the New Year asking me why I did not describe Christmas at Trimble Hall, or some other place which has figured in past tales.

The answer to that kind of question is that it is impossible to crowd everything in. That is really the pity of it; but, luckily, there are exceptions to the rule. For instance, it is possible to crowd all the good feeling in the world into Christmas-time 1919.

There will be room.

It is possible to send to the right about the unhappy memories of life, just as it is possible to get a good, firm hold of the message of the Christmas bells—a message of peace.

### GETTING ON IN THE WORLD.

Every day that passes, I have the most serious questions put to me. Readers propound notions as to the betterment of their own positions, and so forth. That is only one point. It is a tolerably big one, however. One sometimes wishes one had a pocketful of cushy jobs to hand round to the right parties, though, of course, it would not really do. Jobs are

most times made by the fellows who are best fitted for them. But that, again, is not the actual point.

Do I think that a footman should throw up his position and become a clerk? Should a solicitor's clerk resign in order to get into the Civil Service? I am disposed to answer both queries in the negative. We are living in changing times. Well, all times are changing times. The fact here is that these times are no exception to the rule. I am not the man to advocate clerical work at all hazards, because of some clinging shred of an idea of its respectability. You see, it is this way.

A man—a real man—can accomplish the whole right and proper destiny if he has to spend his whole working life in his shirtsleeves. He can be a dreamer, a deep thinker, he can earn more to help his kith and kin. He can be more independent, and he has his brain-fresher for many things by reason of his outdoor or factory work.

Myriads of my readers are young chaps who stand by widowed mothers and young brothers and sisters. Such fellows occupy the proudest places in the world. They are more useful than most. To get on in our world now is not to get into a black coat. It is generally better to keep out of such a garb.

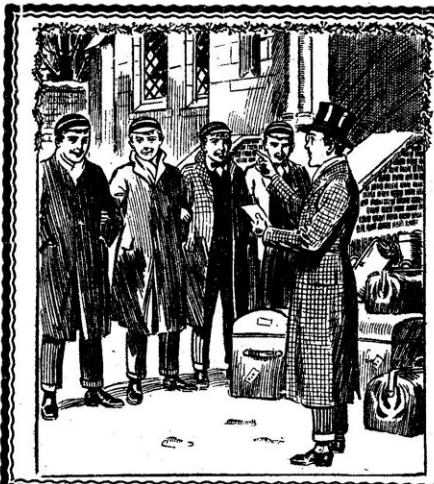
Now, please do not misunderstand me. I deem ambition to be an essential part of every man's mental baggage, but the man who gets his living by his hands—on a farm, in a factory, in a shop—can also fulfil any reasonable ambition as well. He can become a learned chap; he gets easier money.

I don't want chums of mine to leave the jobs they have for the sake of standing after something which may look better, but which isn't half as good. Let's have the courage of our thoughts on such matters. Let's be honest about it. Let's be democratic. I can foresee the time when folks will be crowding to listen to a brainy man who earns his bread and cheese, and his slice of beef and fixings by laying bricks in the daytime, while at night he is a leader of men.

It is doing something useful that matters. The fellow who does that is a king.

Now, as industry develops—or, rather, redevelops and expands, there will be work for everybody. I am dead certain it is a mistake to struggle after that black coat. There are better things to be done. Just as shabbiness is the livery of learning, so are good, rough tweeds and corduroys the uniform of the top-dogs of the big world of endeavour and the work that tells.

Your Editor



# A CHRISTMAS ADVENTURE.

A Magnificent Long Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry and Co., of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

## CHAPTER 1. Breaking Up!

**F**INISHED!" Tom Merry rose to his feet with a sigh of relief. The other members of the editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" rose to their feet also. The amateur journalists had been engaged in a race against time. The "copy" for the New Year number had to be in the printer's hands next day. At first, it had seemed a hopeless task, but everybody had wired in and Monty Lowther had written four comic columns instead of one.

Manners declared that one comic column was quite enough for most of the readers, and that four would kill them outright.

"They'd rather read my comic column than your camera corner, anyway!" said Lowther warmly.

"If you ask my opinion," said Talbot, "the readers could do without both. The camera corner makes 'em laugh, and the comic column makes 'em weep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Well, we've got out the whole issue in a single evening," said Tom Merry, "and that's jolly good going. True, I had to pad out the number with fifteen columns of Skimpole's piffle; but it's better than having no New Year number at all! We couldn't possibly have got the thing out during the vac."

"Of course not!" Tom Merry squeezed all the articles and stories into a large envelope, which he addressed to the printers.

"You'll just catch the post by the skin of your teeth, if you hustle!" said Lowther.

The captain of the Shell nodded, and hurried out to the pillar-box in the quad. The flagstones were carpeted with snow, and more snow was falling. The gusty wind drove the flakes into Tom Merry's face.

"Crossing over to the pillar-box, he dropped his package in with a thud, just as the ancient postman, lantern in hand, loomed up through the snow.

"Brought any letters along?" inquired Tom Merry.

"One for Master D'Arcy, sir!"

"Good! I'll take it along, if you like."

The postman handed over the missive, and Tom Merry took it along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage.

Arthur Augustus was at home. He was seated before a blazing fire, holding forth to his study-mates on the subject of silk socks.

"Letter for you, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"Good! Hand it ova, deah boy!" "Gussy, old top," said Jack Blak, "I'm positive there's a remittance in that envelope. That being so, let me hasten to swear eternal friendship!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Arthur Augustus opened the letter, but no remittance fluttered out of the envelope.

"It's a lettah fwm the patah!" explained the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh!" said Blake, in tones of disappointment. "In that case, the eternal friendship's off!"

Arthur Augustus read the paternal missive, and his eyes gleamed as he did so.

"Bai Jove! This is awfully wippin' of the patah!" he exclaimed.

"Is he buying you a motor-scooter for Christmas?" asked Digby.

"Weally, Dig, I have no use for a motah-scootah. This lettah is to say that I can bring home as many friends as I like for the vac."

"My hat!" Jack Blake's eternal friendship revived suddenly. He clasped his elegant chum round the waist, and proceeded to waltz him up and down the study.

"Gussy, old man, this is great! I've been to your ancestral halls before, and I won't say 'No' if you ask me again. You will invite me, of course?"

"Ow!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Blake, you wuff wottah, you are vumpin' my togs! Pway welease me at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Jack Blake desisted at last, and Gussy sank limply into the armchair, gasping for breath.

"Your pater's a brick, Gussy!" declared Digby.

"A brick of the first water!" agreed

Herries. "I wonder if he'll have any objection to my bringing Towser along?" Arthur Augustus promptly put his foot down.

"I wergad Towshah as a wuthless, de-structive, an' wewehensible beast!" he panted. "He has no wespsect whatevah for a fellah's twousahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Rats! He's all right, if you rub him the right way!" said Herries.

"I wufuse to wub the bwute at all, Hewwies! You, as one of my friends, may accompany me to my patah's place for the Christmas vac, but the othah beast must stay away!"

"That's a nasty one for you, Herries," said Tom Merry, laughing. "By the way, Gussy, am I on your list of friends, or not?"

Arthur Augustus smiled. "I should certainly not dream of leavin' you out, deah boy! You an' Mannahs an' Lowthah will be among the guests, of course! I am afraid I must impose one condition, howeverah."

"Namey?" "That Lowthah behaves himself."

"If possible!" chuckled Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "P'ovided Lowthah wefwains fwm makin' wotten puns, an' criticisin' the awistocwacy, he is quite welcome to come," said Arthur Augustus. "Let me see, deah boys, Blake, Dig, Hewwies, Mewwy, Mannahs, Lowthah. That's six. I should like to take the whole of the School House fellahs, but I am afraid it would put watah a stwain upon the household staff."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I'm afraid it would!" chuckled Jack Blake. "You'd have the cook demanding another five hundred a year, in addition to the thousand she already gets!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I should like to invite Cardew an' Clive, an' Julian an' Hammond, an' ever, that fwabjous ass Gwunday!" said Arthur Augustus. "But I feah it can't be done. Talbot must come, though—an' Miss Mawwie."

"Yes, rather!" "Old Talbot will be awfully bucked," said Tom Merry. "He was-telling me

only this morning that he didn't for the life of him know where he was going to spend the vac. He would have gone to Colonel Lyden—his uncle, you know—but the colonel's been summoned abroad."

"It will be ripping to have Miss Marie with us, too!" said Digby.  
"Especially if any of us get a dose of 'flu, and require nursing!" chimed in Herries.

"Of course, my hwothah Conway will be theah—likewise cousin Ethel," said Arthur Augustus.

"Better and better!"  
"An' the lake 's bound to be frozen ovah, so that we can have skatin'."

"Ripping!"  
"There will also be othah attractions," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I intend to wendah a tenah solo—"

A deep groan came from Jack Blake.  
"Weally, Blake!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in concern. "I twist you are not ill?"

"It was just a passing twinge," said Blake. "When you threatened to sing a tenor solo, I wondered if I should be among the survivors!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed his chum with a wrathful glare.

"Blake, you uttah wottah! I have a vevy good mind to administrah a fearful thwashin'—"

"Shush!" murmured Tom Merry. "This is the time for peace on earth, and good will towards fathheads. Spare him, Gussy!"

"Fip-pip-please, I won't do it again!" faltered Blake.  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake, I wegard you as a cwas ass!"

"The regard is mutual, old chap."

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his nose. He looked at first as if he intended to mix Blake up with the study furniture. But he seemed to think better of it, and turned to the door.

"I'm goin' to see Talbot an' Miss Mawie," he said. "Can I wely on you to explain the posish, to Mannahs an' Lowthah, Tom Mewwy?"

The captain of the Shell nodded. He hurried along to Study No. 10 to acquaint his chums with the good news, while Arthur Augustus sought out Talbot.

The latter was alone in his study, and he was looking rather glum. He could not quite decide what to do, and where to go, now that the Christmas vacation was near.

Arthur Augustus settled the problem.

"Talbot, dear boy, can you manage to spend the vac at my patah's place?"

"Can a duck swim?" said Talbot, brightening up at once. "I shall be delighted, Gussy! Who else is coming along?"

Arthur Augustus rattled off the names.  
"Good!" said Talbot. "Quite a decent selection. Has Marie accepted the invitation yet?"

"No. I'm just goin' up to the sanny to ask her."

"You'll have to put it to her very strongly, because I fancy she may decline on the grounds that she will be the only young lady present."

"Wats! Cousin Ethel will be theah!" said Arthur Augustus. "An' the two are awfully good pals, as you know."

Talbot nodded, and Arthur Augustus, who was enjoying his position as the bearer of good tidings, quitted the Shell fellow's study. He crossed the snow-covered quad, and entered the wing in which the school sanatorium was situated.

Marie Rivers, the charming young

nurse, was seated by the fire in one of the wards.

A book rested on the girl's lap, but she did not seem to be reading it. Her thoughts were elsewhere—probably with her father, the ex-cracksman, who had abandoned his shady career for a more honourable, if less remunerative, vocation.

John Rivers had been demobilised months ago, and he was now in London, earning his living by the sweat of his brow. It was strange to think that this cultured and clever man, who had formerly made as much as four hundred pounds as the result of a night's work—nay, a few minutes' work—was now taking a year to earn the same sum by honest means.

But he was happy—happy in the sense that all honest men are happy. Like the village blacksmith, he was able to look the whole world in the face, and not for anything would he have gone back to the

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The Editor,  
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old life, which had involved not only him, but his daughter, in deep disgrace. He had said to Talbot on one occasion:

"Once a cracksman, always a cracksman." But he himself had given the lie to this theory.

Thanks to the example set by John Rivers, the old Angel Alley gang had broken up. A new gang, under the leadership of Jim Dawlish, had sprung into being, but it was not such a formidable gang as the old one.

Marie Rivers thanked Providence, as she sat gazing into the fire, that her father had turned honest. She respected him for it; she admired him—loved him. He had served his country faithfully in time of war; he was serving it faithfully in time of peace, by playing the part of a patriotic citizen—in short, he had made good.

"Miss Mawie!"  
The girl gave a start as Arthur Augustus uttered her name.

"Sowwy if I startled you, deah gal," said the swell of St. Jim's.

Marie smiled.  
"I'm afraid I was day-dreaming," she said. "You wish to speak to me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas. My patah has requested me to take a numbah of fwiends home for the vac. My list of fwiends includes you, Miss Mawie, of course! Will you com?"

"I'm afraid I was day-dreaming," she said. "You wish to speak to me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas. My patah has requested me to take a numbah of fwiends home for the vac. My list of fwiends includes you, Miss Mawie, of course! Will you com?"

The smile faded from Marie's face.

"I—I'm afraid—" she began.  
"Theah's nothin' to be afraid of, deah gal! Theah will be no spooks, or phantoms, or anythin' like that. Besides, cousin Ethel will be there. It will be gween fun—skatin', an' singin', an' dancin'!"

"It all sounds vevy tempting," said Marie; "and it's awfully good of you to invite me. But I'm afraid I must decline."

Gussy's jaw dropped.  
"Oh, cwombs!" he exclaimed.  
"Evevone will be dreadfully disappointed."

"Talbot goin'?"  
"Yaas, wathah!"

"That only increases my desire to go, too. But it simply can't be done."

"Why not, deah gal?"  
"I haven't seen my father for ages," Marie explained, "and he will be expecting me this Christmaetide. This is his first Christmas in civvies; he had not been demobbed this time last year. And it will be a sorry sort of festival if he has to spend it alone. I should feel a heartless mix if I went elsewhere and enjoyed myself."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I quite understand the posish," he said. "and I think I can see a way out. You can wely on me to wangle things, Mawie. I'm a fellah of tact an' judgment, as you know."

Marie laughed.

"I am sure you will do your best, D'Arcy. You are a most generous boy in every way. All the same, I am afraid my Christmas will not be spent with the rest of you."

To which Arthur Augustus replied with the time-honoured injunction:  
"Wait an' see!"

### CHAPTER 2.

#### Off for the Holidays!

CLANG! Clang!  
It was the shrill note of the rising-bell on the final day of the term.

"Breezing up day at last!" chortled Monty Lowther, leaping out of bed. "Old Taggles can ring that merry bell to-morrow morning till his arm drops off, but there will be nobody left to hear him—barring the kitchen cat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
The juniors turned out in high spirits.

This was indeed a day of days—the last day of the term and the best!

The snow in the quad was hard and frozen. Icicles hung from the windows, and from the branches of the old elms without.

It was an enchanting scene; but the juniors had little time in which to enjoy the beauties of Nature.

There was packing to be done, and in the case of fellows like Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that was a terrible item.

When they were dressed, the Terrills Three and Talbot went along to the Fourth-Form dormitory, in order to give their elegant chum a hand, if necessary.

They found Gussy in what he himself described as "a fearful fluttah."

The swell of St. Jim's monopolised fifty per cent. of the available floor space in his dormitory. He was sandwiched between two large trunks, into which Blake, Herries, and Digby were pitching his things haphazard.

The two trunks did not constitute the be-all and the end-all of Arthur Augustus' baggage. There were innumerable hat-boxes on the floor—like the stars of the sky in multitude, as Monty Lowther expressed it.

"Weally, this is too awful for words!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Steady on!

"Steady on!"

"Steady on!"

"Steady on!"



Quick as a thought, Jim Dawlish caught D'Arcy round the waist and lifted him from his feet, to hurl him at the oncoming juniors. "Yawooh!" yelled D'Arcy. (See chapter 4.)

with those twosahs, Blake! That's my fifth best pair."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your packing ought to have been started a fortnight ago, Gussy," said Monty Lowther gravely.

"Or at the beginning of term," said Manners.

"What on earth are these silk stockings for, Gussy?" inquired Digby. "You don't wear 'em, surely?"

"No, deah boy. It is my intention to hang them both up on Christmas Eve."

"My hat!"

"Good old Peter Pan!" chuckled Cardew. "When are you goin' to grow up?"

"I should be sorry to see the simple customs of our childhood die out," said Arthur Augustus.

"You mean to say you still believe in Father Christmas?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Of course not. But I believe some of my guests will be generous enough to fill my stockings."

"We will!" murmured Monty Lowther, sotto voce. "We won't guarantee to fill 'em with chocolates, though!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Willing hands continued to lend assistance to the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus had sufficient sartorial belongings to set up a good-sized tailor's and hosier's establishment.

Two dozen shirts, plain and striped; a dozen waistcoats, some fancy, and some that Gussy's chums didn't fancy! Collars of all sorts and shapes and sizes; woollen vests in abundance, and a bewildering array of gaudy neckties.

"How many toppers are you taking, Gussy?" inquired Manners.

"All of them, deah boy."

"Help! Have you arranged for a pan-technicon?"

"Wats!"

"I vote we pack the toppers on the concertina principle," said Jack Blake.

"Squash them so that they can be squeezed into the trunks—"

Arthur Augustus, who had been wading through an assortment of neckties, in an endeavour to find his purple, pink, and pale blue one, jumped up with a cry of alarm.

"If you dare to squash my toppahs, Blake, you wuffian, I'll squash you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With eight juniors engaged, the packing was finished at last, and Arthur Augustus sent Hammond of the Fourth in search of Taggles.

The surly old porter, whose brow was a shade less surly than usual, shuffled into the dormitory a few moments later. He even went so far as to touch his hat to Arthur Augustus.

"Angling for a tip!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yes, rather!"

Arthur Augustus turned to the porter.

"Taggles, deah boy, I wish you to take these twunks down to the hall."

"Very good, sir."

"Also the boxes."

"Very good, sir."

"That is all, Taggles. Pway wemove the things at once, as they appeal to be takin' up wathah a lot of woom."

Taggles did not budge. Arthur Augustus regarded him curiously.

"I twust you are not deaf, Taggles?"

"Which my hearin' is very good, sir."

"Then why are you lingerin'?. I distinctly requested you to wemove my belongin's to the hall."

Taggles coughed significantly.

"Bai Jove! Aye you unwell, Taggles?"

"Which I'm in the best of 'ealth and spirits, sir."

"What sort of spirits?" inquired Monty Lowther. "The juice of the juniper?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Taggles!" said Arthur Augustus, in perplexity. "You are behavin' in a most peculiar mannah! I twust you have not been imbubin' gin at this early hour—"

Having exhausted all the hints he could think of—including that of holding out his horny palm—Taggles tackled the swell of St. Jim's outright.

"Which it's the custom, Master D'Arcy, at this 'ere festive season of the year, to put your 'and in your pocket."

"Of course!" said Arthur Augustus in surprise. "We all do that in cold weather. I do it myself, except when I'm weavin' gloves."

"Density, thy name is Gussy!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Can't you see that Taggy wants a tip?"

"Lai Jove!"

Light dawned upon Arthur Augustus at last. He produced his wallet, and took out a pound note.

"Can you give me change, Taggles?" The porter shook his head.

"That is unforch. I wanted to give you ten shillings. However, you may take this note, an' p'pawps you will find change between now and the time we go away."

"Perhaps, sir," said Taggles. But, judging by his tone, he seemed to regard it as extremely improbable.

The School House fellows went down to the quad, where a pitched battle took place in the snow with the New House juniors.

"Nothing like getting a good appetite for brekker!" said Jack Blake. "I—ooohh!"

Blake's remarks were cut short by the arrival of a snowball, which smote him in the mouth and then burst into fragments down his coat.

"Back up, School House!" shouted Tom Merry, amid the uproar. "Let's drive those cheeky beggars back to their own quarters!"

"Hear, hear!"

The fight raged fast and furious. But the School House were stronger numerically, and Piggins & Co. were forced to retreat, step by step, until the quad was finally cleared of all New House rabble, as Monty Lowther expressed it.

"Good!" said Tom Merry, brushing the snow from his garments. "School House are top dog, this term and every term!"

"Yas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Now for some bwicker! Do you know, deah boys, I feel positively wavenous!"

"Stand back!" said Monty Lowther warningly. "Gussy's turned cannibal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As the School House warriors trooped in to breakfast, Marie Rivers came up to Talbot. She was smiling cheerfully.

"Good-morning, Toff!"

"Good-morning, Marie. You're looking very bucked with life."

"I feel it. Christmas is in the air, and yours—and mine—should be the most enjoyable we have known."

Talbot stared.

"I don't understand," he said. "We shall not spend Christmas together. Aren't you going to your father?"

"No. Father is coming to us."

"Oh, good!" said Talbot.

"D'Arcy pulled the strings," said Marie. "And this is the result."

The girl handed Talbot a letter which had come for her by the morning post. It ran thus:

"My dear Marie,—There will be no need for you to come to town to see me, after all. Lord Eastwood having invited me to the country-house party. This is exceedingly kind of his lordship, for it means that we shall spend a really happy Christmas together. This could not have been guaranteed in my humble lodgings up here, where you would have suffered much inconvenience.

"I can only come to Eastwood Lodge for two days—Christmas Day and Boxing Day—as on the following day I have to resume my duties. But a great deal of mirth and happiness can be squeezed out of a couple of days, and I am eagerly looking forward to seeing my little girl again.

"Ever your affectionate father,  
"JOHN RIVERS."

"Good old Gussy!" said Talbot, as he handed back the letter to his girl chum.

"Fancy him working the oracle like that! I shall begin to think he really does possess tact and judgment presently!"

Marie laughed.

"We ought to have an exceptionally jolly time, 'Toff," she said.

"Don't worry," said Talbot, "we shall!"

No thought of possible peril entered the heads of these two young people, as they stood chatting together amid the whirling, eddying snowflakes.

They were going to an old English mansion as the guests of Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus, and they anticipated a jolly time. This they would probably get; but they little dreamed that they would have a wildly adventurous time also!

After breakfast there were great scenes in the old quadrangle.

A crowd of fellows—seniors and juniors of both Houses—appeared on the scene with smiling faces and packed portmanteaus.

Ever and anon, the station hack drifted through the snow like a derelict, and stopped in front of the great building to collect luggage and passengers.

The country-house party stood together in a cheery group, and Arthur Augustus called the roll. Gussy rather fancied himself in the role of a shepherd.

"Tom Mewwy!" he rapped out.

"Here!"

"Talbot!"

"Here!"

"Mannahs!"

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Manners.

"Lowthah!"

"Adsum! And, having 'ad some, I don't want any more!" said Monty Lowther. "Chuck it, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Arthur Augustus persisted in completing the roll-call; and, this done, he appointed himself Inspector of Bags and Baggage.

"Have you all got your luggage weedy, deah boys?"

There was a general nodding of heads.

"You are suah you have left nothin' behind?"

"Of course, fathead!" growled Blake.

At the end of an hour the crowd in the quad was considerably reduced.

The New House juniors marched to the station in a solid body. They threw kisses to Tom Merry & Co. as they passed through the school gateway.

"Merry Christmas, old sports!" shouted Fatty Wynn.

"Same to you!" responded Monty Lowther. "Go easy with the plum-pudding, Fatty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison major, Cardew, and Clive were the next to go. They were spending the vacation at Cardew's place.

Ralph Reckness had, in some mysterious way, managed to charter a taxi, and the three Fourth-Formers looked as proud as peacocks as they were whirled away.

"Bye-bye, you fellows!" called Cardew. "Mind you take care of Gussy!"

"Rely on us!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

The breaking up was well advanced by this time. Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn, Dane, and Glyn and Reilly tramped off through the snow, exchanging Yuletide greetings with Tom Merry & Co. as they went.

Kildare, the handsome, genial captain of St. Jim's, had a cheery word for the members of Gussy's party, of course.

"How you kids will have a topping time!" he said.

"Thanks, Kildare!"

"See that they don't stuff too much, Miss Rivers!"

Marie smilingly promised to keep an eye on them.

With the exception of the country-house party, Kildare was the last fellow to leave.

Gussy's companions glanced inquiringly at the swell of St. Jim's.

"I don't want to be rude," murmured Monty Lowther, "but would you mind telling us, Gussy, how much longer we've got to cool our heels here?"

Arthur Augustus consulted his watch.

"Five minutes, deah boy!"

"Five minutes!" hooted Jack Blake. "You mean to say our train goes out in five minutes? We shall never do it, you frabjous clump!"

"And there isn't another train until

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The juniors were at a lonely part of the road, when Digby made a startling discovery. A small gold locket lay glittering on the hardened snow. Talbot knew that locket well! It belonged to Marie! (See Chapter 5.)

late in the afternoon!" groaned Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus smiled knowingly. "That will be quite all right!" he said.

"Sounds quite all wrong to me!" growled Digby. "If you weren't our respected host, Gussy, we'd roll you in the snow!"

"Yes, rather!"  
"We shall be stuck here all day now," said Manners. "And St. Jim's isn't the pleasantest place in the world when it's practically empty!"

"I vote we turn Gussy into a snowman, and improve the shining hour by taking pot-shots at him!" said Lowther. "Weally, Lowthab—"

The next minute there was a hoot of a horn, and a large Daimler car swung through the gateway of St. Jim's.

"What the merry dickens—?" began Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus gave a chuckle. "This is my brother Conway. He has come to collect us in his cab. I thought it would be wathah a lark to keep the mattah a secwet, deah boys."

The "deah boys" were overjoyed at this unexpected stroke of fortune. They had anticipated being stranded at St. Jim's for several hours.

The car drew to a halt, and Lord Conway jumped out. He was a good-looking young man, and until recently

had held a commission in the Loamshires. He had a cheery greeting for his brother and for Gussy's chums.

"Hop in!" said Conway, after shaking hands all round. "We'll make the journey in less than an hour. I mean to let her rip through the snow!"

The luggage was piled into the car, and the passengers followed.

"Wight away, deah boy!" sang out Arthur Augustus.

A moment later the car fairly flashed through the old gateway.

Glancing back, the juniors caught a glimpse of Mr. Railton standing on the School House steps. They waved to him, and the Housemaster waved back.

The great car gathered speed, and its human cargo chuckled to themselves as the snowflakes blew into their faces. Lessons were over, the holidays had started!

And, happiest of all, as they leaned back against the resilient upholstery of Lord Conway's Daimler, were Talbot and Marie Rivers.

#### CHAPTER 3. Very Mysterious!

"**T**UMBLE out, deah boys—an' gal!"

The car had arrived at its destination, and Lord Eastwood and Cousin Ethel greeted the

juniors and Marie Rivers as they clambered out.

A portly manservant took the luggage into the house, on the instalment system, and Lord Conway ran the car round to the garage.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Talbot, taking stock of his surroundings. "What a jolly old place!"

"This isn't your first visit, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"No; but it's the first time I've been here when the snow's been on the ground. Don't those Christmas-trees look topping?"

"Nevah mind the scenewy now," said Arthur Augustus. "I undahstand from the patah that lunch is weady."

"That is so, Arthur," said Lord Eastwood, smiling. "I expect you are hungry after your journey?"

"Yaas! I was too excited to eat mfeh bwekkeh. It's wippin' to get home again!"

Lunch was served in the oak-panelled dining-room, where, nearly three hundred years before, gay cavaliers had romped and revelled.

Everyone was quite at home. Marie Rivers had been a trifle shy at first, but Cousin Ethel cured all that, and the two girls chatted away merrily.

Lord Eastwood beamed upon his guests from the head of the table, and

Lord Conway related some of his wartime experiences.

In the afternoon a snowfight took place in the old-fashioned courtyard.

The four Shell fellows tackled the four Fourth-Formers, and Marie Rivers and Cousin Ethel were the judges.

Tom Merry's side won the day after a fierce and exciting tussle. They destroyed their opponents' fortresses, and they swamped Jack Blake & Co. with snow to such an extent that the Fourth-Formers were eventually obliged to howl for quarter.

"Oh, cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "My togs are wumped an' soaked, an' 'teah's nearly a ton of snow down the back of my neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Weally, deah boys, I fail to see wheah the joke comes in! We had bettah change our togs, or we shall be catchin' cold!"

The juniors realised the wisdom of Gussy's suggestion. They went into the house and changed their garments, and shortly afterwards the gong sounded for tea.

The winter dusk had set in, but from the mullioned windows of the dining-room the juniors could still see the snowflakes descending thick and fast.

"Looks as if we shall be snowed out to-night!" remarked Lord Conway.

Lord Eastwood nodded.  
"Better to be indoors than out on a night like this," he said. Then, glancing at his watch, he added:

"Your father is due in half an hour, Miss Rivers."

Marie's face glowed.  
"In that case I'll go to the station and meet him," she said.

"My dear girl, you musn't venture out on such a night!"

"I'll pick your father up in the car," volunteered Lord Conway.

Arthur Augustus demurred.  
"It's not worth while usin' the cah for such a short wun, deah boy!"

Finally, it was decided that the St. Jim's juniors should go to the station to meet John Rivers.

They started off directly after tea, and battled their way through the fast-falling snow.

"Goo! What a night!" gasped Jack Blake.

"Wonder if Marie's father will be snowed up?" said Digby.

Arthur Augustus blinked and spluttered as the snowflakes beat slantwise into his face.

"Shouldn't be supwised, deah boy!" he panted. "It is extremely probable that the twain will be held up. Still, 'teah will be a fish in the waitin'-room."

"How far is it to the station?" inquired Tom Merry. "I forget!"

"It's a mile an' a half as the cwow flies, deah boy!"

"But we're not crows!" grunted Herries.

"Weally, Hewies— It's three miles by the wood, but only a mile an' a half across the fields," explained Arthur Augustus. "Follow your leadah, deah boys!"

The swell of St. Jim's clambered over a stile, and the others followed suit. They found themselves in a spacious, snow-clad field.

A crude footpath was visible in the snow, and the juniors followed it with difficulty. It was so dark that they could scarcely distinguish each other.

"Stop!"

It was a sudden exclamation from Manners.

"What the thump—" began Tom Merry.

"Shush! I heard footsteps behind us!"

"Your ears are a jolly sight sharper than mine, then!" grunted Tom. "I heard nothing."

The juniors stopped short, and listened.

The only sound which greeted their ears was that of the wind, which whirled the snowflakes hither and thither.

"Mannahs, deah boy, your imagination was playin' you twicks," said Arthur Augustus.



No. 17.—RICHARD JULIAN.

A Jew, and a fine specimen of the race. Was up against Lowther when he first came to St. Jim's; but that was Lowther's fault, as he has admitted since. They are good friends now. Cheery and light-hearted, but capable of serious thought. Julian holds his own alike in the Form-room and on the greenward. Good stuff all through. Shares Study No. 5 in the Fourth Form passage, with Harry Hammond, Eric Kerruish, and Patrick Reilly.

But Manners declared he had heard a footfall.

"What if you did?" said Jack Blake. "It's a free country, and anybody's got a right to be out walking."

"But it sounded like somebody shadowing us," said Manners.

"Rats! Who'd be likely to shadow us, I should like to know?"

"Oh, come on!" said Digby impatiently.

And the party plunged on through the snow.

They had proceeded but a few yards, when Manners again uttered an exclamation.

"Footsteps! I heard them again!"

"I heard them that time, too," said Talbot. "But there's nothing to be alarmed about."

The juniors had stopped, and the footsteps had stopped, too.

"I can't help thinking that Manners is right, and that we're being followed," muttered Tom Merry. "It's curious that the footsteps should stop every time we do."

For some moments the juniors stood still, straining their ears to listen.

Everything seemed eerie and strange in the wind, and snow, and darkness.

But the footfalls had ceased.

"Who is 'teah?" called out Arthur Augustus, at length. "Why are you hidin' yourself, you wottah?"

There was no reply.

"Shall we go back and search for the beggar?" inquired Jack Blake.

"We might miss Marie's father if we do that," said Tom Merry. "Let's push on again."

With puzzled expressions on their faces, the St. Jim's juniors resumed their journey, keeping close behind Arthur Augustus, who knew every inch of the way.

Why they were being dogged in the dark was a mystery, unless, as Herries suggested, a modern highwayman was prowling around in search of loot.

"Better stow your fivers away in a safe place, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

As the juniors crossed the next field they could no longer doubt that they were being followed, for the footsteps were audible the whole time.

Presently Arthur Augustus could stand the suspense no longer.

He made a sudden rush back, and his form was swallowed up in the darkness.

After an interval of a couple of minutes, he rejoined his chums.

"What luck?" asked Blake eagerly.

Arthur Augustus pumped in breath.

"The bwute got away!" he panted.

"I tried to clinch with him, but he was too quick for me, deah boys!"

"Was it the family ghost?" inquired Monty Lowther. "And, if so, which one?"

Gussy's next words produced a profound sensation.

"It was a man in a mask!" he said.

"My hat!"

"I'm positive he was up to no good," continued Arthur Augustus. "He looked like a fellah who was contemplain' wobbewy with violence."

"Then why on earth did he turn tail?" asked Tom Merry.

"The sight of Gussy's face, of course," said Lowther. "That would be enough to scare Dick Turpin himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, your wepeated wudeness has brough't me to the end of my tethah! Put up your hands!"

"Mercy!" howled Lowther.

"Put them up, you awful wottah!" Arthur Augustus, his dignity ruffled, rushed to the attack, and his fist shot out just as Monty Lowther dodged behind Herries and Digby.

The result was that Herries got the full benefit of the blow. It took him on the point of the jaw, and he turned a back somersault into the snow.

"Acrobatic feats performed while you wait!" murmured Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries was on his feet in an instant.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "I—I'll burst you for that, Gussy!"

"My deah boy, I much wegrat—"

Arthur Augustus finished his regret in the snow. Herries wrestled with him, and downed him, and the swell of St. Jim's was rolled over and over until he was coated with snow from head to foot.

"Ow! Gywooooh! Bai Jove!" gasped the unfortunate victim.



"Serves you jolly well right!" growled Herries unsympathetically.

Arthur Augustus picked himself up. A miniature avalanche of snow was shaken from his coat, and some of it went down his neck, causing him to hunch his shoulders and emit a yelp of discomfort.

"Hewries, you beast, you know very well I didn't mean to hit you! It was an accident. That blow was intended for Lowtham."

"Never strike at Lowther's ear until you know the road is clear!" murmured the humcrust of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come on!" said Jack Blake. "We shall never get to the station tonight, at this rate!"

"How much farther, Gussy?" asked Talbot.

"Gwoot! We're neahly theah, deah boy!"

It so happened that the London train was in when the juniors arrived at the station. The line had been cleared all the way down, and there had been no "hold-up."

Only three people alighted from the train, and Tom Merry & Co. recognised John Rivers at once.

The ex-crackman was tall and upright—a clean-looking, clean-living man. He looked a shade worn and tired, perhaps, as he stood, bag in hand, beneath one of the station lamps. That was because he had been working very hard. John Rivers was no advocate of a four-hour working day, with three hours off for lunch. He believed in energy and hard graft.

The new arrival's face brightened up as he caught sight of the St. Jim's juniors. A moment later he was busily engaged in shaking hands with them all.

"It is very good of you to come to meet me," he said.

"Don't mench!" said Arthur Augustus. "This way, deah boy! I mean, deah man!"

And John Rivers was escorted out of the little station, and across the fields.

Within half an hour the party arrived at Eastwood Lodge.

Marie Rivers stood waiting in the brilliantly-lighted hall, beneath the mistletoe, as it happened, and the girls' hands were outstretched to embrace her father.

"You'll get swamped with snow, Marie!" warned John Rivers, laughing.

"I don't care, father! I'm so glad you've come! I was afraid the snow would have delayed you. I have been looking forward ever so eagerly to this moment, dad!"

"And so have I, Marie. This is a merry Christmas, indeed!"

The voice of Lord Conway boomed through the hall.

"Come along, Mr. Rivers! You must be famished!"

Dinner was served shortly afterwards, and Tom Merry & Co. described the mysterious adventure which had befallen them that evening.

"I distinctly caught a glimpse of a masked man," said Arthur Augustus.

He had been following us across the fields. An' when I made a vush at him, the scoundrel took to his heels!"

Lord Eastwood looked astonished, and so did Lord Conway. An expression of alarm crossed Miss Marie's face; and her father, who had not heard of the incident until now, raised his eyebrows.

"What did it mean?"

Was there a footpad in the locality—a man with base and sinister designs?"

"Sounds very mysterious," remarked Lord Conway, at length. "It's hardly likely that it was a joke on the part of one of the villagers."

"I am inclined to think," said Lord Eastwood, "that the man was a genuine blackguard. Men who wear masks are seldom otherwise. What sort of a mask was it, Arthur?"

"A cwapie one. It covahed the uppah part of the wuffian's face."

"It might be advisable," suggested John Rivers, "to acquaint the police of the incident."

"I will do so at once!" said Lord Eastwood.

And he went to the library, to make a communication by telephone to the

## No. 18.—KOURI RAO.



Jam of Blundepore. An Indian boy, against whom plots from outside the school have had to be met. Of fiery courage, and high, chivalrous nature. He is not easily understood by the rest, for there is in him much of the Orient, hard for the Western mind to fathom. But he is known as a good sort, and can hold his own both on the cricket and footer field. He greatly admires Figgin's. Has a study to himself: No. 1 in the New House.

local police. His lordship, however, had no great faith in the local representatives of the law; and it seemed too much to hope that they would be successful in apprehending and arresting the mysterious man in the mask.

### CHAPTER 4. Marie's Peril!

**C**HRISTMAS EVE!  
The countryside was mantled with snow. Faintly from the distance came the strains of carol-singers:

"God rest ye, merry gentlemen!

Let nothing you dismay."

In the warm, cosy drawing-room at Eastwood Lodge, all was merry and bright.

The affair of the masked man was for-

gotten—for the time being, at any rate—and the St. Jim's juniors were gazing, in some surprise, at a vast array of toys and presents on the table.

"Looks like the headquarters of Santa Claus!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"What a crowd of Christmas presents!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Who are they all for, Conway?"

"The villagers," said Lord Conway, with a smile. "They are an awfully decent lot; but the majority of them are miserably poor, thanks to the present high cost of living. Very few of the parents have been able to afford presents for their kiddies, so I decided to remedy matters in this way."

"Bai Jore! That's awfully sportin' of you, deah boy!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Many hands make light work," said Lord Conway; "so perhaps you would all like to lend a hand with the distribution?"

There was a chorus of assent at once.

The presents—each duly labelled with the name of the place it was going to—were stowed into sacks, and the juniors, accompanied by Lord Conway and John Rivers, set off on their enjoyable errand.

Marie wanted to go as well, but she had promised to write a long letter to Mrs. Holmes, her kind benefactress at St. Jim's, and unless the letter was written at once, it would not catch the last post.

Lord Eastwood, who had correspondence of an even more urgent nature to attend to, remained in the library, while Marie Rivers made herself comfortable by the drawing-room fire and wrote her letter.

"Mrs. Holmes is such a dear," she murmured, "that I don't disappoint her."

The missive was completed at last—five packed pages of neat, girlish handwriting.

Marie was about to ring for one of the servants to despatch the letter. Then she remembered that a big celebration was taking place in the domestic regions, and since she had no wish to disturb it, "I'll go myself," she murmured. "It isn't a great distance to the pillar-box."

As an afterthought, Marie tapped on the door of the library and entered.

"Have you any letters for the post, Lord Eastwood? I'm just going to post one of my own."

"My dear girl, one of the maids will do that!"

Marie smiled.

"I don't want to interrupt the kitchen festivities," she said. "Do let me take your letters!"

"It is unsafe for you to venture out alone—"

"I shall be quite all right, I assure you."

Reluctantly, Lord Eastwood handed over the letters.

Marie went down to the hall, and donned her hat and coat. Then she opened the heavy, oaken door, and a deluge of snow rushed in.

"Goodness! What a night!" muttered Marie. "Those carol-singers don't seem to mind it, though. They've got plenty of pluck."

It was with difficulty that Marie groped her way down the drive and out into the roadway.

A pall of darkness hung over everything, and through the darkness the snowflakes faintly glimmered.

"Wish I had brought an electric torch," reflected Marie. "Never mind. It's hardly worth while to go to the house for one."

The girl groped her way as best she could through the snow. Presently she halted. She knew that she was in the vicinity of the pillar-box, but it was difficult to discover its precise whereabouts.

The sudden gleam of a lantern, however, revealed both the pillar-box and the postman who had come to collect the letters.

"Splendid!" murmured Marie. She handed the letters to the postman, who thrust them into his sack; then, wishing him a merry Christmas, she retraced her steps in the direction of Eastwood Lodge.

Marie rather hoped that the postman would be coming that way, so that his light could serve as a guide. But the postman, having cleared the box, trudged off in the opposite direction.

At the end of a couple of minutes, however, Marie distinctly heard the sound of footsteps behind her—not the postman's heavy tread, but a furtive, stealthy step.

Marie stopped short, and as she did so the footsteps ceased.

The girl peered into the darkness, but could see no one.

"Strange!" she murmured. "I wonder—"

The thought struck her that the person whose footsteps she had heard might be the masked man mentioned by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was not a pleasant thought, and Marie promptly walked on, quickening her pace, and hoping to be safe within the gates of Eastwood Lodge before the unknown could catch up to her.

As she walked, her fears gathered weight. She could still hear the footsteps behind her, and every time she quickened her pace the pace of her pursuer was quickened also.

Marie was no coward. At the same time, she had no desire to find herself confronted by a masked man on a lonely road at night.

She was only assuming, of course, that the man now following her was the man who had previously eluded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But something seemed to tell her that her assumption was correct.

The footsteps were growing nearer. Marie judged that only a dozen yards separated her from the man behind.

"I'd better run for it," she panted.

Marie Rivers was a splendid runner for a girl, and it looked as if she would regain the gates of Eastwood Lodge—and safety—before the masked gentleman could overtake her.

But there were slippery patches in the snow, and on one of these Marie came to grief.

There was a patter of feet close behind her, and, before the girl could rise to her feet, her pursuer was bending over her.

It was the man in the mask!

There was something familiar about the lower features of the fellow's face. Marie's curiosity got the better of her alarm. She was wondering where she had seen that prominent jaw before.

"Marie!"

In that single word the speaker betrayed his identity.

Marie rose to her feet, and the masked man's hand gripped her by the wrist.

"Dawlish!" panted the girl. "Jim Dawlish!"

Marie was thunderstruck.

Dawlish was the one man of whom she stood in dread—the man who had kidnapped her before, and who had threatened to do so again. He was a thoroughbred scoundrel—a rogue whose record bore no redeeming feature.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 620.

"I—I thought you were in prison!" exclaimed Marie.

Jim Dawlish laughed in the darkness. It was not a nice laugh.

"Guess I soon got clear!" he said.

"It was only a short sentence."

"What brings you here?"

"Surely you ought to know that as well as I do? I'm here to get you, Marie—and you and the Toff. You refused to join our little gang before, and I'm going to give you another chance."

"You scoundrel! You are wasting your breath. I haven't the slightest intention of joining your gang—or any gang, for that matter—and neither has the Toff. Release me at once!"

Dawlish laughed softly.

"I rather think I hold all the cards," he said. "You will be silly to offer resistance."

"Do you mean that you will use force?"

"If necessary."

"You coward!" panted Marie. "I—I wish my father was here!"

"I happen to know that your father is

## THE PENNY POPULAR

OUT ON FRIDAY

CONTAINS

SPLENDID CHRISTMAS STORIES OF GREY-FRIARS, ROOKWOOD, AND ST. JIM'S.

doing the Santa Claus stunt in the village at the present moment. He has not seen me, but I have seen him. There is no help for you, Marie. Be a sensible girl, and make up your mind to come quietly, as the bobbies say. I don't like being rough with one of the weaker sex—honestly I don't!"

"You had no compunction about it before!" said Marie contemptuously. "You chloroformed me, if you remember?"

"Yes, yes," said Dawlish impatiently. "Don't make it necessary for me to repeat the performance, Marie. Do as I tell you. Come where I bid you, and you'll be all right. Dash it all, I'm not going to be cruel to you! I'll be kindness itself! If you join our gang, you'll never lack money and fine clothes. The gang's in a flourishing state, I might mention, and it's going to flourish still more when you and the Toff are working with us. Don't be a fool, Marie! You can see which side your bread's buttered. Chuck that silly nursing stunt—you'd be wasted as a school nurse—and come and follow the only profession worth following!"

The grip on Marie's wrist tightened with an intensity which was painful.

"Quick, Marie!" rapped out Dawlish. "I'm not going to wait here all night. What's it to be—yes or no?"

"No—a thousand times no!"

Marie's voice rang out defiantly on the night air.

Having delivered her ultimatum, the girl panted breathlessly, and strained her ears to listen.

Footsteps were approaching from the distance!

The sound was muffled, owing to the snow, and Jim Dawlish failed to hear it. But Marie heard, and her heart beat quickly with hope.

"Very well," said Jim Dawlish. "Then it'll have to be force again!"

He drew something from his pocket, and as he did so Marie uttered a ringing cry.

"Help! Help!"

Both the man and the girl paused to listen, but there was no indication that Marie's appeal had been heard, and her heart sank.

Dawlish turned to his intended victim. "You're only making it harder for yourself by behaving like that," he said gruffly. "I won't give you the chance to speak again. Here goes!"

Before the scoundrel could take action, however, there was a sudden cry of:

"Got you, you wottah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with fists clenched, hurled himself at Jim Dawlish.

The latter was thrown off his balance, but only for a second.

Quick as thought, he caught his school-boy antagonist round the waist, and hurled him towards several more dark figures that came running up.

"Ow!"

"Yawwoooooh!"

There were two separate and distinct roars as Arthur Augustus crashed into Tom Merry, bowling him over like a ninepin.

"Quick, you fellows," panted Talbot, "or he'll get away!"

But he—the "he" being Jim Dawlish—had already got away.

The St. Jim's juniors, aided by John Rivers and Lord Conway, rushed in pursuit.

In spite of the fact that the cracksmen had only a few seconds' start, he was aided by the pitchy darkness and the driving snow, and he got away with comparative ease.

Marie Rivers waited in the roadway until the baffled searchers returned.

"No go," said Lord Conway, with a grunt of dissatisfaction. "The bouncer's vanished!"

"It's hopeless to continue the search," said John Rivers. "Finding a needle in a haystack would be child's play to getting on the track of that ruffian."

The St. Jim's juniors were bitterly disappointed that their quarry had slipped through their fingers. They had hoped to wind-up an enjoyable Christmas Eve by marching the man in the mask to the police-station. But their hopes had not materialised.

"Gussy, again!" growled Jack Blake. "He's always making a muck of things!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come along!" said Lord Conway. "We've missed collaring that masked beauty, but it will be a bigger tragedy still if we miss dinner!"

And the whole party trudged off through the snow, in the direction of Eastwood Lodge.

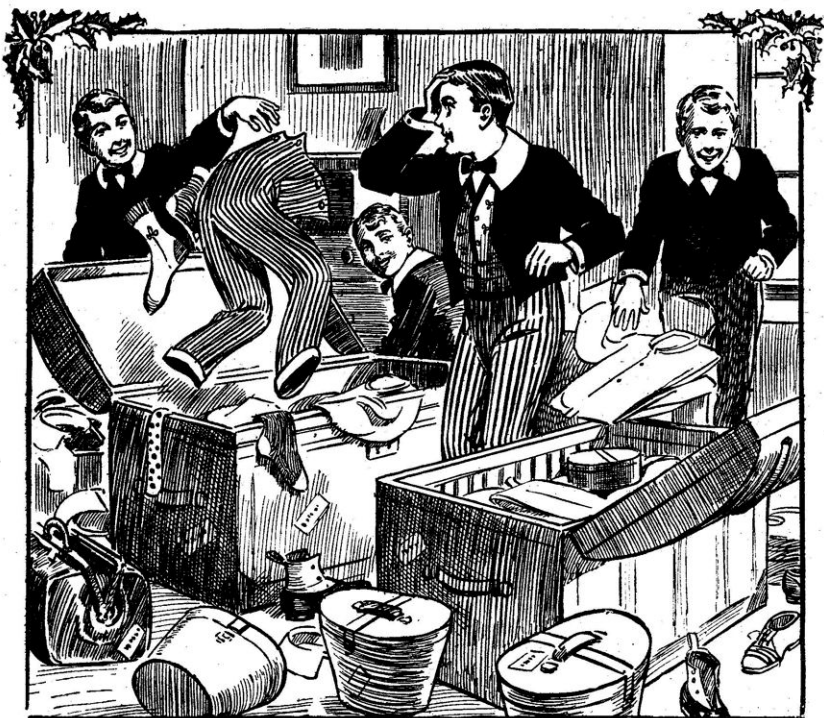
### CHAPTER 5.

All Gussy's Fault.

TALBOT pressed the hand of his girl chum in great relief.

"I'm awfully glad you're safe, Marie!" he said. "I was afraid that—"

"So was I," confessed Marie. "I don't think I've ever felt so afraid in my life. Did you recognise our friend in the mask, Toff?"



D'Arcy was sandwiched between two large trunks, into which Blake, Herries, and Digby were pitching his things, haphazard. "Weafy, this is too awful for words!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Steady on with those twousahs, Blake!" (See Chapter 2.)

"No," said Talbot, in wonder. "Surely it was no one we know?"

"It was Jim Dawlish."

"My hat!"

"He's out of prison, and he's still as keen as ever on getting us to join his precious gang."

"By Jove! I should have thought he would have tired of that game long ago," said Talbot.

"So should I. But then, Dawlish is a persistent scoundrel, and he's come down here for the express purpose of getting hold of us."

John Rivers, who had listened to this conversation without taking part in it, clenched his hands fiercely.

"There will be short shrift for Dawlish if ever I get hold of him!" he muttered. Marie's father needed no introduction to the methods of Jim Dawlish. He had heard all about the previous attempt to kidnap Marie, and he was aware of the debt he owed to Talbot, who had rescued the girl from the clutches of Dawlish's gang.

John Rivers was furious to think that Dawlish was still at large. At the same time, he was just as relieved as Talbot to know that Marie was safe.

Lord Eastwood noted the flushed faces of the juniors when they came in, and he inquired the cause. He listened in great

astonishment to Lord Conway's recital of recent events.

"It is amazing that the police have not arrested that masked scoundrel!" said Lord Eastwood. "I gave them implicit instructions."

"P'r'aps they're too busy getting the turkey and plum-pudding ready," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it hadn't been for Gussy," said Tom Merry, "we should have collared the villain with ease!"

"But it was D'Arcy who rushed at him!" protested Marie Rivers.

"Granted. But the silly ass rushed too soon! He was too impatient to wait till I gave the signal. If only he had waited we should all have rushed up at once, and surrounded the scoundrel. Blake had an empty sack all ready to bung over his head."

"Oh!"

"It would have been as easy as falling off a form," said Manners. "With the sack over his head, the fellow would have been helpless. We should have carted him off to the police-station, left him there with our best wishes for a merry Christmas and a bright New Year, and come back with the feeling that we'd deserved well of our country. But Gussy, not

being able to possess his soul in patience, spoilt everything—as usual!"

Arthur Augustus writhed as a result of this speech. He jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed Manners with a glare which should have shrivelled that youth up.

"Weafy! Mannahs, I acted from the best of motives! It made me extremely watty to heah that wuffian thwestenin' Miss Marie, and I couldn't westwain myself—"

"You never can!" growled Jack Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody was agreed that it was all Gussy's fault.

Tom Merry, who had been pelted with Gussy, as it were, felt particularly sore. And Talbot, Manners, and Lowther, as well as Blake, Herries, and Digby, were loud in their condemnation of Gussy's impetuous conduct.

It was not until Lord Eastwood, Lord Conway, and John Rivers had retired to the smoking-room, however, that the juniors were able to tell Arthur Augustus exactly what they thought of him. The chorus went something like this:

"Ass!"

"Dolt!"

"Fool!"

"Imbecile!"

"Candidate for Colney Hatch!" Arthur Augustus blinked as this torrent of invective was poured upon his devoted head.

"Bai Jove! I appear to be slightly unpopular!" he remarked.

"Well, you brought it on yourself," said Tom Merry. "If only you had held back until I gave the order, we should have collared that scoundrel! You're an ass, Gussy!"

"And a clump!"

"And a dolt!"

"And a lunatic!"

The chorus was chanted over again. "Bump him!" said Jack Blake, in tones of exasperation.

"Weally, Blake—"

Gussy's incensed schoolfellows closed in upon him, and he would have received a very rough handling had not Marie Rivers intervene.

"Don't you think you might let him off, as it's Christmas Eve?" she said, smiling.

"All serene," said Tom Merry. "We'll display the quality of mercy this time, but if Gussy spoils our plans again, we'll pulverise him!"

Although he had escaped a bumping, Arthur Augustus did not look happy.

"Cheer up, Gussy," said Herries. "You must admit that it was your own fault that things went wrong. Now, if you had allowed me to bring Towser—"

"Bothah, Towser!"

"Towser's a dog in a thousand. If I wasn't so fond of him, I'd lend him to Scotland Yard. They'd welcome him with open arms. He would have hung on to that scoundrel like a leech—"

"Give Towser a rest!" pleaded Monty Lowther. "Let's adjourn to the library, and have a nice, exciting game of ludo. It will cheer Gussy up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am considerably wowwied—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Anybody can see that, by your chivvy!" said Tom Merry. "What are you worried about, fathead?"

"I seem to have fallen out of favah. An' it makes me wondah whethah it's worth while to hang my stockings up to-night."

"Hang 'em up, by all means!" said Digby, with a chuckle.

"Yaas; but will anybody put anything in?"

"Yes, rather!" said Jack Blake, winking at his companions. "We'll see that Father Christmas arrives all serene!"

"Thank you, deah boy! I trust you do not regard it as childish of me to weave an old custom?"

"Not a bit!" said Talbot. "I've known fellows older than you to hang up their stockings on Christmas Eve."

The juniors, together with Marie Rivers and Cousin Ethel, amused themselves in the library until bed-time. They did not play a fierce, exciting game of ludo, as Monty Lowther had suggested, but they related ghost stories to each other until most of them had the "shivers."

It was past midnight when the party finally retired.

Outside the wind blew fitfully, driving the snowflakes against the window-panes.

Arthur Augustus slept in what was known as the state bed-room.

"Good-night, deah boys, an' a mewwy Christmases!" he said cheerfully.

"Same to you, Gussy!"

"Mind you're asleep when Father Christmas comes!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After Arthur Augustus had retired, his chums met together in Tom Merry's bed-room.

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"Now," murmured Tom, "what are we going to put in his stockings?"

"We'll have a whip round," said Digby charitably. "Here's a French penny with a hole in it, for a start."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors turned out their pockets, and made a collection of those things for which they had no use.

Tom Merry produced a slab of very ancient toffee; Manners added a bladeless penknife; and Jack Blake contributed a quantity of horse-chestnuts. Herries came to the fore with a quaint-looking goliwog; and Talbot, who had accidentally found a book of nursery-

rhymes, will have to leave my name out of the list of donors."

"Couldn't you write Gussy an ode, or something, and drop it in one of his stockings?" suggested Talbot.

"By Jove!" said Lowther. "I hadn't thought of that! It shall be done! If you fellows wouldn't mind clearing out of the room while I court inspiration—"

"Well, of all the cheek!" gasped Manners. "D'you think we're going out to freeze on the landing?"

"Oh, all right!" granted Lowther. "You can stay, so long as you sit on the bed and keep quiet."

The others waited patiently while Monty produced a scrap of paper and addressed a Christmas greeting to Arthur Augustus. The finished article ran as follows:

"To our illustrious Vere de Vere,  
We wish great joy and all good cheer,  
We trust that when he finds this stocking,

His language will not be too shocking!  
We trust the toffee will adorn  
His noble cheeks on Christmas morn.  
We also trust the nursery rhymes  
Will keep him from committing

crimes.  
The toffee, by the way, was Merry's,  
The goliwog belonged to Herries.

And that most tender, touching ditty  
Is Lowther's work, so smart and witty.

(Copyright throughout the civilised world, and in Germany.)"

The juniors chuckled when they read that effusion.

"Gussy will have a blue fit when he wakes up and goes through his stockings," said Digby. "In one of them he'll find all these useless articles, and that piffle."

"What!" shouted Monty Lowther. "You—you dare to describe my poetry as piffle?"

"Poetry?" echoed Digby. "My hat! You surprise me! I thought it was blank verse—so blank that nobody could see anything in it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about Gussy's other stocking?" said Jack Blake. "Pity to leave it empty."

"We'll fill it with soot from the chimney," said Tom Merry, after a moment's reflection.

"That's the idea!"

"Think Gussy's asleep by now?" asked Manners.

"Most likely."

"How many of us are going to do the deed?"

"I think a couple will be enough," said Tom Merry. "If too many of us start barging about, we shall wake Gussy up."

"You and I will go along, Tommy," said Monty Lowther.

"All serene. Take off your boots."

Lowther thrust his ode into his pocket for the time being, and removed his boots.

Tom Merry did the same, and then, gathering up the miscellaneous assortment of rubbish, the two juniors stole away in the direction of Gussy's bed-room.

The apartment was in darkness.

From the bed came a sound of heavy breathing. Arthur Augustus was in the arms of Morpheus.

"We must do the trick in the dark," whispered Tom Merry. "I'll see to the stocking that's got to be filled with soot, while you shove these things and your ode into the other."

"Right you are," said Lowther, very softly.

No. 19—RICHARD HENRY REDFERN.



By way of being a competitor for the leadership of the New House juniors, though he is ready enough to back up Figgins against the School House rivals. Good at sports, and has the makings of a fine journalist. A fellow of character and marked ability, who should go far, but no despatcher of a jape for all that. Shares Study No. 5 in the New House, with Owen and Lawrence, scholarship juniors.

rhymes during the day, added it to the collection.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "What are you going to give, Monty?"

Monty Lowther went through his pockets for the second time.

"Afraid I've got nothing that's valuable," he said.

"What about your brass watch?" asked Manners.

"Brass?" hooted Lowther. "Why, you—you— That watch is solid gold! It's stamped in every link, and jewelled in every movement!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got a fiver here," continued Monty. "A Christmas present from one of my aunts—bless her! Apart from this, and my watch, and my pearl-

handled penknife, I've got nix. Afraid

The juniors groped their way to the end of the bed. Monty Lowther nearly gave the whole show away by tripping over a boot which lay on the floor.

"Shuah!" muttered Tom Merry. The couple strained their ears to listen, but the sleeper made no sign that he had been disturbed.

"Carry on," whispered Tom Merry; and he took one of the stockings and groped his way towards the fireplace.

It was comparatively easy, in spite of the darkness, to load the stocking with soot.

Tom Merry thrust a poker up the chimney, and quite an avalanche of soot shot down into the grate. The junior scooped it up by the handful, and filled the stocking, which he replaced on the bed-rail.

"Finished, Monty?" he murmured. Lowther whispered an affirmative reply, and the two practical jokers returned to their schoolfellows.

"Did you work the oracle?" asked Talbot.

"We did!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "The only drawback is that we sha'n't be on the spot when Gussy wakes up out of his beauty sleep. Still, life is full of these little disappointments. Fare thee well, kidlets! I'm going to bed!"

"Same here!" said Jack Blake. The juniors dispersed to their own rooms and turned in.

Within ten minutes they were all sound asleep, and in their slumber they were smiling.

#### CHAPTER 6.

#### A Tragic Discovery!

**C**HRISTMAS morning! The snow had ceased. As Monty Lowther remarked, it was high time the inhabitants of Mars stopped sprinkling salt on the earth.

Meadows and hedges and trees, however, were still mantled in white.

It was a glorious morning. The bells of the old village church rang out in merry, joyous peal. Christmas! The time of mirth and good cheer! Christmas, with its heritage of happy laughter!

In consequence of their late retirement overnight, the majority of the St. Jim's juniors failed to awake until the morning was well advanced.

After hurriedly dressing, the Terrible Three, with Talbot and Jack Blake, went along to the "state bed-room." They were hoping to find Arthur Augustus ruefully surveying the contents of his silk stockings.

But the bed was empty, and the swell of St. Jim's had evidently dressed and gone down.

"What a sell!" groaned Monty Lowther. "No sign of Gussy, and no sign of the stockings!"

"I expect he slung them out of the window," said Talbot.

At that moment the breakfast-gong sounded.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "I've got an appetite like Fatty Wynn's and Billy Bunter's rolled into one!"

The juniors clattered down the stairs, being joined en route by Herries and Digby.

Lord Eastwood and Lord Conway were already in the dining-room, chatting to John Rivers.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seated between Marie Rivers and cousin Ethel, and his expression was happy and contented. He did not look like the victim of a "jape."

Christmas greetings were given and returned whilst the porridge was being served.

"Top of the morning, Gussy!" said Jack Blake.

"Did you find your stockings?" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, deah boy!" "Fairly gave you a fit, didn't it?" said Tom Merry.

"Not at all. Of course, I was agreeably delighted an' surprised. I've been tellin' cousin Ethel an' Miss Mawie all about it."

The juniors stared at Arthur Augustus. They could not understand why he should inform the girls of the trick which had been played on him. They had imagined he would be only too anxious to hush the matter up.

"Did the present come from all of you, or from one fellah in particular?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

#### No. 20—CLIFTON DANE.



A Canadian and a real good sort. Has brains and muscles, fond of a jape, ready for a fight if need be, and can hold his own with most. Shares Study No. 11 in the Shell passage, with Bernard Glyn and Harry Noble. Not a regular player in the junior elevens, but always ready if wanted. Quite a useful man with the gloves.

"Which present do you mean?" said Tom Merry, in surprise. "The toffee came from me."

"And the nursery-rhymes from me," added Talbot.

"I supplied the bladeless knife!" chuckled Marners.

"And I threw in the horse-chestnuts," said Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus nodded. "Did you contribute anythin', Dig?"

"Yes," said Digby. "A French penny with a hole in it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"An' you, Hewwies?"

"I presented you with the golliwog."

Arthur Augustus turned to Monty Lowther with a beaming smile.

"Then it was you who made me the weal present, Lowthah? I am extremely obliged to you, deah boy. Furthah, I am touched by such an unexpected act of kindness, bai Jove!"

Monty Lowther gasped. "What on earth are you babbling about, Gussy? I admit that I was responsible for the note."

"Then I can only weepat that I am extremely obliged to you! I had nevah befoah regarded you in the light of a good Samaritan. It was wippin' of you to make me such a handsome present!"

Monty Lowther tapped his forehead significantly.

"Mad!" he murmured.

"Mad as a hatter or a March hare," agreed Marners.

"Fancy Gussy making such a fuss over a piffing poem!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"It wasn't a poem, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "It was, as Lowthah said, a note—a fivah, to be precise!"

And the swell of St. Jim's, to the utter and complete astonishment of his chums, produced a crisp and rustling banknote.

"This is a Christmas present worth havin'!" he declared. "Even Father Christmas, wouldn't have been so generous!"

Monty Lowther's face worked convulsively.

"You—you burglar!" he roared.

"Where did you find that note?"

"In my stockin', deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of laughter rang through the dining-room.

The juniors understood now.

Owing to the darkness, Monty Lowther had made a slight mistake. Instead of putting his poetical effusion in Gussy's stocking, he had put the five-pound note there!

Lowther produced the ode from his pocket. His face was a study.

"Oh, crumbs!" he gasped. "I—I—"

There's been an awful mistake, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Didn't you intend this fivah for me, deah boy?"

"Of course not!"

"Then I was quite w'ong in cweditin' you with chawitable motives?"

"Hand over that fiver!" roared Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It could serve you wight," said Arthur Augustus severely, "if I sent it to the local hospital! However, I won't be hard on you. Heah's your fivah!"

And, as Lowther pocketed the note, he realised that the laugh was not against Gussy, after all, but against himself.

The day passed pleasantly, but all too swiftly.

In the evening Lord Eastwood entertained about a score of villagers, mainly men who worked on his estate.

Tom Merry & Co. organised a variety concert, and it went with a swing from start to finish. Then came feasting and revelling, and yet more revelling.

When the village guests had returned to their homes, John Rivers drew Marie aside.

"I leave to-morrow, Marie—early in the morning."

Marie nodded wistfully.

"I do wish you could stay longer, dad. Lord Eastwood wishes it, too."

John Rivers smiled.

"Duty calls, my dear."

"Have you had a good time?" asked Marie.

"The time of my life! I have never known such genuine happiness!"

"I am so glad. I will come with you to the station in the morning, of course."

Father and daughter remained in each other's company for the rest of the evening. Every moment was precious, for it might be many months ere they met again.

After breakfast next morning John Rivers bade farewell to his hosts. Tom

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Merry & Co. would have liked to accompany him to the station, but they realised that he and Marie would prefer to be alone.

"We'll put in half an hour's skating on the lake, Marie," said Tom Merry. "By that time the train will have gone, and we'll come and escort you home."

"Don't trouble," said Marie.

"It's no trouble, dear gal—it's a pleasurah!" said Arthur Augustus gallantly.

John Rivers shook hands all round, and the last hand he shook was Talbot's.

"Good-bye, Toff!" he said in a low tone. "This is the first opportunity I've had of thanking you for rescuing Marie from Jim Dawlish's clutches some time ago, and for saving her life. You needn't try to belittle your action. Marie told me all the details, and I realise only too well what you went through for her sake. You played a man's part, Toff, and I am proud of you. And now might I ask a favour of you?"

"Certainly!" said Talbot. "Fifty, if you like!"

John Rivers lowered his voice until it was barely audible.

"I have fears for Marie's safety," he said. "Dawlish is in the neighbourhood, and the police have not yet succeeded in locating him. Perhaps they regard the story of the masked man as a myth, and are making no serious effort. Anyway, the presence of Dawlish in the district spells danger. He was bawked the other evening in his attempt to capture Marie, but he may not be so easily thwarted next time. Is it asking too much of you, Toff, to make my daughter's safety your first consideration?"

Talbot smiled.

"You may rely on me to see that no harm comes to her," he said.

"Thank you, Toff! Now that I have this assurance I shall be easier in my mind. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

John Rivers, his brief holiday at an end all too soon, started off for the railway station, accompanied by Marie.

Tom Merry & Co. stood in a group by the front door and watched them go. They returned John Rivers' farewell wave, and then, collecting their skates, they proceeded to the frozen lake.

All of them were good performers on the ice, and the half-hour passed all too quickly.

Tom Merry, his face flushed and healthy with exertion, consulted his watch.

"Time to go and meet Marie, you fellows," he said.

The juniors hurried away towards the railway station. They found the little platform deserted.

"Has the London twain gone?" inquired Arthur Augustus of the solitary porter.

"Yessir—ten minutes ago, sir!"

"Bai Jove! Then Mawie must have returned home. We're too late, dear boys!"

"And we promised Marie we'd escort her back to the lodge," said Tom Merry. "We're bright specimens, and no mistake!"

"We will apologise to Mawie at once!" said Arthur Augustus. "Come on!"

The juniors sprinted back across the fields to Eastwood Lodge. Cousin Ethel met them in the hall, but there was no sign of Marie.

"What have you done with Marie, Arthur?" inquired Ethel.

"Hasn't she returned?"

"No."

Arthur Augustus gave a jump, and so did his schoolfellows.

"Marie must have started back from THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 620.

the station half an hour ago!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Surely she must have come in? P'raps you didn't see her, cousin Ethel?"

"I couldn't have missed her," said Ethel. "I've been standing here the whole time."

"She wouldn't have come in by the back entrance?" suggested Jack Bbke.

"The servants are sure to have seen her if she did. We'll ask them."

Inquiries were made in the servants' quarters, but Marie Rivers had not been seen since she set off for the station in her father's company.

The juniors looked very worried now, particularly Talbot.

Less than an hour ago he had assured John Rivers that he would make Marie's safety his first consideration.

And now—

Marie had not returned, and there were only two possible explanations. Either the girl, after leaving her father, had gone for a solitary walk beyond the railway station, or there had been foul play. And, knowing Jim Dawlish as he did, Talbot inclined to the latter theory.

"This—is this awful, dear boys!" said Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "It seems ridiculous to suppose that Mawie has been kidnapped in broad daylight, an' yet—"

"A kidnapper's job would be perfectly simple on a lonely road," said Jack Bbke.

Talbot clenched his hands hard.

"If this is Dawlish's doing," he said fiercely, "I shan't rest until I've squared accounts with him!"

Talbot's tone and the angry blaze in his eyes sent a tremor through cousin Ethel. This was a new Talbot. She had never seen the handsome Shell fellow in a passion until now.

"I suppose we'd better tell Lord Eastwood that Marie's missing?" said Manners.

"Not yet!" replied Tom Merry. "We'll go along to the station by way of the road, and see if we can pick up any information."

With worried and anxious looks the juniors quitted the house.

They all felt convinced by this time that Marie's disappearance was directly due to that masked scoundrel, Jim Dawlish. And their convictions were borne out when, at a lonely part of the road, Digby made a startling discovery.

A small gold locket lay glittering on the hardened snow.

Talbot knew that locket well. It belonged to his girl chum, and it had evidently been dropped during a struggle. There were footprints in the snow—beyond a doubt the footprints of Jim Dawlish.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, who was nearly as white as Talbot. "This is dreadful, dear boys!"

"And it's our fault, too!" said Tom Merry bitterly. "If we had come to meet Marie earlier, instead of fooling about on the lake—"

"Cheer up, old scout!" said Monty Lowther. "We'll go back and report to Lord Eastwood, and he'll ginger up the police. We'll form a search-party, too, and Marie ought to be restored to the fold by to-night."

"Dawlish won't leave this neighbourhood, I feel certain," said Talbot, taking Marie's locket. "If he attempted to take Marie away by train or car she would raise a hue-and-cry and give him away. The rascal means to hide somewhere until this has blown over."

"In that case, we'll dig him out like a rat from his hole!" said Jack Bbke. "Come on! The sooner Lord Eastwood

and the police are informed of this the better."

And the juniors, maddened at the disappearance of their girl chum, returned with all speed to Eastwood Lodge.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Black Despair.

**L**ORD EASTWOOD did not let the grass grow under his feet.

As soon as he was acquainted with what had occurred he went to the telephone and summoned the local inspector of police.

The inspector arrived shortly afterwards. He was a stout, comports-looking individual, with a vast idea of his own importance.

In the presence of the juniors Lord Eastwood described what had happened. The official listened respectfully, but he did not seem to be raised to any great heights of enthusiasm.

"You say there were signs of a struggle in the roadway?" he asked, turning to Tom Merry.

"Yes," replied Tom. "There were a man's footprints—obviously those of Jim Dawlish."

"H'm! In which direction did the footprints lead?"

"There was no sign of them except at that part of the road. Dawlish must have bunked through a gap in the hedge and out off across the fields."

"And you say that this man wears a crape mask?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I'll give you a detailed description of him," said Talbot. And he did, the inspector jotting down the particulars.

"No stone must be left unturned to bring the rascal to justice!" said Lord Eastwood. "I understand this is not the first time Miss Rivers has fallen into his hands. I might mention, inspector, that if your efforts prove successful an adequate reward will be forthcoming."

The inspector smiled. He evidently regarded the tracking down of Jim Dawlish and the restoration of Marie Rivers to her friends as a very simple matter.

"I fancy there will be developments by nightfall, your lordship," he said.

"You will communicate with me at once in the event of Dawlish's capture!"

"Of course."

The inspector quitted the room with a ponderous tread and an expression of confidence on his florid face. But neither Lord Eastwood nor the juniors had any great faith in him.

"Of course, we must institute a search on our own account," said Lord Eastwood. "After lunch we will go out in two parties and ransack the district. Conway will conduct one party, and I will be responsible for the other. Talbot, my dear boy, pull yourself together! You must not look so dejected."

But Talbot found it difficult to conceal the anxiety and misery he felt. He was perpetually haunted by the assurance he had given John Rivers—an assurance which had been broken!

"Will it be necessary to communicate with Mawie's fathah?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"Not at present," said Lord Eastwood. "We will see what the afternoon search brings forth, and if there are no developments, I will wire to Mr. Rivers in the morning."

After lunch the two search-parties set out, and they went about their task in grim earnest.

Lord Eastwood, with the Terrible Three and Talbot, went to the village to institute inquiries. His lordship quite startled the local printer by striding into his establishment and insisting upon fifty leaflets being printed at once.

The leaflets—which were to be posted up for miles around—ran as follows:

### "FIFTY POUNDS REWARD!"

The above sum will be paid to any person or persons giving such information as may lead to the apprehension and arrest of one JAMES DAWLISH, who is wanted on a serious charge.

Dawlish is stockily built and of medium height, and when last seen he was wearing a crape mask, which concealed the upper portion of his face. He is believed to be hiding in the neighbourhood.

Information should either be given direct to the police-station or to Lord Eastwood, Eastwood Lodge."

Having arranged for the distribution of the leaflets, Lord Eastwood and his companions made an exhaustive tour of the village. They inquired of everyone if a man answering to Dawlish's description had been seen in the locality, but on each occasion they drew a blank. No one in the village had seen a masked man, and the news that such a person was in the neighbourhood greatly alarmed some of the inhabitants. The party extended their search. They explored all the by-lanes and the meadows and copses; in fact, all the environs of the village. But they met with no success. They did not light upon a single clue.

Lord Conway's party went further and farred worse—if that were possible. They explored barns and sheds, and hundreds of nooks and crannies, but with no result. Herries felt very bitter about it all.

"Now, if only I had brought Towser, all would have been well," he kept saying. "Towser would have run Dawlish to earth in no time. He's a wonderful beast."

Jack Blake, Digby, and Arthur Augustus became so fed-up with this parcel-tray that they consigned both Towser and his master to Jericho.

Finally, Lord Conway was reluctantly obliged to abandon the search. The winter dusk was descending, and the task seemed indeed hopeless.

Even Lord Eastwood, persistent and determined as he was, remarked that everything had been done that could be done, and he suggested that the search should be relinquished—for that day, at any rate. "There's one place we haven't inquired at," said Tom Merry.

"Indeed! I was under the impression that we had called at every house for miles around," said Lord Eastwood.

"There's a cottage standing by itself, close to the mill-stream," said Tom.

"That cottage is empty."

"All the more reason why we should explore it!" said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" said Herries. "An empty cottage would be just the place for Dawlish. It would suit him down to the ground."

"This way!" said Lord Eastwood briskly. "It is a forlorn hope, I think; but we will leave nothing to chance."

The cottage by the mill-stream was not empty, as Lord Eastwood had supposed.

An aged couple were in occupation, and they explained that they had recently rented the cottage. On being questioned as to whether they had seen a masked man in the vicinity, they shudderingly answered in the negative.

"No go!" said Talbot glumly.

"We'll be getting back now," said Lord Eastwood, "and I'll phone the police to ascertain if there are any developments. Sorry to have disturbed you, Mr. —"

"Jenkins is my name," said the old cottager, in a wheezing voice.

"I see. Good-night, Mr. Jenkins!"

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night!" added Mrs. Judkins, in a shrill falsetto.

Had the members of the search-party looked closely at the old lady, they must have seen several things to arouse their suspicions.

In the first place, Mrs. Judkins' face was not at all smooth, and secondly, her feet were extremely large. Her hair was hidden by a mob cap, and one row of eyebrows seemed to be out of all proportion to the other.

The St. Jim's juniors noticed none of these things; though had they remained in the cottage a moment longer they could not have failed to become suspicious on another account—namely, an incessant knocking on the floor of the room above.

Mr. and Mrs. Judkins had given the impression that they were alone in the cottage; but the knocking would clearly have shown that there was a third person, and the searchers would have made it their business to find out who the third person was.

Unfortunately, however, Lord Eastwood and his party had not dallied, and they little suspected that the quaint old cottage by the mill-stream could have furnished them with a fund of information.

### A BEAUTIFUL BOOK FOR LOVERS OF ST. JIM'S—

A MAGNIFICENT NEW SCHOOL STORY  
OF BOYS, WOOD, GREYFRIARS & ST. JIM'S

## FOOTBALL

## CHAMPIONS.

BY

FRANK RICHARDS.

4<sup>d</sup>.

No. 489

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With heavy hearts and tired feet, the searchers returned to Eastwood Lodge. There they encountered Lord Conway's party, and exchanged experiences. The result was not inspiring.

Marie Rivers had been kidnapped, and neither of her nor her kidnapper was there any trace.

The last gleam of hope was extinguished when Lord Eastwood telephoned to the police-station, and received the inspector's laconic message that nothing had happened. Every effort was being made, etc., etc., but up to the present time there was nothing to report. His lordship would be kept posted of any developments.

"I'm afraid, deah boys, that nothin' moah can be done to-day," remarked Arthur Augustus. "If we had no luck in the daylight, it's not likely that we should twice Dawlish in the darkness."

"We'll turn in early," said Jack Blake, "and have another hunt at daybreak."

"Poor old Marie!" said Digby, his voice quivering a little. "It mu' be awful for her, being trapped like this!"

"Cousin Ethel is dreadfully upset

about it," said Arthur Augustus. "She's been cwyin', an' I can't comfort her."

"Then supposing I have a shot?" said Monty Lowther hopefully.

Arthur Augustus froze the speaker with a glare.

"You are not likely to succeed where a fellow of tact an' judgment has failed, Lowther!" he said severely.

Talbot took no part in the juniors' conversation. Just as Eugene Aram, in the poem, "sat remote from all, a melancholy man," so Talbot sat now. His head was buried in his hands, and—although his chums failed to notice the fact—through his fingers the tears were trickling.

Reginald Talbot was hard as nails, as a rule, but the kidnapping of his girl chum, and the long, disappointing search, had almost unmanned him. And then there was his promise to John Rivers—a promise he had not kept. He ought to have been Marie's constant companion. He ought to have been at hand to protect her when danger threatened. He had left undone those things which he ought to have done, and he considered himself far more to blame than he was in reality.

Christmas, with its whirl of joy and delight, was over. But the aftermath was terrible.

Marie Rivers was in the hands of the enemy, and neither she nor her captor had yet been found.

A black night indeed for Reginald Talbot! But, in his acute distress, he quite overlooked the fact that the darkest hour heralds the approach of dawn, and that right triumphs over wrong as surely as night follows day!

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Happy Re-union.

THE winter night had set in dark and grim.

The St. Jim's juniors, acting on Jack Blake's suggestion, went early to bed.

There was one exception, however. It was useless for Talbot to think of slumber.

How could he sleep, with the haunting knowledge that his girl chum was in peril?

By ten o'clock the great House was still and silent. But Talbot still lingered in the drawing-room, gazing moodily into the dying embers of the fire.

The junior's mind was in an agony of fear and suspense.

He was acutely concerned for Marie, of course, but he was also concerned for his father!

It would be a terrible blow for John Rivers on the morrow, when he received Lord Eastwood's telegram to the effect that his daughter had been kidnapped.

And what would he think of Talbot? Surely he would never trust him again.

The unhappy junior rose to his feet. He was too restless to remain still any longer. He went quietly into the hall, donned his cap and coat, and, opening and closing the heavy oak door as noiselessly as possible, he stepped out into the night.

And a wild night it was!

The fierce wind tore through the leafless branches as Talbot strode along, heedless alike of direction and destination.

Presently the rush of the millstream, turbid and swollen from the melted snow, came to his ears.

Talbot's attention was then arrested by a light which glimmered from the windows of the cottage occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Judkins.

The junior was mildly surprised. He

knew that country people retired to rest early, as a rule, especially in the winter; and it was now decidedly late.

Instinctively, Talbot walked up to the little cottage.

Suddenly the front door opened, and a shaft of light fell upon the voice.

The sound of muttered voices came to Talbot's ear, and he stepped back quickly into the shadows.

"It ought to be a simple enough matter, Jim. Everybody in the house will be asleep by now, I reckon. His lordship has taken no precautions against burglary, so you've nothing to worry about."

"You will keep an eye on the girl in my absence?"

"Of course!"

"I shall be back within a couple of hours—with the loot, I hope. So long!"

Talbot crouched low in the shadows, with his heart thumping against his ribs.

He had not overheard the whole of the conversation between the two men, but he had overheard sufficient to ascertain three very important facts. Mr. and Mrs. Judkins were impostors. The former was no other than Jim Dawlish, and the latter was a confederate. That was the first important fact.

Secondly, Jim Dawlish had planned a burglary at Eastwood Lodge, and he was about to carry out his base design.

Thirdly—and this was by far the most important discovery of all—a girl was imprisoned in the cottage.

Talbot was wildly excited, though he made no sound.

The captive would, of course, be Marie, his girl chum. Who else could it be?

The junior's brain was in a whirl.

He wanted to do several things at once. He wanted to get to grips with Dawlish—to prevent him from carrying out his shady scheme. He wanted to overpower Dawlish's rascally confederate. And, thirdly—this was the keenest desire of all—he wanted to rescue Marie Rivers from her terrible plight.

In order to do this, however, it would be necessary to carry out the other two operations first. It was useless to think of releasing Marie until her captors had been dealt with.

Talbot was wondering how to act, when inspiration came to him.

He would return with all speed to Eastwood Lodge, and raise the alarm. Then, when the cracksmen arrived at the house, he would walk into a hornets' nest. He would be arrested and taken to the police-station. After which, the St. Jim's juniors would proceed to the cottage in full force, overpower the other man, and rescue Marie.

It all seemed so beautifully simple. Certainly it was a far better plan than for Talbot to tackle the situation single-handed.

But the junior's luck was out, for as he moved away from the spot the rays of an electric-torch were flashed upon him, and a startled exclamation burst from the lips of Jim Dawlish.

"The Toff!"

Talbot halted, and spun round. "Yes, you scoundrel," he said fiercely, "it is I! And I might add that your game's up!"

For a full minute, man and boy stood glaring at each other, like the implacable enemies they were.

Then Dawlish muttered an imprecation. "Hang you, Toff! You're always crossing my path at the wrong moment, but you shall never cross it again!"

The speaker drew a revolver from his hip pocket.

"The sooner you are out of the way, the better!" he snarled, levelling the weapon at Talbot. "You have been a thorn in my side ever since I formed the gang. Stay! I'll give you one more chance—the last you will ever get. Marie has consented to join the gang—"

"I don't believe you!" flashed Talbot.

"Whether you believe me or not, it's the truth. Marie has become one of us. And I'm giving you a chance—a last chance, Toff—to do the same."

"Fool!" said Talbot. "As I told you before, I would die rather than go back to a life of dishonour!"

"Then die you shall!" muttered Dawlish thickly.

He had lowered the revolver temporarily, whilst parleving with the junior, but now he raised it again.

Talbot was not alarmed. He knew that Jim Dawlish, coward and blackguard though he was, hadn't the pluck to commit murder. And he was prepared to swear that the revolver wasn't even loaded.

Talbot's brain worked swiftly.

Should he hurl himself at Dawlish, or

An alternative occurred to him. He would pretend to be terrified, and dash away at top-speed, hoping Dawlish would follow. And if Dawlish followed him as far as Eastwood Lodge, the rest would be easy.

Accordingly, Talbot turned on his heel and took a flying leap across the mill-stream at its narrowest part.

Dawlish immediately gave chase, but he was less athletic than Talbot, and instead of attempting to leap across the stream, he made for the narrow rustic bridge.

Talbot saw him step on it, and what followed was like a strange dream.

The bridge, already undermined by the swollen water, yielded beneath Jim Dawlish's weight.

A startled cry, followed by a splash, and bridge and man were whirling in the stream together.

Talbot stood rooted to the ground,

sick with horror. But within a few seconds the nausea passed.

The junior pulled himself together. He sprang down the bank, and, seizing one of the boughs of an overhanging tree, he leaned over the dark waters.

If he could catch Jim Dawlish as he passed, he might save him. It was the only chance.

Talbot's career was struggling in the surging waters, trying to fight against the powerful current of the millstream. But the fight was futile.

The swirling waters bore him onward, dashing him from side to side.

"Now!" muttered Talbot.

And he leaped over and seized the man's arm in the nick of time.

The bridge and the waters rushed on, but Reginald Talbot had saved his enemy.

Jim Dawlish was unconscious, and his face was colourless. With a supreme effort, Talbot dragged him safely to the bank. Then the junior took off his overcoat, spread it out on the hard, frozen turf, and heaved the inanimate form upon it. This done, he sped away to Eastwood Lodge for help.

It was a novel experience for Lord Eastwood, to be aroused in the middle of the night, but he behaved admirably in the circumstances. Without waiting to ask a lot of needless questions, he hurried into his clothes, whilst Talbot roused his schoolfellows.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is extraordinary! How on earth did you manage to wun into Dawlish, Talbot?"

"You shall hear the full story later," said Talbot. "Buck up!"

The juniors, with Lord Eastwood at their head, went out into the night, and bore the insensible form of the cracksmen back to the house.

Dawlish was laid on a couch, and brandy was administered. The injured man came round, but he seemed to think he was dying.

In hoarse, broken accents, the cracksmen explained everything to his eager audience. He told how he had kidnapped Marie Rivers, and made her a prisoner in the cottage, locking the girl in a small room under the eaves—a room without windows. He also explained how he and his partner had disguised themselves, and rented the cottage as Mr. and Mrs. Judkins. He hoped to keep Marie a prisoner there until the affair of the kidnapping had blown over, when he intended to remove the girl to his headquarters in London.

Remorse and repentance seemed to be mingled with Dawlish's confession. He appeared to be genuinely ashamed of himself and of his shady past.

"Thank you, Toff," he concluded, "for attempting to save my life to-night."

Big "Bill" Hart.



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BOYS' CINEMA



It was a plucky effort, but I'm afraid it was in vain. I'm at death's door—"

"Nonsense!" said Lord Eastwood. "The doctor shall be sent for, and we will endeavour to make you comfortable here until he comes."

Jim Dawlish was wrapped in several blankets and a rug, and one of the maids was despatched for the doctor.

"And now," said Talbot, his eyes glowing with a glad light, "we'll go and fetch Marie."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And while we are about it, we'll collar the other precious scoundrel," said Herries.

Meanwhile, Lord Conway, who had been awakened by the disturbance, had slipped into his clothes and come down to see what it was all about. He was overjoyed to know that Marie's whereabouts had been discovered, and he insisted on accompanying Lord Eastwood and the others to the cottage.

Cousin Ethel joined the party in the hall, and she, too, insisted upon going. The cottage by the millstream was in darkness. Tom Merry & Co. swarmed into it, and the rays of several electric torches lit up the little kitchen.

There was no sign of Jim Dawlish's accomplice. A blouse, a skirt, and a mob cap had been thrown in the corner, and the man who had worn these feminine garments had bolted.

A sudden feeling of dread assailed the party.

Had the man, in his hurried flight, taken Marie with him?

Talbot soon proved that these fears were false. He went to the foot of the stairs, and shouted.

"Marie!"

To his delight, there was a ready response from the room above.

"I am here, Toff!"

Talbot went up the rickety stairs three at a time, and hurled himself at the door of the room where Marie had been kept a prisoner.

"It is locked, Toff!" came a voice from within.

Talbot laughed—quite his old, merry laugh.

"It won't take long to bust it in!" he said. "This way, you fellows!"

The Terrible Three and Jack Blake were up the stairs in a twinkling, and the united weight of the juniors was pitted against the door. It was not a very stout door, and in less than a couple of minutes it was swept off its hinges.

Then there was a struggle to see who would clasp Marie's hand first. Talbot proved an easy winner.

Marie warmly returned the pressure of her chum's hand. Her eyes were shining.

"Toff! So you have found me—once again!"

"Trust old Talbot to do the trick, Miss Marie!" said Monty Lowther. "He's going to be a 'tec when he grows up—aren't you, Talbot?"

Talbot scarcely heard the question. All his attention was for his girl chum.

"Have you had a rotten time, Marie?"

"It might have been worse," said the girl. "The actual kidnaping was neither a gentle nor a pleasant affair. But I'll give Dawlish his due. He hasn't kept me short of food!"

Lord Conway's voice boomed up from below.

"Have you found her, boys?"

"Yes, rather!" replied the Terrible Three and Jack Blake, in unison.

"Huwah!" chortled Arthur Augustus, dancing a hornpipe on the floor of the kitchen. "Hip, hip, hip—"

"Come along Marie," said Talbot.

There was a further bout of handshaking when Marie descended to the kitchen. Her hand was quite limp by the time Lord Eastwood, Lord Conway, and the others had finished using it as a pump-handle.

Then, light of heart now that all danger and suspense were over, the party returned to Eastwood Lodge.

A surprise awaited them on their arrival.

Jim Dawlish had escaped!

"The spoofer!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "He was merely putting it on when he said he was at death's door!"

Talbot looked puzzled.

"He was certainly injured," he said. "He must have found it awfully difficult to get away."

"Better search for him in the grounds," suggested Lord Conway.

The search, however, came to nothing. Aided probably by his confederate, Jim Dawlish had got clear, and escaped the consequences of his barbarous action.

Next morning, Lord Eastwood received a telephone message from the local police-inspector. The latter was very excited.

"We're fairly on the track of Miss Rivers, your lordship," he announced. "Her footprints have been discovered at a spot four miles away."

"Fool!" shouted Lord Eastwood.

"Miss Rivers has already been restored to her friends—small thanks to you!"

This intelligence caused the inspector to gasp. And he was still gasping when Lord Eastwood rang off.

As for the St. Jim's juniors, they were as happy as sandboys to know that their girl chum was safe and sound.

And happiest of all was Reginald Talbot, who had once again been instrumental in delivering Marie Rivers from the hands of an unscrupulous plotter.

Jim Dawlish was still at large; but he was not fit enough to cause any more trouble at the moment.

And when the joyous vacation came to an end, Tom Merry & Co. took back with them to St. Jim's all the thrilling details of Marie's Christmas Adventure!

THE END.

(Another grand long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "TRIMBLE MINOR!" Order your copy in advance.)



**SYNOPSIS.**

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 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, and 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 Sulah Mendoza, a villainous Malay, are their unscrupulous rivals for the treasure.

Harry Fielding and Joe Maddox join the expedition, also Wang Su, a Chinese boy.

They reach the island off which the Pathan is sunk, and a fierce encounter with the Red Rover takes place, in which our friends are victorious. Later, Dick and Stella go for a swim round the island. During their absence from the ship a cyclone approaches, and the Foam has to leave them and make for safety.

The Red Rover is sighted, and later Stella and Dick hear the sounds of firing. They return to the Foam, and find that Captain Kidd has been slightly wounded.

It is discovered that Otto Schwab is in league with the Islanders, and work on the wreck is commenced.

Wang Su obtains the Dragon's Eye and disappears. Dick proceeds to the Grotto, where a strange sight meets his gaze.

(Now read on.)

**Wang's Wheeze.**

IN a broken stalcate a small fire had been kindled, before which the missing Chinaman was standing, his arms raised above his head, his eyes uplifted, as he muttered, in a low, droning chant, what was evidently part of some mysterious ritual.

Even as Dick looked, he ceased his prayer, or incantation—which the astonished boy could not say—and prostrated himself before a small object wrapped in what looked very much like linen torn from his shirt.

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Raising the small parcel from the ground, Wang Su bowed low over it three times; then, taking a small bag, stiff with gold and embroidery, that flashed in the sunlight, as though composed of precious stones, thrust the linen package inside it.

Then Dick Danby sneezed. It was a most unromantic thing to do, but had his life depended upon holding it back he could not have done so.

With a cry in which rage, dismay, and surprise were about equally blended, Wang Su wheeled round, and Dick Danby recoiled before the blind rage that shone from his little eyes.

"What do you see? Why you watchee Chinaman making joss?" he demanded furiously, and, for a moment, Dick thought he was about to fly at his throat.

But, as suddenly as it sprung into being, his rage departed, and his face resumed its wonted passive expression, as he said:

"You frightened poor Wang! He make play at Mastel Dickee have good fist chop luckee," he said reproachfully.

"Sorry, Wang! What is it you were praying to?" demanded Dick.

Wang Su looked quickly into his master's face, and a momentary flash of alarm shot into his eyes.

"Heap big Joss. Top-hole Joss!" he replied quickly, as, turning his back on Dick, he placed the embroidered bag into a bladder, then thrust the whole into a wallet attached to the belt round his waist.

"Won't you show it to me?" persisted the young Britisher.

"One day, p'laps! Me helpee missee now," returned Wang, and, hastening to the pool, dived into its placid depths.

With a vexed laugh, Dick Danby followed.

Arrived at the Chair-Rock, they found Siella straining pluckily at the hauling-rope, which, strong though she was, had proved almost more than she could manage.

Dick relieved her at the derrick, and, with the help of the Chinaman, she was soon on her way to the reef, where the Foam's boat awaited her, with the first load of the recovered gold.

All that day they worked without intermission, eating as best they could during their time at the derrick.

Every moment they expected to hear the firing shot from the Foam, which would tell them that the Malays were in sight.

But nothing happened. By nightfall they had secured the greater part of the loose gold, and of the jewels that had been scattered about on the strong-room floor.

But the richest gem of all—the Dragon's Eye—had vanished. In fact, the only sign of it they found was the splintered sandal-wood box, in which it had reposed when Dick had last seen it in the hands of the Pathan's ill-fated purser.

During the day Wang made a journey in the canvas boat and the schooner's gig to the Foam, from whence he returned carrying a tin of petrol.

"What on earth do you want with that, Wang?" asked Harry Fielding.

"No teelce, you no teelce," retorted the Chinaman.

"I'll pull your nigtail out by the roots for that!" threatened Harry.

But Wang Su only grinned. He knew that the white boy was tied

to the rope until he landed the load he was then pulling up.

But Harry Fielding bided his time. "Now, my celestial friend, I'm going to—," he began, directly he had dragged a net full of gold bars on to the rock.

But the sentence was never finished, for, to his amazement, Wang slipped into the water, dragging the tin of petrol with him. A few minutes later he could be seen hauling the tin painfully over the uneven bottom of the sea towards the tunnel.

Though not so heavy as when above the surface, the tin weighed sufficient to render it necessary for the Chinaman to rise to the surface twice before he had got it through the tunnel, where he left it lying safely at the bottom of the pool, for, splendid swimmer though he was, he could not raise it to the surface unaided.

It was not until darkness rendered further work beneath the surface impossible that the treasure-seekers reluctantly knocked off work for the night.

Having done full justice to a supper of broiled fish, prepared as only Wang Su could cook it, the weary workers rolled themselves in their blankets, and were soon fast asleep.

It seemed to Dick Danby that he had barely closed his eyes, though it was well past midnight, when he was awakened by Wang Su shaking him gently by the shoulder.

"Hallo, Wang! What's the trouble?" he demanded.

"Come long; Wang quite leady!" replied the Chinaman.

"Ready—what for?" asked Dick.

"We buln Islandel's canoes; Islandel's no attackee Foam," asserted Wang Su calmly.

"Burn their canoes!" repeated Dick, in amazement. "What with?"

"Fire!" declared the Chinaman, without a smile.

Dick Danby made a gesture of imperviousness, but he knew his little yellow servant too well not to feel convinced he had not awakened him in the middle of the night for nothing.

"Not a bad idea, Wang! It would certainly put the kibosh on the skunks, but what are you going to make the fire with?" he asked.

"Petrol!" was the unexpected answer.

"Where's the petrol?" persisted Dick. For answer Wang Su pointed to the pool which lay like a silver dish beneath the bright rays of the moon that shone from immediately above their heads into the gorge.

"Oh, go to sleep and wake up sane!" retorted Dick, rolling over on to his side. But Wang Su would not leave him in peace.

"Waitee lilly minute!" he pleaded; then, to Dick's astonishment, snatched up a coil of rope and dived into the water.

A minute later he was back, with one end of the rope clasped in his hand.

"Helpee pullee!" he begged, as Dick rose to his feet.

Shaking his head as though the problem was too deep a one for him to solve, Dick Danby complied, and a few seconds later was gazing in amazement at the tin of petrol which had so aroused Harry Fielding's curiosity that afternoon.

"How on earth did that get there?" cried Dick.

But Wang Su only smiled with that irritating superiority which always made Dick want to kick him good and hard.

"Makee haste quick!" he urged; and, shouldering the petrol-tin, entered the grotto singing softly, but none too sweetly:

"It's a long wavye Tipelaly, it top-hole fist chop long way goee!"

Laughing at the Chinaman's quaint rendering of the famous song, Dick Danby only stopped to take a cartridge-belt and revolver from the watertight tin case in which they had been brought through the tunnel, and hastened after his agile little companion.

Twenty minutes after leaving the grotto, Dick Danby and Wang Su stood in the deep shadow, just within the Snake God's temple, and gazed upon a perfect, moonlit paradise.

It was as peaceful a scene as the heart could wish.

Immediately before them was the open space in which Dick had fought his desperate fight with the priests, to right and left thick forests of tropical trees reaching to the very foot of the unscalable mountains that lay between the islanders' village and that part of the lagoon in which the treasure-seekers had been working.

Beyond them a cluster of native houses with low, palm-leaf-covered roofs, amongst which shone the embers of many fires, for firemaking is a cumbersome operation to a people who have no matches, and know no flint and steel, so a fire, once kindled, is never allowed to go out.

### The Burning of the War Canoes.

FOR some minutes Dick Danby and Wang Su crouched within the shadow of the temple, watching lest some belated Islander should be about.

But not a soul was in sight, and, from what he learned of the Islanders during his captivity on the island, Dick had little fear of meeting anyone, for he knew them to be in constant terror of ghosts, which prevented even the bravest amongst them from stirring out of the house, unless in company with several companions—the more the better.

"What now, Wang?" whispered Dick.

"Cleep like snakee to trees, then you lead slaight to canoes," replied the Chinaman, as, flinging himself on the ground, he wriggled out of the shadow-filled temple into the bright, moonlit plain.

For a few moments Dick watched his little companion squirming in a way a worm might have envied over the short grass, then, tried, but in vain, to follow his example.

However, he managed to reach the shelter of the trees without being seen, or, at any rate, without an alarm being given, to find Wang Su awaiting him with as much impatience as a Chinaman ever shows.

Dick was now on terribly familiar ground, every inch of which brought back painful recollections of some degradation or ill-treatment he had received at the hands of the Islanders.

Consequently, it was with a feeling of elation as he reflected how great the blow he hoped to inflict on the Islanders would be, that he led the way towards inland.

Struck by a sudden thought, he came to an abrupt halt.

"How about getting back, Wang? These woods will be alive with savages when they find their canoes on fire," he asked.

"No goee backee," returned the Chinaman.

"Think the brutes will get us—eh?" demanded Dick, aghast at the ominous words.

"We no goe backee," repeated Wang Su. "If we goe backee we showee Islanders seclat path."

"But—" began Dick, when his companion interrupted him with:

"Tlust your Chinaman's uncle. Yelly clevee uncle. Gottee muchee blains."

"Dick Danby shrugged his shoulders.

"All right! But mind, if I'm killed, I'll wring my Chinese uncle's neck!" he replied, with a laugh.

Giving the houses a wide berth, lest the sharp-eared dogs that over-run every native village should raise an alarm, Dick led the way round the native houses, then, striking a well-worn path, kept on until they reached a shelving beach, on which a score or more large war canoes were drawn high above the reach of the tide.

Nearer to the sea were a number of smaller craft, which, acting under Wang's direction, Dick helped to carry to the larger vessels, and place in such a way as to assure their leading the fire from one large canoe to the other.

One canoe they left where it lay, and Dick nodded understandingly as he realised that this was to be their line of retreat when their work was done.

All was now ready for the petrol. Unscrewing the stopper, Dick sprinkled every large canoe, and the connecting smaller ones with the highly-inflammable liquid.

The moon shining down upon them rendered the whole shore as bright as day, and Dick Danby breathed a sigh of relief when the last drop of petrol drained from it, he flung the can away.

"Now, Wang, a match, and we'll soon give my late captors something to scratch their fuzzy heads over!" he cried triumphantly.

But the triumph died out of his eyes as he noticed the look of blank dismay in the Chinaman's face.

"You gottee file sticks?" asked Wang anxiously.

With sinking heart Dick ran swiftly through his pockets.

"No, I haven't them! Don't you remember I gave the bottle to you to light the fire last night?" he replied.

Wang Su turned his back on his master.

"Wang Su folgot file sticks. Kickee fool Chinaman's—kickee hald!" he said earnestly.

Despite his disappointment, Dick Danby could not forbear a smile.

"We've had all our trouble for nothing, then!" he cried despondently. "Unless the flame from my revolver will do the trick," he added more hopefully, as he drew the weapon from its sheathe at his belt.

Wang Su grasped him by the arm, crying:

"No shootee! Waitee min'tyee!"

The next moment he was running as quickly as his little yellow legs could carry him towards the fringe of cocoanut-palms that separated them from the village.

Until the little Chinaman had vanished through the trees, Dick Danby stood gazing in amazement after him; then, realising that the plucky little fellow had gone to secure a blazing brand from one of the fires burning in the village, started to follow, intent upon sharing his peril should he be attacked.

But ere he had taken a couple of steps, he realised that Wang Su could keep as quietly as a shadow where his more clumsy movements might easily betray them both, and, returning to the canoes, waited anxiously for his comrade's return.

Slowly the minutes dragged by, and

as Wang Su did not return, Dick occupied himself by dragging the canoe they had reserved for their flight down to the water's-edge, ready to push off at a moment's notice.

He had just laid the paddles over the cross pieces that held the sides of the frail craft apart, ready for immediate use, when he was startled by a single rifle-shot, another, and yet another, from the direction of the village.

The next moment the silence that had hung over the island was broken by a constantly rising chorus of vengeful yells.

Drawing his revolver, he ran in the direction from whence the ominous sound came.

But even as he did so, he saw the twinkle of a swiftly-moving light amongst the cocoanut-palms. The next moment Wang Su, waving a blazing brand above his head, dashed into the open.

"Get aboard one time—quick!" yelled the Chinaman; and Dick, recognising the

remaining barrels of his six-shooter into their huddled ranks, fled back to the shelter of the palms.

But only for a few seconds. At that moment the petrol-soaked canoes caught fire with the suddenness of an explosion. A fierce yell of rage and dismay burst from the savages as they saw the flames spreading to them with miraculous speed from canoe to canoe, and they dashed forward once more.

Short though the respite, it had enabled Wang Su to reach the canoe.

Tumbling head over heels into it, he righted himself with the agility of a monkey, and, seizing a paddle, was soon helping Dick to propel the light craft beyond the savages' reach, who, rushing into the water, sent a shower of spears hurtling around the fugitives.

Dick and Wang were soon out of the range of those primitive weapons, and, though a few Islanders commenced swimming after them, a couple of shots from



Wang Su dashed by the canoes, hurling his flaming torch into their midst as he did so, whilst Dick, resting his pistol on his left arm, took steady aim at the foremost savage and fired. (See this page.)

need of immediate action, ran back to the canoe, and pushed it off.

Thrusting the canoe into deep water he sprang into it, then glanced back to his fleet-footed little companion.

#### Just in Time!

HE was just in time to see a score of spear-armed savages dash from out the palms, and fling themselves furiously after the fleeing Chinaman.

But Wang Su was as fleet of foot as an antelope.

Rapidly drawing ahead of his pursuers, he dashed by the canoes, hurling his flaming torch into their midst as he did so, whilst Dick, resting his pistol on his left arm, took steady aim at the foremost savage and fired.

The bullet sped true to its mark, and the brawny savage, plunging heavily forward, fell dead on the sand.

Seeing their leader's fall, the Islanders halted, then, as Dick emptied the

Dick's revolver persuaded them to give up the chase.

Realising that the men who had inflicted such serious damage upon their tribe were already beyond their vengeance, the Islanders hastened to save as many canoes as possible.

In this they might have been fairly successful, for, despite the petrol, the fire had not had time to gain the mastery, had not luck played into the daring adventurers' hands, by causing the gas in the discarded tin to explode with a report that sent the savages fleeing back to the palms.

It was at that moment that Schwab and Mendoza, followed by their Malays, appeared upon the scene, and gazed in dismay at the burning of the canoes upon which they had depended for an attack on the British schooner.

Howling with rage, the German sprang forward, and commenced throwing sand on the blazing pile.

Mendoza, on vengeance intent, called

upon his men to follow him, and, rushing to the water's-edge, opened fire on the canoe, just as Wang Su, carried away by excitement, had sprung to his feet, and, waving his paddle above his head, gave tongue to a shrill, taunting:

"Heep, heep, lullah!"

"Sit down and paddle for your life, you madman!" shouted Dick.

But the warning came too late. Wang Su, the words left Dick's lips, Wang Su's antics ceased; he whirled round, and disappeared over the side.

Despite the shower of bullets that were hurrying overhead, or skimming through the waves on either side of the canoe, Dick swung the light craft round, and paddled frantically back to where the waves had closed over his plucky little servant's head.

The next moment a sigh, that was almost a sob of relief, burst from his lips. Wang Su rose to the surface, and, reaching the boat in a couple of strokes, clambered on board.

"Hurt, Wang?" he asked anxiously.

"Huh! Me pool Chinaman killed! But no time diee! Too busee!" panted Wang, paddling vigorously.

Then followed an anxious five minutes, during which they remained under fire, then they gradually drew away, until at last they rounded a tall cliff and were out of danger.

"Now, Wang, let's see what is wrong with you!" said Dick, turning anxiously towards his companion.

He was relieved to find that, save for a portion of cartilage, torn from his ear by a flying bullet, the little Chinaman was uninjured, though it had come sufficiently close to his head to send him flying over the side.

Shortly afterwards they drew up alongside the Chair Rock, to which Wang Su secured the captured canoe ere they re-

gained the gorge where they lay down to snatch half an hour's sleep before dawn called them to their labours once more, well content with the result of their daring raid.

### A Fearful Antagonist.

ALL went well with the treasure-seekers the following morning, and by midday Dick was able to tell Stella that, barring accidents, the strong-room would be cleared, the treasure on board, and the Foam able to set out on her return journey, to home and civilisation, by night.

"And then, Dick?" queried Stella.

"Ah, then, Stella, we will know how bloated millionaires feel. I am sure—"

He began laughingly, then ceased speaking, and, stepping to the edge of the rock, peered anxiously through the crystal clear water towards the wreck.

Immediately beneath him the repulsive body of a huge eel, that could not have been less than fifty feet in length, was gliding towards the jagged rent in the side leading to the strong-room in which Harry Fielding and Joe Maddox were at work.

Even as, with shaking hand, Dick Dandy pointed out the huge monster to his ghid chum, they saw Harry Fielding, carrying a native basket laden with gold bars, emerge backwards from the wreck, all unconscious of the fearful pool that menaced him.

Paralysed with horror, they saw the eel's huge, fang-armed head shoot forward, and Stella covered her eyes with her hands to shut out the horrid specter.

For a fraction of a second Dick Dandy hid his breath, then a shout of joy burst from his lips when he saw that the mon-

ster's huge teeth had closed over the air-cylinder Harry wore strapped to his back.

The force of the impact landed the young diver against the side of the wreck, and the next moment the writhing eel had wound its huge body, the smaller part of which was as thick as a man's thigh, round his prostrate chum.

At that moment Joe Maddox rushed from out the wreck, and, though armed only with a long, sharp knife flung himself recklessly upon the awful monster.

Dick Dandy waited to see no more.

Snatching up an axe, he dived to his chums' rescue.

It only took him a few seconds to reach the scene of that awful fight beneath the waves, but short though the time, it was long enough to enable the eel to envelop its second attacker in its fearsome folds, and, with a sinking heart, he realised that little short of a miracle could save his chums from certain death.

Yet, without a moment's hesitation, he flung himself on the eel, and, seizing hold of one of its enormous, spine-like fins struck frantically at its huge body with his axe.

On land that blow would have driven the keen blade deep into the eel's yielding flesh, but the water robbed the blow of half its strength, and he succeeded only in inflicting a deep gash in the writhing form which caused the brute to thrash about in agony, but did not force it to relinquish its prey.

By this time they were fighting in a seamy of floating sand, torn seaweed, and dismembered ammonites, torn from his strike by the monster's furcous writhings.

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