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WHAT TOM MERRY SAW AT MIDNIGHT!

A Dramatic Scene from this week's Long Complete School Story, entitled: "GUSSY'S QUESTS," inside.



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

RUNNING.

A READER from Manchester tells me that he has started a GEM Harriers Club, and the membership at present stands at twenty. Apparently none of my chums have gone in for running before, and they are desirous of starting in the right way. What do I advise them to do? Well, I was very keen on running in my early days, and the trainer of the club to which I belonged started us off with a two-mile run. It doesn't sound much of a distance, but believe me we felt it telling on us when we were in the inexperienced stage. The captain of the team chose the route, and we set off together at a steady pace. There was no idea of one fellow trying to race the other. On the contrary, the pace of the run was reduced to the speed of the worst runner. After each run we used to have a brisk rub down; and that took a lot of the stiffness out of our limbs. But that stiffness which is so unpleasant in the early stages of training soon wore off. After three two-mile runs—spread over a week—it disappeared entirely. You see, we were beginning to get into trim. On the first evening of the second week we increased the distance of our run to three miles. And so on. By the time we had been in existence as a club for two months we were "some" runners, believe me. I think my Manchester chums won't go far wrong if they start on these lines.

NERVE.

I have received a very unusual letter from a reader in Australia which starts off like this: "Dear Editor,—I hope you will not consider it impudent, but if one or more of these jokes"—he encloses three—"are not accepted, and a prize, or prizes, given, I may happen to think the business fishy and I might discontinue to read the GEM and some of your other papers. . . ." Rather cool, isn't it? My correspondent also mentions the fact that he has sent two other lots of jokes that have not been accepted, and which were, HE considers, as good as those published! Really! Now, there is a vein of frivolity running through my correspondent's letter which leads me to conclude that he really doesn't

mean all he says. If he does mean what he says, then I can only remark that he is not a typical Australian, or a credit to our chums "down under." Everyone knows that our Joke column is run on absolutely straight lines. The number of years it has been in existence is sufficient testimony as to that. My Australian reader doubts whether anyone receives a Tuck Hamper or a half-crown. Incredible, isn't it? Well, well, I must not take too serious a view of this youthful indiscretion on the part of my Australian reader.

A NEW SERIES!

I have an extra-special series of long complete adventure stories starting very soon in the GEM, written by that popular author, Cecil Fanshaw. That they will be well received goes without saying, for, in my opinion—and I'm supposed to be the one to know—these stories will outshine anything we have ever had in the way of "long completes" in the GEM. There's a spanking character in Big Jim Barstow. None of your good-looking, handsome men; Jim is a modern Hercules so far as strength is concerned, and his face—well, it's rugged, very rugged, and very honest. Stand by, chums, to make "Bat" Barstow's acquaintance.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME!

"PONGO PLAYS UP!"

By Martin Clifford.

This coming story of St. Jim's is a sequel to the one you have just read, or are about to read. In it, Pongo—Wally D'Arcy's mongrel puppy—plays a prominent part. Don't miss this excellent yarn, boys!

"A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE!"

Look out, too, for the concluding chapters of this ripping football story. Dick Hastie is coming into his own, and we all like to make the acquaintance of a fellow who has pulled through a sea of adversity.

"PUNISHMENT ROOM!"

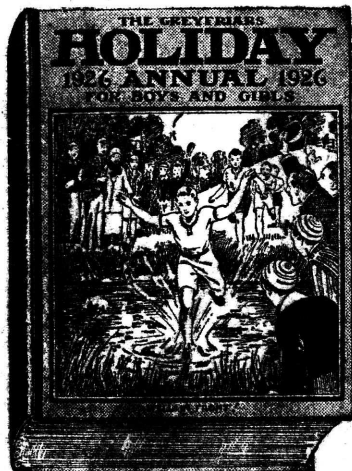
Next week's issue of the "St. Jim's News" will deal exclusively with the joys—if any—and woes of the punishment-room. Well worth reading!

JACK BLAKE.

Jack Blake, the leader of Study No. 6, takes a place in our "Jingle" for next week. Order your GEM early, chums!

Your Editor.

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GIVE YOUR ORDER TO THE NEWSAGENT TO-DAY, CHUMS!

THE UNEXPECTED! A few days' holiday at Lord Eastwood's fine old mansion, in honour of his lordship's birthday, is hailed with delight by Tom Merry & Co. But a shadow is cast over their enjoyment, however, for Manners declares that there is a "wrong 'un" amongst—

GUSSY'S GUESTS!



A Magnificent Story of Tom Merry & Co., describing an extraordinary adventure that befell them during a stay at Eastwood House.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

The Footpad!

"SHALL we?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Lets!" said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No! Can't be did! Guests don't snowball their host, you duffers!"

Monty Lowther rolled the snowball in his gloved hands, and cast quite a longing look at the handsome silk topper shining in the winter sun at a little distance.

The temptation was strong.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was walking, with his usual airy grace, along the lane from Easthorpe village to Eastwood House.

It was grim January weather; the sky was like steel, the trees leafless and glimmering with frost, the ground muddy and half-frozen, the hedges banked with snow. But the swell of St. Jim's was, as usual, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. His silk hat reflected what sunshine there was; the cut of his natty overcoat would have attracted the admiring eye of any tailor in the kingdom. Only the bright polish of his well-fitting boots was a little marred by the mud in the lane; but, with the aid of his celebrated eyeglass, the swell of St. Jim's was picking his way along very carefully, avoiding mud and puddles as far as possible.

Like the white plume of Navarre, of old, the shining topper gleamed afar. It tempted Monty Lowther sorely. He stood with the snowball in his hands, undecided.

Tom and Manners and Lowther were following a path through a patch of woodland towards the lane. Through the thin, leafless trees they spotted the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus. Monty gathered up snow and kneaded it into a missile without even stopping to think. There were times when Monty's playful sense of humour was too much for him. This was one of the times.

But Tom Merry shook his head emphatically.

"Chuck it, old man!" he said.

"That's what I want to do," said Lowther. "I'm going to chuck it."

"Fathead!"

"Better not," said Manners. "We're Gussy's guests, you know, and fellows really can't snowball their giddy host."

"But—"

"No good butting," said Tom Merry. "Chuck it, you ass!"

Tom Merry & Co. had stopped among the trees close by the lane. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming gracefully along the lane, had not observed the three Shell fellows; he was too busy taking care to avoid puddles.

"Just one!" murmured Lowther. "It would make old Gussy jump if his topper went flying all of a sudden."

"We're not staying at Eastwood House to make our kind, host and entertainer jump, you ass!" said Tom Merry. "Drop it!"

Monty Lowther sighed.

Really, it seemed too good an opportunity to miss; but even the humorist of the Shell realised that knocking off Gussy's shining topper with a snowball was not strictly in accordance with the good manners expected of guests.

Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. were spending a few days at Eastwood House in honour of Lord Eastwood's birthday. Gussy's noble pater had worked the "oracle," as Monty Lowther expressed it, with Dr. Holmes, and the kindly old Head had at once given his sanction to Lord Eastwood's request. The gathering at Lord Eastwood's fine mansion was, without exception, exactly the same as at Christmas. Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison were there; Wally D'Arcy, Reggie Manners, and Frank Levison of the Second were there; and even Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's guardian, was among the numerous guests.

Altogether it was a jolly party—so jolly, in fact, that Monty Lowther remarked that it was a pity Lord Eastwood had only one birthday a year.

"Drop that snowball," said Tom Merry, with a grin at Monty Lowther. And the humorist of the Shell at St. Jim's complied, albeit very reluctantly.

Quite unconscious of his danger, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked cheerily on, till he came abreast of the spot where the Terrible Three stood among the trees.

And then came a sudden happening that made the Shell fellows jump more emphatically than a whizzing snowball could possibly have made Gussy jump.

On the other side of the lane was a little hollow, choked with frozen bracken. There was a sudden movement among the bracken, and a figure leaped out into the road.

It was that of a short, bull-necked man in a thick coat, gaiters, and a fur cap pulled low down over his shaggy, beetling brows.

To the utter amazement of Tom Merry, & Co., he rushed

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right at Arthur Augustus, collared him, and brought him down with a crash into the muddy road.

Bump!

"Oh!"

The attack was so sudden, so utterly unexpected, that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went down under it helplessly. Almost before he fairly saw the man rushing on him he was down on his back, with the ruffian kneeling on his chest. The silk topper, which had so narrowly escaped Lowther's snowball, flew from his head and rolled into a ditch; the beautiful natty overcoat slopped into mud and snow. Over the startled upturned face of the swell of St. Jim's a huge knuckly fist was brandished.

Tom Merry & Co. stood for the moment, staring. They were too dumbfounded by the sudden happening to move.

"Oh!" gasped D'Arcy. "Ow! Gwoogh! You feaful wuffian! What do you mean by this?"

"And it over!" said the man in the fur cap. "Sharp's the word! You look as if you've got something about you, you do! Now then—your watch and your spondulics! Sharp's the word!"

"You wotten wuffian!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wufuse to hand you a single shillin'!"

The knuckled fist approached his face.

"Want yer 'ead smashed in?" demanded the man in the fur cap. "I'll crack your 'ead like an egg-shell if you give me any lip! Now, then—"

"Help!"

"Who's going to 'elp you 'ere, you young idiot?" snarled the fur-capped man. "There ain't any cove within a mile. Now, then—"

Chug, chug, chug!

It was the sound of a motor-bicycle along the road.

"Help!" shouted Arthur Augustus again, as he heard the welcome sound. Some motor-cyclist was coming up the road from the direction of Easthorpe.

But there was help nearer than that.

The Terrible Three had stood for a few seconds dumbfounded. But it was only for a few seconds.

Then they rushed forward.

There was a ditch between them and the lane, half-filled with frozen water and mud. Tom Merry leaped it with a single bound and came out into the road.

The next moment he was upon the fur-capped man.

The ruffian was as completely taken by surprise, in his turn, as D'Arcy had been.

Tom Merry grasped his collar with both hands and dragged him backwards.

With a surprised and angry yell, the fur-capped man sprawled on his back in the road.

"Back up, you chaps!" shouted Tom.

"What-ho!"

Manners and Lowther were on the scene a moment later.

The fur-capped man turned on Tom Merry like a tiger. He was a powerful, muscular fellow, and the captain of the St. Jim's Shell would not have stood much chance against him alone. But Manners and Lowther piled in at once, and the bull-necked ruffian had three sturdy juniors to deal with. And he quickly found that he had his hands full.

Arthur Augustus sat up breathlessly.

"Tom Mewwy, bai Jove! Lucky you fellows happened along! Hold that feaful wottah till I get at him, deah boys!"

Chug, chug, chug!

The motor-bike came rushing on the scene, and the rider jumped off.

"What's this? Highway robbery, by Jove!"

And the motor-bike, left to itself, went crashing into the ditch, while the motor-cyclist rushed into the fray.

CHAPTER 2.

The Rescuer.

"HOLD him!"

"Collar the brute!"

"Yaas, wathah! Collah the wottah!"

With a savage effort, the man in the fur cap wrenched himself away from the juniors.

He plunged through the ditch towards the wood, evidently thinking now only of escape.

"Collah him!"

Tom Merry & Co. plunged after the footpad. They were not disposed to let him escape easily after his savage attack upon the swell of St. Jim's.

The young man who had jumped off the motor-bike rushed in pursuit with the St. Jim's juniors.

But he caught his foot on a trailing fallen branch in the ditch and fell, catching at the juniors to save himself.

"Here, look out!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Leggo!" howled Manners.

But the falling man's grasp was on them, and they fell with him, dragged down by his weight.

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But for that incident the footpad would certainly have been collared by the St. Jim's juniors, and made a prisoner.

As it was, he reached the farther side of the ditch, with only Monty Lowther grasping at him.

"Stop, you rotter!" panted Lowther.

The man turned on him with a savage snarl, and struck fiercely at him. Monty Lowther staggered back and fell under a terrific drive on the chest.

The next moment the man in the fur cap was fleeing through the frozen woodland.

Tom Merry scrambled up.

He gave the cyclist a rather angry look. No doubt the young man had meant well; but his interference had saved the footpad. The man in the fur cap was already at a distance, and running hard. And Monty Lowther was sitting on the ground, panting spasmodically for breath, quite knocked out by the heavy blow he had received.

"Monty, old man—you're hurt—"

"Oh! Ow! Wow!" gasped Lowther. "Mmmmmmm! A bit winded—ow!"

"Lend me a hand!" panted the young man, who was still sprawling in the muddy ditch. "I think I've hurt my knee."

Tom Merry's momentary annoyance vanished at once.

"Oh, sorry!" he exclaimed. "It was awfully decent of you to chip in and help us. Bear a hand, Manners."

Monty Lowther staggered up, gasping painfully.

"I'm all right," he panted. "Only a bit winded. Lend that chap a hand—I'm all serene, or shall be in a minute. Ow!"

"Pway allow me to assist you, sir," said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "I am awfully obliged to you for chippin' in."

The young man rose, with the assistance of the juniors. He winced painfully, and limped as he was helped out into the road.

By that time the man in the fur cap had vanished in the woodland. Pursuit of the footpad was out of the question now.

But the four juniors were not thinking of the ruffian. They were concerned for the stranger who had rushed to their aid; though, as a matter of fact, his intervention had done more harm than good. But for his intervention the footpad would assuredly have been collared and marched off to Easthorpe police-station by the St. Jim's juniors. But it was no time to think of that.

"Bai Jove! I am afraid you are injahed, sir!" said Arthur Augustus anxiously. In his concern for the rescuer Gussy even forgot his silk hat, still lying in the ditch, and the state of his coat, which really was shocking.

The young man winced again.

"My knee!" he said. "I forgot that I couldn't trust it—it's a good many years now since it was damaged in Flanders, but it still gives me trouble. I shall be all right soon—I'll sit down for a bit."

He sat down on the bank by the lane, breathing hard.

"It was vevy kind and genewous of you to chip in as you did, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

The young man smiled faintly.

"I could scarcely see highway robbery going on without interfering," he said. "I suppose that brute's got away."

"Yes, he's clear off now," said Tom Merry. "Never mind him, though. I'm sorry you're hurt."

"It will be all right soon. A gammy knee won't worry me much when I get into the saddle again."

The juniors looked at the motor-bike, which had curled up in the ditch and was sunken deep in water and mud. Their impression was that that bike would need a good deal of attention before its rider could get into the saddle again.

The young man followed their glance.

"Oh gad!" he said. "What a wreck! Well, it can't be helped. I couldn't stop to think of the jigger when I saw you young fellows struggling with a footpad. I dare say I can get back to the village I passed a while ago. It's less than a mile, I think."

"You can't limp a mile on one leg," said Manners.

"Wathah not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "We are less than a mile ffrom my home, sir, and my fathah will be vevy glad to send a cah to pick you up."

"Oh, no! Not at all! I don't want to give anybody a lot of trouble."

"Wats! I mean, I insist upon sendin' a cah for you," said Arthur Augustus. "I could scarcely do less, sir, aftah the wippin' way you came to our help. These chaps are my friends; but it was weally wippin' of you, a perfect stwangah, to wush in as you did. Pway west heah while I huwvy on to Eastwood House and bwing back a cah."

"But—"

"I insist!" said Arthur Augustus. "Perhaps you fellows will remain while I wun on."

"Certainly," said Tom Merry.

"But I can't give you all that trouble," exclaimed the young man. "Really, I can manage somehow."

He rose from the bank, and then, with a groan, sank back again.

There was a sudden movement among the bracken, and a short, bull-necked man leaped out into the road. He rushed right at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and brought him down with a crash into the muddy road. Eump! "Yawwooh!" Tom Merry & Co. stood, for the moment, staring. They were too dumbfounded by the sudden happening to move. (See Chapter 1.)



"By gad! I shall have to throw myself on your help, after all," he said. "It's awfully kind of you."

"Not at all. You fellows remain with—with Mr.——" Arthur Augustus paused, and looked at the stranger.

"Lagden," said the young man, "Cecil Lagden."

"I am vevy pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Lagden," said Arthur Augustus, in his most polished manner. "My name is D'Arcy—my fathah is Lord Eastwood. These chaps are Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah, school-fellows of mine. They will be vevy pleased to wemain with you while I fetch the cah."

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus fielded his hat and started at a run in the direction of Eastwood House.

CHAPTER 3

Gussy in a Hurry!

"OH, Gussy!" Blake and Herries and Digby, of the St. Jim's Fourth, uttered that exclamation together, in tones of exaggerated horror. Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison, who were walking with them on the drive of Eastwood House, gazed at Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

Arthur Augustus presented anything but his usual elegant aspect, as he came hurrying up the drive. For once his manners had not that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. And his silk hat no longer shone; and no self-respecting tailor would have cast a second glance at his coat.

Arthur Augustus looked as if he had been in the wars—indeed he had!

"Oh, Gussy!" repeated Blake.

"Is it Gussy?" asked Digby. "Do I sleep, do I dream, do I wonder and doubt? Are things what they seem? Or are visions about?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows——" gasped Arthur Augustus, stopping short in his breathless trot.

"What ever has happened, Arthur?" exclaimed Cousin Ethel.

"An accident?" asked Doris.

"Bai Jove! I have been the victim of a feahful, wuffiant! attack!" said Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "I was wushed oveh by a fwightful wuffian, who twied to wob me."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"A footpad, you know, in bwoad daylight," said D'Arcy. "Feahful neck, you know! Luckily, Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah came up and collahed him."

"And strewed the hungry churchyard with his bones, what?" asked Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You were not hurt, Arthur?" asked Ethel.

"Well, no, deah gal, exceptin' for a bwuise or two. That's all wight. But my clobber is pwactically wuined, and—and look at my hat!"

"Awful!" said Herries.

"This is what comes of letting Gussy off his chain!" said Blake, shaking his head.

"Weally, you ass——"

"But what are you rushing along for now?" inquired Digby. "The jolly old footpad isn't after you, is he?"

"No; he cleahed off and disappeared," said Arthur Augustus, pumping in breath. "But I am in a fwightful huwvy, you know."

The Fourth-Formers grinned. Although Arthur Augustus stated that he was in a frightful hurry, he was standing in the drive explaining matters to his friends.

"In a hurry to change your clothes?" asked Dig.

"No; to send a cah," explained Arthur Augustus. "I

left him sittin' by the roadside, you know, with a gammy knee."

"Eh! Who? The footpad?" asked Blake blankly.

"No, you duffah; of course not! I should not be likely to be sendin' a cah for the footpad."

"Tom Merry?" asked Dig.

"Wats! No!"

"Manners or Lowther?" asked Herries.

"Nothin' of the kind. They were not hurt, only Lowthah had a thump that wathah winded him."

The juniors stared at Arthur Augustus.

"But who's got a gammy knee?" bawled Blake. "Who's sittin' by the roadside nursing a gammy knee?"

"Lagden, you know."

"Who the jolly old thump is Lagden?"

"The motor-cyclist."

"What motor-cyclist?" shrieked Blake.

"Weally Blake, you are wathah slow on the uptake, you know. I have explained the mattah wathah fully. I had bettah get on now, as I shall have to speak to the patah before sendin' a cah."

"But—"

"Pway excuse me, deah gals!"

And Arthur Augustus scudded up the drive to the house. The guests at Eastwood House stared after him. Jack Blake tapped his forehead significantly.

"Wandering in his mind, poor old chap!" he said. "Can anybody make head or tail of the yarn? There's a footpad, and those Shell bounders, and Gussy—and a motor-cyclist seemed to be mixed up in it somehow. Let's trot down the road and see if we can see anything of the crowd."

"Let's!" agreed Dig.

And Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison assented, and the party walked down to the gates, and down the road towards Easthorpe. They knew that Gussy had been to the village that afternoon, so they expected to find Tom Merry & Co. somewhere between Eastwood House and Easthorpe—and the unknown motor-cyclist, if any, as Blake put it.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus scudded into Eastwood House; and the state of the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he scudded in quite startled and shocked Wilkinson, the butler, who met him in the hall.

"Master Arthur—"

Wally of the Third, Gussy's cheery minor, was coming down the stairs, and he gave a yell at the sight of his elegant major.

"Gussy! What's this game?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"You've been out mud-collecting?" asked Walter Adolphus D'Arcy. "But why did you use your coat for the job? Why not take a tin pail and a spade, like the kids at the seaside in the summer?"

"You young ass!" roared Arthur Augustus, while Wilkinson's clean-shaven and sedate face twitched for a moment.

"Well, you look a pretty picture," said Wally. "Better bolt for a bath-room, Gussy—you're really not quite clean, you know. The pater will have a fit if he sees you. By the way, old bean, have you seen Pongo?"

"I have not seen Pongo, Wally, and I wufese to discuss your beastly dog at all! Where is the pater?"

"Pongo's wandered away—"

"Bothah Pongo! Wilkinson, where is my fathah now?"

"His lordship is in the library, sir," said Wilkinson. "Perhaps you would like me to brush you down, sir, before—"

"I am vevy pressed for time, Wilkinson!"

And Arthur Augustus scudded for the library.

Wally stared after him and grinned.

"The pater will have a fit, Wilkinson!" he said.

Mr. Wilkinson coughed.

"Fancy old Gussy butting in on the pater in that state! My brother Gus is a bit of an ass, Wilkinson."

"Oh, Master Walter!"

"I suppose you haven't seen Pongo, Wilkinson?" asked D'Arcy minor anxiously.

"No, Master Walter, not since this morning when he came into my room, sir, and tore a coat to pieces, sir," said Wilkinson somewhat stiffly. "I have not seen your dog since then, Master Walter."

Wally of the Third chuckled.

"Some dog, Pongo!" he said. "He's no end of a card, Wilkinson."

"Indeed, Master Walter."

"I dare say he'd have ripped up that coat, even if you'd been in it, Wilkinson."

"I trust not, Master Walter."

"Don't you be too trusting when Pongo is around," said the St. Jim's fag. "He's a card, Pongo is. Sure you haven't seen him?"

"Quite sure, Master Walter."

"Right-ho, old bean!"

Master Walter walked on to look for his shaggy, scraggy

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favourite, and Wilkinson looked after him expressively. It was true that the butler had not seen Pongo since the incident of the torn coat. But he forbore to mention that Pongo had been assisted out of the window of the butler's room with the butler's boot behind him. Wilkinson was a judicious butler, and he considered it wiser not to mention that little circumstance.

Quite regardless of Pongo, and of the fact that that valued animal was lost, Arthur Augustus hurried on to the library. Wally had declared that Lord Eastwood would have a fit when he saw him. It was not quite so bad as that; but undoubtedly his lordship looked greatly astonished at the sight of his second son.

"My dear Arthur, what has happened?"

"Bai Jove, you know, I am quite out of bweath—"

"You are in a shocking state, Arthur."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You are covered with mud—"

"Yaas—"

"Even your face is not clean!" exclaimed Lord Eastwood.

"Really, Arthur, this is shocking!"

"Bai Jove! Pway allow me to explain, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wushed home as fast as I could to ask you to send a cah for him."

"Eh! For whom?"

"I've been attacked by a footpad, sir—"

"Upon my word!"

"A fwightful wuffian in a fur cap, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "A stwangah came to my help, and Tom Mewwy and his fwiends, and there was a feahful swap, and his knee gave way—you see, he was wounded in the War—"

"Bless my soul!" said Lord Eastwood blankly.

"I told him I would send a cah to pick him up, sir—"

"Whom?"

"Him, sir! I twust I make myself cleah."

"You make yourself very far from clear," said Lord Eastwood testily. "Please collect yourself, and tell me exactly what has happened."

His lordship looked very serious when he had extracted the details from Arthur Augustus at last.

"Certainly I will send a car!" he exclaimed. "He must be brought to the house, and a doctor sent for at once. You had better go and change your clothes, Arthur; you are in a shocking state."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus hurried away to his room, where, for something like an hour, he was very busy indeed.

CHAPTER 4

Manners Has His Doubts!

TOM MERRY glanced up the lane.

"Here comes the car," he said.

They had had rather a long wait.

Mr. Cecil Lagden had risen from the bank; the frosty grass was cold and chilly. He stood leaning against a tree, with his weight on one leg as he waited, and the Terrible Three of St. Jim's waited with him. The motor-bike, sunk in the deep mud of the ditch, was almost out of sight now.

Tom Merry & Co. had been chatting with the young man while they waited. They had found him rather a pleasant fellow.

Mr. Cecil Lagden looked about thirty years of age, and he was a stalwart fellow, with a rather handsome face and extremely keen eyes, as the juniors noticed.

If his "gammy" knee gave him pain, he bore it with great fortitude, giving no sign of it save an occasional wince. In fact, he made very light of it, referring to himself jestingly as a "crook" left over from the War.

Tom Merry and Lowther quite liked him, and chatted freely with him; but Manners was a little silent. More than once, Manners of the Shell let his eyes rest on the good-looking young man, with a somewhat perplexed and inquiring look. Manners was, perhaps, a rather more thoughtful fellow than his two comrades, and possibly he did not take this cheery young man quite at face value as they did.

The buzz of the car was heard on the road at last. Lord Eastwood himself was sitting in the car as it came up.

"Gussy's pater!" said Lowther.

Lagden glanced at the approaching car.

"Is that Lord Eastwood?" he asked.

"Yes; D'Arcy's father," said Tom Merry.

The chauffeur brought the car to a halt, and Lord Eastwood alighted. He came over to the group by the roadside.

"Mr. Lagden?" he asked.

"That is my name, sir," said the young man.

"My son has informed me of what has happened," said Lord Eastwood. "I have come personally to thank you for so kindly rendering him assistance. I am very much obliged to you."

"It is nothing, Lord Eastwood," said Lagden. "As I told



"Stop, you rotter!" panted Monty Lowther. The footpad turned on Monty Lowther with a savage snarl, and the St. Jim's junior staggered and fell, under a terrific drive on the chest. The next moment, the man in the fur cap was fleeing through the frozen woodland. (See Chapter 2.)

your son, I could scarcely see highway robbery going on without interfering. As it happened, these lads were of more assistance than I was, owing to my knee giving way. An old wound—"

Lord Eastwood held out his hand in his most stately manner.

"I must thank you, Mr. Lagden; and I take great pleasure in making your acquaintance," he said. "I hope you will allow me to offer you the hospitality of Eastwood House until you have quite recovered from the injury you have sustained."

"You are very kind, sir; but—"

"Come, I will take no denial," said his lordship, with stately geniality. "You are not in a fit state to proceed, as I can see; and I can also see that your bicycle will require a great deal of attention."

"It certainly looks like it," said Mr. Lagden, with a smile. "I hardly think it would carry me on to Southampton to-night."

"I am quite sure that it would not," said Lord Eastwood. "If you have pressing business at Southampton, sir, I shall be delighted to send you on there in a car. Otherwise, I trust you will accept my hospitality for the night."

"I can scarcely refuse, sir, when you are so very kind," said Lagden, in a frank and engaging way. "I have no special engagement in Southampton, and I shall be delighted, sir. The fact is, I should like to rest my knee a little—they never got out all the fragments of the shell, and it worries me a little at times when I forget that I am rather a creak, and put too much strain on it."

"Please step into the car, Mr. Lagden," said his lordship graciously. And he gave the young man a kindly, helping hand.

Tom Merry & Co. had already rescued the young man's travelling-bag from the motor-bike, and it was placed in the car.

"I will send men along to drag the bicycle out of the ditch," said Lord Eastwood. "It can be brought to the garage at Eastwood House and repaired there, if repairs are needed. Are you boys walking back?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

"Very good."

His lordship signed to the chauffeur, and the car glided away.

Monty Lowther closed one eye at his chums.

"Gussy's pater is the real goods," he said. "A bit stiffish—a jolly old relic of the Victorian era—but the real goods. That young fellow is rather in clover."

"He seems a good sort," said Tom Merry.

"Does he?" said Manners.

"Don't you think so?" asked Tom, glancing at his chum in surprise.

"I don't know."

"What rot!" said Monty Lowther. "He's all right! He wasn't much use in the scrap, as it happened, but he did his best. It was jolly decent of him to pile in, when he had a gammy leg left over from the War."

"Jolly decent, and jolly plucky," said Tom.

Manners had a very thoughtful look.

"You fellows think he's all right?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!"

"Well," said Manners of the Shell deliberately, "I don't."

"Oh, come off, old chap!" said Lowther. "I noticed, now I think of it, that you hadn't much to say to him. What's the matter with the chap?"

Tom Merry looked at Manners in surprised inquiry. So far as Tom could see, Mr. Cecil Lagden was a very agreeable and pleasantly-spoken young man. And the fact that he had been wounded in the War naturally prepossessed the juniors in his favour.

"Well, it's queer," said Manners. "I don't want to be suspicious, but that chap seems to me a jolly good deal too plausible."

"Oh, draw it mild, old man."

"He let his bike go to smithereens, to pile in and help us against that rotten footpad!" said Lowther warmly.

"Well, did he?" said Manners. "We handled the footpad all right; he was bunking when that chap came up. We

should have collared him, and got him to the police-station, if Mr. Lagden hadn't chipped in."

"Well, it wasn't his fault, if his leg caved in," said Tom. "No—if!" assented Manners. "But when he fell in the ditch, he managed to make two of us fall with him, and the footpad got away."

Tom Merry stared. "He caught at us to save himself, of course," he said. "A man would, if his leg gave way, and he went down." "He caught us jolly tight," said Manners, "and he held us till the man was clear."

Tom and Lowther blinked at Manners. This was rather a new view to them.

"But, dash it all!" exclaimed Tom. "You don't think he wanted the footpad to get away, do you?"

"I think it looks like it."

"Oh, my hat! Then why should he chip in at all on our side?" exclaimed Lowther. "If he knows the man, and he is in with him, he could have joined up with him instead of with us! You're talking out of your hat, Manners!"

Manners nodded. "I don't say I feel certain that he's a bad hat," he said; "but I don't feel satisfied that he's straight. He fairly held us back from collaring the footpad, that's certain. We've only got his word for it that he's got a crooked knee. It all looks to me a good deal like a plant."

"But for what?" "Blessed if I know," said Manners, shaking his head. "But that's what it looks like to me."

"For goodness' sake don't say so at Eastwood House," said Tom anxiously. "It would sound beastly suspicious and distrustful."

"I'm not likely to say anything of the kind, fathead!" said Manners. "I'm telling you chaps, that's all. It looks to me as if the whole thing was a plant between the two of them, with old Gussy as the victim, and we spoiled it by butting in. But I may be mistaken—I daresay I am—"

"You jolly well are!" said Lowther warmly. "Really, old man, it's a bit too thick. The chap's all right."

"Well, I hope he is," assented Manners. "I may be mistaken, and I hope I am. Anyhow, Lord Eastwood is certain to telephone for a doctor to see his gammy knee, and if the chap is a spoofer, he will contrive somehow not to see the medical Johnny."

Tom Merry laughed. "Rot, old fellow!" he said. "If he's got a crooked knee from the War, he will naturally be glad for a medical man to see it, after he's given it a strain."

"And if he hasn't, he will take jolly good care that a medical man doesn't see it," said Manners. "Leave it at that. Hallo, here comes the crowd!"

Blake & Co., and Ethel and Doris, came in sight. The car had passed them in the lane.

"Here they are—alive, at least!" said Blake. "According to Gussy, you fellows have been going through it. Terrific fighting, and so on."

"Well, we've had a scrap," said Tom, laughing. "A footpad wanted to help himself to Gussy's gold watch and wad of currency notes."

"You let him get away?" asked Herries.

"Well, we nearly bagged the brute—"

"Pity we weren't here," said Blake. "We'd have quite bagged him. I dare say you did as much as could be expected of Shell fellows."

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"Who was that Johnny in the car with Lord Eastwood?" asked Dig. "Is that the merchant Gussy mentioned, who piled in to help?"

"Yes; chap named Lagden."

"Looks a decent sort," said Dig.

"Five of you!" said Blake. "You three and Gussy and this merchant, Lagden, and you let the jolly old footpad bolt! How on earth did you manage to do it? Did you fall over one another, or what?"

Manners grinned, and Tom Merry and Lowther looked uncomfortable as they caught that grin. They realised that in the circumstances, the man in the fur cap ought not to have got away. Certainly his escape had been due to Cecil Lagden's hapless intervention, well meant as Tom and Monty firmly believed it to be. But Blake's remark gave them an uncomfortable feeling that Manners might, possibly, be in the right in his suspicion.

"Well, he got away, anyhow," said Monty Lowther, rather shortly.

Blake chuckled. "He would, in the circumstances," he agreed.

"Look here—"

"Perhaps we had better walk back," suggested Cousin Ethel gently. "We shall be late for tea."

And the St. Jim's juniors walked back to Eastwood House, Blake & Co. smiling, Manners looking very thoughtful, and Tom Merry and Monty Lowther feeling a little sore.

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CHAPTER 5

The Hero of the Hour!

"DEAREST Tommy—"

"Hem!"

"My little darling!"

"Um!"

"Are you hurt, my poor little Tommy? Did that great, rough man hurt you?" asked Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

Miss Priscilla was among the guests at Eastwood House. She was the dearest friend of D'Arcy's Aunt Adelina. Tom Merry was very glad to have his old guardian with him, because his presence always made the old lady happy. But it could not be denied that Miss Priscilla did not always make the captain of the St. Jim's Shell quite happy.

The stalwart, sturdy captain of the Shell really was not the delicate little lad that Miss Priscilla seemed to suppose him to be. And to be addressed as a little darling before a crowd of fellows was somewhat discomfiting.

But Tom Merry was accustomed to tolerating Miss Priscilla's little foibles with affectionate and exemplary patience.

"It's all serene!" he said, rather hurriedly. "Nobody's hurt, except the great rough man—hem! He had a knock or two."

Miss Priscilla eyed him anxiously over her glasses. The youthful party had arrived for tea, and all Eastwood House knew of the adventure with the footpad now. Arthur Augustus had told the story, and Mr. Lagden had told it—Mr. Lagden, reclining gracefully on an ottoman, to rest his gammy knee, the object of much sympathy from several ladies, young and old. Miss Priscilla had been among his admiring sympathisers; but all her attention was transferred to Tom when he came in. The good old lady had been very anxious about her ward.

"But you had a dreadful fight, did you not?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"Nunno! Not very dreadful!"

"I am afraid you are hurt, Tommy. Your face is very red," said Miss Priscilla anxiously.

Undoubtedly Tom Merry's face was very red.

There were about twenty people in the great drawing-room at Eastwood House, and Miss Priscilla's voice, though old and thin, was very distinct.

"Your face is quite—quite red, my dear," said Miss Priscilla. "I think the doctor had better see you, Tommy darling."

"Oh, my hat! Not at all! Right as rain!" gasped Tom Merry. "I suppose the doctor has seen Mr. Lagden, as he's been here?" Tom hoped to change the subject.

"No. Mr. Lagden was so much better that he would not let Dr. Smith examine his poor, poor knee," said Miss Priscilla. "But I am very anxious about you, Tommy. Are you sure you are not hurt?"

"Oh, quite!" gasped Tom. "Right as rain! Let me get you a cup of tea, dear."

"You must not over-exert yourself, Tommy darling."

"Oh dear! That's all right."

Tom Merry made his escape. His chums were manfully suppressing their smiles. Miss Priscilla sat down again near Mr. Lagden's ottoman. That handsome and pleasant-mannered young man was holding almost a reception. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was holding his teacup and saucer, Aunt Adelina was fairly feeding him with biscuits, Lady Eastwood gave him very kind and marked attention. Miss Priscilla was very pleased with him. His gammy knee, as a relic of the War, naturally evoked sympathy. A perfect stranger, he had rushed to the rescue of Arthur Augustus, which was very brave and generous; and his good looks and pleasant manners did the rest.

Indeed, the Terrible Three found that Mr. Cecil Lagden was generally regarded as the hero of the hour. Which was, as Harry Manners murmured, rather "thick," since the Shell fellows had done all that had been done, and Lagden had only got in the way.

He seemed to be enjoying himself, too.

Cousin Ethel and Doris seemed rather taken with him. Reggie Manners and Frank Levison, Wally's friends of the Third, evidently admired him very much. Manners regarded the little scene with a somewhat sardonic eye.

Even if Mr. Lagden was quite "straight," which Manners did not believe, he was getting a lot of credit that was not his due.

"He hasn't seen the medico, after all," Manners whispered to his chums.

"So Miss Fawcett says," assented Lowther. "Why should he, ass, if he doesn't want to?"

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"I told you he wouldn't, if it was spoof about his leg," he answered.

"Oh, rot!" said Monty.

"Well, you remember I said so!"

"The chap doesn't want to make out that he's an invalid, that's all," said Tom Merry uncomfortably. "A man who's been through the War wouldn't want to be fussed over, of course, like some kid."

"He seems rather to like being fussed over, all the same," said Manners sarcastically. "All the women seem to be gathered round him. He's fairly basking in it."

Tom Merry could not deny that, so he made no rejoinder. Arthur Augustus bore down on the Terrible Three, with a cheery, smiling face.

"I haven't thanked you fellows yet, for chippin' in as you did," he remarked. "I am weally vewy much obliged!"

"Bow-wow!" said Tom. "Of course, that goes without sayin', deah boy. I would have done as much for you," said Gussy. "St. Jim's men are bound to stand by one another—what? But it was wippin' of Mr. Lagden, who is a stwangah."

"He doesn't look much of a stranger now," said Manners. "He seems to have made himself quite at home."

"Yaas, wathah! He has quite got on the wight side of the pater. Your old governess likes him vewy much, too, Tom Mewwy; he has been speakin' to her about you vewy nicely."

Tom Merry laughed. "He can't know very much about me to speak to her about," he said.

"And Dowis is vewy pleased with him," said Arthur Augustus, with a smile. "He asked her who that good-lookin' kid was, and it turned out to be young Fwank. Dowis is vewy fond of young Fwank, you know."

"I suppose he could see the kid was her brother, from the likeness," remarked Manners.

"Bai Jove! I never thought of that." "He seems to be making himself jolly pleasant all round," said Manners. "Something nice to say to everybody."

"Yaas, wathah! He is a vewy agweeable chap," said Arthur Augustus unsuspectingly. "By the way, have you fellows seen anythin' of young Wally? He hasn't come in



St. Jim's Jingles!



No. 19. DAME TAGGLES

MY LADY of the Tuckshop
now
My merry muse engages;
Her plump round face,
her wrinkled brow
Oft figure in our pages.
Old Father Time has streaked her
hair,
Grey locks she has in plenty;
"Young gents," she sighs, "I'm not
so fair
As when a lass of twenty!"

For many moons, this worthy Dame
Has served us well and truly;
And she has won deserving fame.
We pay our tributes duly.
Her pies are tasty and tip-top,
Her pastries are perfection;
And fellows flock into her shop
To sample her confection.

Although the Dame is old and grey,
She's still alert and nimble;
And should you question what I say,
Refer to Wynn and Trimble!
They think the world of Mrs. T.,
(Except when Baggy's luckless);
She won't allow him "tick," you see,
And Trimble then goes tuckless!



Mrs. TAGGLES.
OF THE TUCK SHOP.

She always has a friendly word
For those who bring their custom;
Fellows like Merry are preferred—
She knows that she can trust 'em!
But Trimble, with his parrot-cry,
"I'll settle up to-morrow,"
Or "presently," or "by-and-by,"
Causes the Dame much sorrow!

Some tuckshop owners profiteer,
Not so the good Dame Taggles;
This is her slogan, year by year—
"DAME TAGGLES NEVER
HAGGLES!"
Her honest soul would surely shrink
From methods mean and sordid;
And this explains just why, I think,
She's honoured and applauded.

Good Dame, you are the gorgers'
friend!
I wish you all prosperity;
And when these verses have been
penned
I'll seek you with celerity.
For I would fain enjoy a feast
Of pies and cakes and patties;
My appetite has now increased
To half the size of Fatty's!

NEXT WEEK:—JACK BLAKE, Leader of Study No. 6.

"Yaas, wathah! He's the pater's guest now, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "A wippin' chap, I think!"

"Oh, ripping!" said Manners. "I wish my bwothah Conway were at home now, to make his acquaintance," said Arthur Augustus. "This chap was on the Somme, you know, when old Conway was out there, and they would have a lot to talk about. He got his knee cwooked on the Somme."

"Did he?" said Manners. "Yaas. Burstin' shell, you know." "What regiment was he in?" asked Manners. "He hasn't mentioned it. He wufused to let the doctah see him, though the pater telephoned at once and got Dr. Smith heah," said Arthur Augustus. "He's not a chap to make a fuss about a twifle. He said it was all wight, and he would be on his motor-bike again to-morrow."

"Oh, he's going to-morrow, is he?" asked Manners. "Yaas. He is only stayin' the night. I am wathah sowwy for that. I have quite taken a likin' to him, you know!"

"Your pater likes him, too, does he?"

to tea. I suppose he is still lookin' for that howwid mongwef of his—Pongo."

"Pongo lost again?" asked Lowther. "Yaas; the bwute is always gettin' lost. Wally wufuses to keep him in the stables, and he gets into people's way, you know. I weally wish Wally would not have that dog about the house; he has no respect whatever for a fellow's twousahs."

"I hope Wally will find him," said Tom. "Well, I am not suah that I hope so," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally think it would be wathah pleasantah without Pongo. I think the bwute has cleahed off fwom the house, anyhow; I have a stwong suspicion that the butlah kicked him. He was wowwyin' a coat in the butlah's woom, and natuwallly Wilkinson does not like to have his coats wowwied. I quite sympathise with Wilkinson, you know."

"Hallo! Talk of angels!" said Lowther. "Here he is!" Wally of the Third came in.

He was looking tired and a little cross. From his looks

it was easy to deduce that he had not found the elusive Pongo. He came over to the Shell fellows.

"You chaps have been out rambling this afternoon?" he said.

"Yes," said Tom.

"Seen anything of my dog?"

"Sorry—no."

Wally grunted.

"Nobody seems to have seen him. I can't help suspecting that somebody has been chucking things at him, or something. Pongo is very sensitive."

"Oh, my hat! Is he?"

"He's a jolly good dog!" said Wally. "He's got feelings, you know."

"I know he has no respect for a fellow's twousahs," said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Blow your old trousers!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Of course, he's gone wandering before," said Wally. "He made a den for himself once in the deer-park and stayed there for days. That was when Conway gave him the boot for worrying his dress-clothes. As if a fellow's dress-clothes mattered!"

"Bai Jove!"

"He wasn't found for days," said Wally in an aggrieved tone. "When I found him at last he had a regular den under a hollow oak, and he had done in no end of rabbits. Some dog, you know."

"I weally hope and twust, Wally, that he has wandahed into the next county this time, and that he will stay there."

"Oh, rats to you, Gussy!" said Wally of the Third cheerfully. "I say, who's that merchant yonder? The girls seem to be fond of him."

"That is Mr. Lagden, Wally, who wushed to the wescue this aftahnoon when I was attacked by a footpad."

"I wonder if he's seen Pongo?"

"Bai Jove!"

Evidently Wally's interest in Mr. Lagden was not on account of the aid he had given Arthur Augustus, but was founded upon the possibility that the young man might have seen Pongo.

Wally went over to the well surrounded ottoman to inquire, leaving his brother Gussy breathing rather hard.

"Of all the disrespectful young wapsallions—" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Well, he's very fond of Pongo," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "We might have a trot out after tea and look for the little beast."

"Bai Jove! I weally think I will leave that to you fellows," said Arthur Augustus.

And the swell of St. Jim's drifted away to bestow his elegant attention upon other guests.

CHAPTER 6

A Difference of Opinion!

"VOLUNTEERS!" said Tom Merry. "Don't all speak at once!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Nobody spoke.

The January darkness had fallen, and a keen wind whistled over the roofs of Eastwood House and whined among the leafless trees of the park.

In the old oak-panelled hall, by the great log fire, it was very cheery and comfortable. Nobody seemed anxious to tramp out in snow and mud and a cutting wind.

Wally of the Third had gone out; there was no rest for Walter Adolphus D'Arcy so long as Pongo was lost. But his comrades of the Third Form—Reggie Manners and Frank Levison—had declined to join him. They had spent a good part of the day hunting for Pongo, and they considered that they were entitled to a rest.

"It's jolly cold," remarked Blake.

"And dark!" said Herries.

"No end of a wind!" said Digby.

Tom Merry smiled. He had made up his mind to join in the hunt for the missing Pongo, but he was prepared to go alone if the other fellows did not care to leave their comfortable quarters.

"What about you, Manners?" he asked.

Manners yawned.

"You, Monty?"

"Oh dear! I'll come!" said Lowther. "After all, it will give a chap an appetite for dinner."

"I'll come," said Manners.

"Any more offers?" inquired Tom Merry.

There were no more offers.

"Mind you don't get lost in the park," said Blake.

"You know what you Shell fellows are!"

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"How are you going to find a dog in the dark?" inquired Herries.

"The moon's rising," said Tom, "and I've got an electric torch. Besides, I shall call him."

"Wish you luck!" yawned Blake. "Something like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"We've been looking for the little beast all day," said Reggie Manners. "I'm fed-up, for one!"

"We'll look again to-morrow," said Levison minor, with a yawn. "Chap can have enough of rooting about in this weather."

"Too much, in fact," assented Reggie.

"You fellows heah?" Arthur Augustus came along to the group before the blazing logs on the old wide hearth.

"Will you three chaps come along to the libwawy? A police-inspectah johnnie wants to ask you about what happened this aftahnoon. Mr. Lagden's there."

"Floored!" grinned Lowther. "That puts the lid on Pongo."

"Oh, the inspector won't keep us long!" said Tom Merry.

"We'll go after Pongo when we're done with him. Lead on, Gussy."

The Terrible Three accompanied Arthur Augustus to the library. Lord Eastwood and Mr. Lagden were there, and a stout, ruddy police-inspector from Easthorpe.

Lord Eastwood nodded genially to the Shell fellows.

"Will you kindly answer Inspector Watkins a few questions, my boys?" he said. "Mr. Lagden has already given a description of the ruffian who attacked my son, but Mr. Watkins would like to hear your account of the incident."

"Certainly, sir!" said Tom.

Inspector Watkins had a notebook and pencil in his hand.

"The fact is there seems to be some doubt as to the man's appearance," he said. "Mr. Lagden's description of him does not wholly tally with Master D'Arcy's. But as you young gentlemen saw the man also, no doubt you can set the matter right on points of detail."

Manners compressed his lips a little.

"We can give a full and complete description of the man, Mr. Watkins," he said very distinctly. "I should know him again anywhere, for one!"

"I'm sure I should, too," said Tom Merry.

"Same here," assented Lowther.

"Height?" asked the inspector, in a business-like tone.

"Rather a short man," said Tom. "I should say about five feet five or six."

Manners and Lowther assented.

"That is Master D'Arcy's impression," said Inspector Watkins, referring to his notebook. "But Mr. Lagden thinks that he was taller."

"Of course, I had only a glimpse of the man, really," said Mr. Lagden, in his pleasant voice. "I can only give you a hasty impression. These lads saw more of him than I did."

"Quite so. Build?" asked the inspector.

"Very powerful and muscular," said Tom. "Bull-necked and jolly strong."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I did not observe that," said Mr. Lagden, as the inspector glanced at him. "I should have said a taller man, not very broad—but perhaps his coat made him look broader."

"Possibly," said the inspector. "Clothes?"

"Thick overcoat, gaiters, and a fur cap," said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah; I particularly noticed his fur cap. It was a vewy fwoisy-lookin' cap."

"That agrees with Mr. Lagden's description. And the scar on his face?"

"I did not notice any scar," confessed Tom. "Of course, it was all very hurried."

"Mr. Lagden noticed that he had a strongly-marked scar under the right eye."

"I did not," said Manners.

The inspector looked at Monty Lowther, who shook his head.

"I can't say I noticed it," said Monty.

"Same heah, sir; but, of course, I was not thinkin' of the man's description at the time," said D'Arcy. "I was in wathah a fluttah."

"All of you are sure that you did not notice the scar?"

"Quite."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you are sure about it, Mr. Lagden?"

"Well, yes," said Mr. Lagden thoughtfully. "About the man's height and build I might be mistaken; but I could not be mistaken about the scar. Certainly he had a strongly-marked scar under the right eye, fully an inch long—I should say quite that."

The inspector wrinkled his brows.

"This places us in some little difficulty, my lord," he said, glancing at Lord Eastwood. "I have here two descriptions that do not tally. If the man had a conspicuous scar on his face, it should be easy to trace him—but if he had not, it is



In answer to a whistle, a figure came tramping through the leafless trees, passing a few yards from where Wally crouched with a beating heart. The St. Jim's junior could scarcely repress a cry of astonishment, for the newcomer was Cecil Lagden, the honoured guest of Eastwood House, and he was secretly meeting a ruffian at midnight. (See Chapter 10.)

no use looking for a man with a scarred face. And it does not seem clear whether he was tall or short, thin or broad. It is not an uncommon occurrence for eye-witnesses to vary very widely in their descriptions, but it makes the work of the police somewhat hard."

"No doubt, no doubt," assented Lord Eastwood. "You can only do your best to trace out this lawless ruffian, Mr. Watkins; and that I know you will do."

"You may rely upon that, my lord."

The inspector asked a few more questions, making careful notes of the answers.

It was fairly clear that he was inclined to give more heed to Mr. Lagden's description than to that of the juniors—a man's opinion being more serious in his estimation than a schoolboy's. But the schoolboys were in the majority, and their accounts fully agreed with one another. So the Easthorpe inspector was puzzled.

When the juniors left the library he was still in conversation with Mr. Lagden on the subject. The Terrible Three went up to their rooms to put on overcoats and thick boots for their expedition. Manners came into Tom Merry's room when he was ready.

There was a grim expression on the face of Manners of the Shell.

"What do you think now?" he asked.

"About what?" asked Tom uneasily. "Pongo?"

"Bother Pongo! About that man Lagden," said Manners. "Do you mean to say that you can't see that he was deliberately misleading Inspector Watkins?"

"Oh, that's too thick, old man," said Tom.

"Did that fur-capped rotter have a scar under his right eye, or did he not?" demanded Manners.

"I certainly didn't notice it, if he had," confessed Tom Merry.

"And I didn't, and Monty didn't, and Gussy didn't! But Inspector Watkins is going to look for a man with a scarred face," said Manners sardonically. "I wish him joy of the job—he won't find the scarred man in Hampshire."

"Manners, old man—"

"And Lagden didn't notice that the man was short and thick-set," said Manners. "Was he blind, do you think?"

"It all happened so quickly," said Tom uneasily.

"Not too quickly for us to see what the man was like

"Well, we saw more of him than Mr. Lagden did."

"Of course we did," said Monty Lowther, coming into the room. "Manners, old chap, you're letting your suspicions run away with you—"

"Mr. Lagden himself said so, you know, Manners. After all, he saw the man only for a few moments."

"And in those few moments he couldn't see what he was like, but could see a scar that wasn't there!" said Manners satirically.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, what are you driving at, Manners?" he asked. "If there's anything in what you suppose, this man Lagden is a pal of the fur-capped johnny. Yet he joined up with us to deal with him—"

"To prevent us from catching him," said Manners coolly.

"Well, even admitting that; what was his object? Do you think the whole thing was a plant to bag a free tea at Eastwood House?"

Lowther chuckled.

"I think the whole thing was a plant," said Manners deliberately. "Everything that happens confirms it. What his game is I don't know; but it isn't only a tea he's bagged here. He's staying the night."

"So he was after a lodging for the night?" asked Monty, with a grin. "He looks as if he could afford to pay for a room at an hotel."

"I don't know what his game is—but he's got some game on!" said Manners obstinately. "He isn't what he makes out. He saved that footpad from arrest, and explained what he did with a tale of a gammy knee; but refuses to let a doctor see his injured knee, though the medical man was specially telephoned for. Now he gives the police a false description of the footpad; and the inspector naturally takes more notice of him than of a lot of schoolboys. There's something in the wind."

"Let it go at that, then," said Lowther. "Look here, we sha'n't find Pongo if we stay here."

"Come on!" said Tom Merry.

And the subject was dropped, and the Terrible Three started.

CHAPTER 7

An Unexpected Meeting!

"GROOOGH! It's cold!"
 "Beastly!"
 "Why grouse?" said Tom Merry cheerily. "Do you expect it to be sunny in the evening, or warm in January?"

"Br-r-r-r!"
 The three juniors were tramping through the snow amid the leafless trees of Eastwood Park.

They had been out of doors for an hour; and two of the party, at least, were feeling rather fed-up. Hunting for the lost Pongo did indeed seem, as Blake had expressed it, a good deal like seeking a needle in a haystack.

The juniors had called and shouted and whistled; the park had rung and echoed to the name of Pongo.

But there had come no reply from Wally's missing dog. No bark or whine answered the voices of the St. Jim's juniors.

"What about chucking it?" asked Manners, as if that bright idea had struck him suddenly.

"Good!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry smiled.

"Oh, get on with it!" he said. "Why grouse? You remember Wally told us that last time Pongo was lost, he made a den in the deer-park. Let's have a look round the deer-park."

"It's a mile from the house," groaned Lowther.

"And somebody says it's haunted," said Manners.

"We can stand the giddy ghost if he shows up," said Tom, laughing. "And I hope we're good for a mile."

"It's another mile back," Lowther pointed out.

"Fathead!"

"Oh, let's get on!" said Manners, with a sigh. "We're for it, and we may as well get on with it!"

And the chums of the Shell tramped on.

A crescent of moon was rising over the trees, the light glimmering on the snow and the leafless, frosty branches.

The juniors turned into a narrow, sunken lane, which was the shortest route to the old deer-park. They had already seen the old hollow oak in the deer-park, under which Pongo had once made his den; and it was easy to find their way thither in the glimmer of the moon. Tom Merry thought it quite likely that Pongo had crept back to his old shelter, now that the wandering fit was on him again. Manners and Lowther thought it quite probable, too, though they were not yearning to pay Pongo a visit in his remote retreat. However, they kept on.

"Somebody else on this road," remarked Lowther presently, with a nod towards a dim figure tramping the road in advance of them.

Only a glimpse could be had of the man ahead in the dim moonlight that filtered through bare branches into the narrow lane.

The juniors, who were putting on some speed, were drawing nearer to the man who was tramping ahead. Their footsteps made no sound on the soft carpet of snow that covered the earth.

As they drew nearer and nearer, Tom Merry's eyes fixed on the man ahead very intently.

He could only see the man's back; but it seemed to him that there was something familiar in the broad build of the man, his thick-set shoulders and bull neck.

"My hat!" murmured Tom at last. "You chaps, I believe that is the Johnny in the fur cap."

"Eh?"

"It jolly well looks like him, anyhow."

"He's got on a bowler hat," said Lowther.

"Well, he wouldn't keep on the fur cap, with the police looking for him, and his description known."

"Bow-wow!" said Lowther. "That footpad is in the next county by this time. Why should he hang about here?"

Manners breathed hard.

"It's the man!" he said. "And I know jolly well why he's hanging about here—it's because Lagden is at Lord Eastwood's house."

"Oh rats!"

"He's turning round," said Tom. "Look at his chivvy."

The murmur of voices behind him had evidently caught the man's ears.

He turned and stared back along the lane. The juniors were only a few yards from him now; and the glimmer of the moon was on his face. He was no longer wearing the fur cap; but the juniors knew his face at once—a hard, brutal face that was not easily forgotten.

"Great Scott! It's the man!" shouted Lowther in great excitement.

"Collar him!" exclaimed Manners.

The Terrible Three rushed forward.

It was the footpad, there was no doubt about that, whatsoever might be his motive for lingering in the vicinity where the local police were hunting for him.

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The only thought of the Terrible Three was to seize him. They rushed right at him with their hands up.

For a second the man stared at them; and then he understood. He gave an angry snarl and sprang back.

"At him!" shouted Manners.

The juniors' grasp was almost upon the bull-necked man, when he leaped out of the lane among the trees and fled.

"After him!"

The man's hurried, crashing footsteps rang through the frozen park. Fast on his track rushed the Shell fellows of St. Jim's.

"Put it on!" panted Tom Merry. "We shall pin him in against the park wall, and then we shall have the rotter."

They rushed on at top speed, winding through the frosty trees as the bull-necked man dodged and wound his way across the park.

The high park palings on the Easthorpe road came into sight at last. The bull-necked man reached them and made a desperate leap. His hands caught the top of the palings, and he clambered desperately and breathlessly.

Tom Merry put on a spurt, and forged ahead of his comrades and leaped after the man.

His grasp was touching the ruffian, when, with a desperate effort, the bull-necked man dragged himself out of reach, and rolled over the top of the high palings.

There was the sound of a fall in the road.

A savage exclamation accompanied it, and a curse followed. The three juniors halted at the palings, panting.

"Bunk me up!" exclaimed Tom.

He clambered up the palings with the help of his chums. Over the top of the wall he stared down into the dimly moonlit road.

But the bull-necked man was gone.

He had picked himself up and run for it, and had already vanished from sight.

Tom put his leg over the wall.

"Come on, you fellows. He's gone; but we'll cut down to Easthorpe and give them the tip at the police-station."

"Good!" said Manners.

"What about Pongo?" asked Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"Pongo!" Tom Merry had forgotten Wally's missing mongrel in the excitement of the chase. "Oh, bother Pongo! Let Pongo rip! We've got to get this rotter nailed if we can!"

And the juniors clambered over the fence, and started at a run for the village. They kept their eyes open for the bull-necked man, but no sign of him was to be seen. The juniors dropped into a walk as they entered the village.

"Did you chaps notice—" began Manners.

"What?" asked Lowther.

"You saw the moonlight full on that rascal's face. Was there any sign of a scar on it?"

"No," said Monty Lowther a little shortly.

"Mr. Lagden was mistaken about that," said Tom.

"That's certain, now that we've seen the man again."

"No mistake about it, in my opinion. What do you think that ruffian was hanging about Eastwood House for?"

"He wasn't near the house."

"He was in the lane that cuts across the park. Why should he hang about here—he must know that the police have been called in?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"He's got a reason," said Manners.

"For goodness' sake don't say anything about Lagden at the police-station, Manners," said Tom anxiously. "Lord Eastwood would be frightfully annoyed if he heard that anything had been said about his guest. It's only a vague suspicion, anyhow."

"It's more than that, to my mind," said Manners. "But, of course, I sha'n't say anything—I've got nothing to go upon that a policeman would be likely to listen to. But I'm going to keep my eyes open."

"That's all right—so long as you keep your mouth shut at the same time, old bean," said Lowther. "Here we are."

The Terrible Three entered the little police-station of Easthorpe. They found Inspector Watkins there, and surprised him a good deal with their account of the unexpected meeting with the fur-capped ruffian. Mr. Watkins eyed them very searchingly, almost doubtingly.

"You are quite sure it was the same man?" he asked.

"Quite!" said Tom.

"Absolutely certain," said Manners. "And there was no scar on his face. We saw him clearly in the moonlight."

"Mr. Lagden seemed quite sure about the scar."

"That was a mistake," said Tom. "We saw the man quite clearly this time, and there was no scar. No possibility of a mistake this time."

The inspector nodded.

"Well, well, I am glad you came to me at once," he said.

"It is extraordinary that the man should be hanging about here; he must know that he is being searched for. But the

information is valuable—very valuable. I am much obliged to you young gentlemen."

And the Terrible Three left the police-station.

They walked back to Eastwood House almost in silence. Their thoughts were busy.

Manners was quite convinced now that his suspicions of Cecil Lagden were well-founded. According to his view, every circumstance pointed to the young man being an impostor of some kind. And Tom Merry and Monty Lowther could not help admitting that the circumstances lent a certain plausibility to Manners' distrust. They wondered—they could not help wondering—whether the young man was in actual fact other than what he seemed—and, if so, what the "game" was. For if he was playing a part, it was obvious that he was doing so with some object in view. And what was his object? Why had he laid his plans to obtain an entrance into Lord Eastwood's house?

CHAPTER 8.

The Woes of Wally!

"WATS!"

The remark was not an elegant one for a drawing-room, but for once Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was more emphatic than elegant.

Manners of the Shell was at the piano discoursing sweet music. There were several guests, as well as D'Arcy's friends from school, and, of course, Cecil Lagden, who looked very handsome in dress clothes and had apparently recovered by this from the weakness in his gammy knee. At all events, he showed no sign of it now.

There was no doubt that Lagden had made himself popular among the guests at Eastwood House.

Manners, certainly, would have liked him as much as the others but for his deep distrust.

And even Manners, when he looked at the handsome young man in the brilliantly-lighted room, conversing at his ease with a graceful and pleasant manner, almost doubted his own conclusions.

It seemed impossible to imagine any connection between that debonaire, young fellow and the fur-capped ruffian who had attacked D'Arcy in Easthorpe Lane.

If he was a member of the "swell mob," certainly he played his part to perfection, and had nothing of the swell mobsman in his looks.

Tom Merry and Lowther, during the walk back from the village, had felt themselves infected with Manners' doubts. But in the presence of Lagden their vague misgivings melted away like snow in the sunshine. They wondered, indeed, how Manners could be so obstinate in his suspicions. They were glad, at least, that he had confided them to no one but themselves.

Manners, however, had forgotten Lagden now; he forgot most other things when he was at the piano.

The Shell fellow was really a good player, and people liked to listen to him. But there was at least one fellow in Lady Eastwood's drawing-room who turned a deaf ear to the music.

D'Arcy minor was thinking of Pongo.

What Wally of the Third saw in that shaggy, scraggy mongrel was a mystery to everyone else; but there was no doubt that he was extremely attached to Pongo. Every time Pongo went wandering, D'Arcy minor was worried and anxious; and Pongo was much given to wandering. Sometimes he was kept on the chain; but at such times he would look so pitifully at his master that Wally's heart smote him, and he would decide to give the "old beggar" another chance. And Pongo took advantage of such chances with utter unscrupulousness.

Now he had been missing so long that Wally was really anxious about him. Farmers might shoot a dog on their land if he worried the sheep or the poultry, and Pongo was not very reliable in such matters. He might have fallen through thin ice into the river, or somebody might have found him wandering and stolen him. Reggie Manners assured Wally that nobody in his senses would steal Pongo, and asked him whether he thought that a lunatic was wandering about Hampshire stealing dogs. But Reggie's remark only led to rejoinders from Wally that were more in the style of the Third Form-room at St. Jim's than Eastwood House. On the subject of Pongo, when that valuable animal was lost, Wally did not approve of jesting.

Wally of the Third had planned to continue his search for that evening until bed-time.

His chums of the Third—reluctantly, but loyally—had agreed to join up. But parental authority stepped in.

Lord Eastwood might or might not have supposed that Pongo was worth finding. In either case, he had no idea of allowing his youngest son to wander about dark, snowy woods after nightfall.

Wally was strictly commanded not to leave the house, and his dutiful brother Gussy was enjoined to keep a brotherly eye on him till bed-time.

Which his brother Gussy was doing dutifully.

"It's all rot!" Wally said, in an undertone, while Manners discoursed music at the piano. "Look here, Gussy! You speak to the pater, and persuade him to let me go."

"Wats!"

"I've got to find Pongo."

"Bothah Pongo!"

"You old ass, Gussy!"

"Pongo will turn up all wight. He always turns up. I am quite assuahed that there is no gettin' wid of him," said Arthur Augustus.

"If you spoke to the pater——"

"Wats!" said Gussy.

"He would let me go if you came with me," said Wally hopefully.

"Wats!"

"Look here, Gussy!"

"You uttah young ass!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"You fwabjous young chump. How can I leave my guests, you duffah?"

"They wouldn't mind."

"I am suah they would!"

"Why should they?" argued Wally of the Third.

"Weally, you young ass——"

"It would be a treat to them!" urged Wally.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon his younger brother with a withering stare.

That suggestion put the lid on, so to speak.

That he could leave his guests for the evening to go hunting for Pongo was quite impossible, and the suggestion that his absence would be a treat to his guests was really disrespectful and exasperating.

The swell of St. Jim's gazed at his minor as if he would bore a hole in Walter Adolphus' cheeky countenance with the aid of his eyeglass.

Wally did not seem to be withered, however.

He grinned.

"Don't make faces in the drawing-room, Gussy!" he said.

"Wha-a-t?"

"What will the mater think if she looks this way? What will Aunt Adelina think? For goodness' sake, Gussy, don't make faces!"

Wally loafed away, leaving Arthur Augustus almost at boiling-point. But for the presence of the guests, probably at that moment Walter Adolphus D'Arcy would have been the recipient of a terrific licking. As it was, he loafed away unlicked, and the swell of St. Jim's was left to consume his own smoke.

Manners left the piano amid an applauding murmur and joined Tom Merry and Lowther. Mr. Cecil Lagden was to sing. Manners dropped into a seat beside his chums, and his eyes were on the handsome figure of Lagden as he stood at the piano. The young man had a good baritone voice, which was very pleasant to listen to, and Cousin Ethel accompanied him on the piano. Manners' face grew more and more thoughtful as he watched and listened, and Tom Merry and Monty exchanged an amused glance.

"Penny for 'em, old bean!" murmured Lowther at last.

Manners started.

"What? I was thinking——"

"Thinking that Lagden has a jolly good toot?"

"No. Thinking of something D'Arcy told me when I asked him," said Manners.

"And what——"

"There are a lot of valuables in the house at the present time," said Manners.

"Eh?"

"The famous Eastwood gold plate, you know. It's worth a good many thousands, and it's in Lord Eastwood's safe now. It's kept in the bank as a rule for safety, and brought home for special occasions when Lord Eastwood is at home. I asked Gussy."

"My only hat! What about it?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, you—you awful ass!" whispered Tom Merry. "Do you think that Lord Eastwood has let a giddy crackman into the house?"

"You awful chump!" breathed Lowther.

Manners did not answer.

It was evident that he had been thinking the matter out very thoroughly, and that in consequence his suspicions had taken a darker turn.

Tom was about to speak again, when Wally of the Third joined the Terrible Three.

"I hear that you fellows went after him," he said.

(Continued on page 16.)

THE St. Jim's News





EDITORIAL!
By Tom Merry.



The CHAR-A-BANC RIDE!
By Dick Brooke.



MAXIMS for MOTOR CYCLISTS!
By Monty Lowther.



MY chum Manners tells me that it's the wrong time of the year to publish a number dealing with the joys of the open road.

"January's a mucky month!" growls Manners. "It's slushy underfoot and burky overhead! It's a month that's neither good for man nor beast!"

"Well, you're a cheerful soul!" I answered, laughing. "Who's been missing his little daily dose? January's a ripping month!"

But Manners wouldn't hear a good word for January. He called it all sorts of choice names, and he said he wished he was basking on the Riviera, where the jolly old sun never stops shining.

Of course, we know that the roads are not in ideal condition for biking or hiking in January. But the average fellow doesn't care a rap for the weather conditions. He literally doesn't care if it snows! Instead of keeping his bike locked up in the shed during the winter, he pedals gaily through the country lanes. If he is lucky enough to possess a motor-bike, he doesn't leave it to get rusty. He uses it. And if he fancies a charabanc-ride, he doesn't let fogs or even blizzards interfere with his pleasure.

Dash it all, we are not dependent on the weather for our fun. If we were, we should get precious little fun in England. An optimist can keep cheerful in any sort of weather.

One of my numerous correspondents has written to inquire what is the make of the Head's car, and whether Dr. Holmes has ever been fined for furious driving. The fact is, the Head doesn't possess a car. He has never been a motoring enthusiast, being a somewhat old-fashioned gentleman in this respect. And if he did own a car, I can't imagine him driving furious like Jehu of old. The Head's progress would be steady and sedate, and I doubt if his speed would ever exceed a modest fifteen miles an hour.

Mr. Raiton has a car—a dapper little two-seater—but the other masters are carless. Mr. Ratcliff owned a three-wheeled "run-about" once, but it led him such a merry dance that he was glad to get rid of it.

Several people at St. Jim's possess motor-bikes. Cutts of the Fifth has a very speedy machine, with which he is always trying to break records. Cutts is a much more clever and cool-headed motor-cyclist than Coker of Greyfriars. All the same, he will have to moderate his transports a bit if he wants to avoid trouble with the law.

The juniors in the Shell have to be content with the old-fashioned "push-bike." Practically every fellow has a bike, and some of the lucky ones have two. Baggy Trimble is bikeless, but that doesn't worry Baggy. He always borrows the first machine that comes to hand.

TOM MERRY.

THIS is the song of the charabanc,
The monster of the road;
Swinging, swaying, rocking, rumbling,
Drowning all the driver's grumbling,
Pitching, tossing, nearly tumbling
With its schoolboy load!

All aboard for Wayland town,
Schoolboys of St. Jim's!
Mount the footboard, gay and sprightly,
Take your seats, and hang on tightly!
Might a fellow ask politely:
"Hast insured your limbs?"

Ready, driver! Off we go!
Sound the merry horn!
Swinging through the old school gateway
In a truly grand and great way.
Taggles leaps from danger straightway,
Fearful of his corn!

Rumbling down the frosty road,
Singing loud in chorus.
Blithe and happy you will find us,
Though the snowflakes whirl and blind us,
With the old school left behind us,
And the road before us!

Cyclists and pedestrians glare
As we leave them clawing!
Jolting, joggling, swaying, rocking
(Baggy Trimble's knees are knocking!),
Skimpole says the pace is shocking,
Gussy gasps "Appalling!"

But the ride is all too short—
No more jolts and lurches!
We have reached our destination,
And with joy and jubilation,
Mixed with shouts of animation,
We forsake our perches.

Here's to the good old charabanc,
The monarch of the highways!
That thunders through the busy streets
With happy schoolboys in its seats,
And takes them out for topping treats
Through country lanes and byways!

SOLD OUT!
 SOLD OUT!!
 are the words your news-
 agent will shortly be
 shouting—so get
 YOUR
**"HOLIDAY
 ANNUAL"**
 AT ONCE.

BUSY corners often lead to busy coroners.
They should be taken slowly!

SCORCHING along the highway is simply fine; but remember that the sequel is often "fine" also!

SCANDALMONGERS should never apply for motor-cycle licences. If they own motor-bikes, they will always be "running people down"!

NEVER go for a spin in your Sunday best. The correct thing to do is to travel "in low gear."

IF your brakes and hooters are "unemployed," you can't expect the "dole" of sympathy when a collision takes place.

IF you should happen to "run across" a few pals whilst motor-cycling, the decent thing to do is to send for the ambulance at once!

NEVER invest in a motor-cycle unless you are able to "raise the dust."

"STILL waters run deep"—as you will discover when you pitch head-first into a ditch!

THE course of main roads never did run smooth.

"HE that scorches all the way
Won't live to scorch another day!"

A PASSENGER in the sidecar is worth two in the bush.

IT'S a long lane that has no police-traps.

A PUNCTURE mended in time saves nine.

WHERE there's a spill there's a sway.

MONEY makes the mare go—but nothing can make a motor-bike go if it's made up its mind not to!

A GOOD start is half the battle.

IT'S better to be safe than sorry!

"SAFETY First" is the best maxim in "the long run."

BREAKING records leads to breaking necks!



RUCTIONS on the ROAD!

An Eggsiting Eggsperience on the King's Highway.

Related by BAGGY TRIMBLE.

And then he gave me a push, and away I went, neck-or-nothing, like John Gilpin. Talk about travel! I shot down the hill out of Wayland like a streak of lightning. They say that heavy people go downhill quicker than light ones, and I proved it! I went down that hill quickly enough, anyway.

I tried to put the break on, but the blessed bike had no breaks. I lost my head, and my nerve, and my school cap, and I yelled like a madman as I clung frantically to the handlebars.

I had an awful feeling—what you might call an admonition—that I should bump into something or somebody before I'd gone very far, and my fears were well founded.

Old P.-c. Crump came puffing up the hill, and his stout figger seemed to mesmerize me. I ought to have swerved to avoid him, but I simply couldn't. I sailed straight into him, and—

Biff! Crash!

Old Crump sat down suddenly in the roadway, and he must have seen a million stars. He wasn't unconscious—I could tell that by the yells he let out!

As for me, I pitched clean over the handlebars of the "penny-farthing," and landed plump into the ditch, which was swollen with recent rain. I don't like a cold bath at any time, and I didn't enjoy that one a little bit. When I scrambled out of the ditch, reeds and slime clung luvvingly to my face and neck, and I must have looked a pretty picture.

Old Crump sat up in the roadway, waving his arms like windmills.

"Which I'll 'ave the lor on yer for this 'ere!" he roared. "Ridin' to the common danger! Puttin' of people's lives in jeopardy, as ever was! Jest you wait till I gets to me feet! I'll harvest yer!" I didn't wait for the wrathful Crump to get to his feet. I picked up the old

MY most eggsiting adventure on the road was when I rode one of the old-fashioned "penny-farthing" bikes from Wayland to St. Jim's.

I had been to the pictures in Wayland, and I didn't feel like tramping all the way back to the school. Besides, it was getting on for locking-up time, and time was preshus. So I tried to hire a bike on tick. But the mingy, stingy proprietors of the different cycle-stores only larked at me.

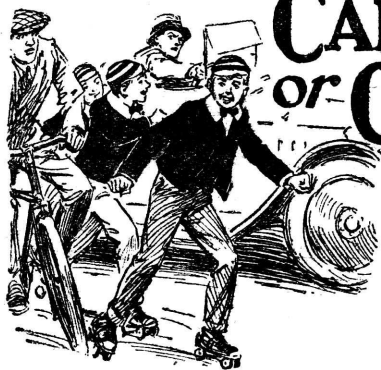
It looked as if I should have to go back to the school on Shanks' ponies, after all. But an old gent who was standing outside the Green Man happened to hear of my plite, and he very jenerusly offered to lend me his bike.

"It's not eggsactly a brand-new masheen," he said. "It belonged to my old dad when he was alive, and he left it to me in his will. But if it's any use to you, you're welcome to the loan of it. I'll go and fetch it for you."

When I saw the bike, I nearly had a fit. It was one of those awful "penny-farthings," with the front wheel about three times bigger than the back one. The saddle was ever so far from the ground, and only a skilled acrobatt—like me—could have climbed on to it.

To tell the trooth, I felt rather nervuss about riding the beastly thing; but I didn't like to offend the jenerus old gent, so up I clambered.

"You can return the masheen at your lezzure," he said.



CARS, CYCLES, or CHAR-A-BANCS?

Our Contributors state their Choice

bongs! The proper way to travel is on a pair of roller-skates. There's nothing more ripping than to go whizzing along the roads at top speed, knocking anybody over who happens to get in your way. I'm just going to skate over to Wayland with Curly Gibson and Jameson; and I wouldn't swap my skates for the most hansom Rolls-Royce that ever rolled, or the fastest Ford that ever forded a duckpond!

GEORGE FIGGINS:

Cars for the lazy, charabancs for the crazy, but the good, honest push-bike for this child! I prefer to get along by my own exertions. You can call me old-fashioned, if you like; but my push-bike is a tried and trusty friend, and even if I was a millionaire I don't think I would swap it for any swifter means of transport.

HERBERT SKIMPOLE:

Really, my dear fellows, I have a violent objection to cars and cycles and charabancs. During the summer holidays my Uncle Theophilus took me for a joy-ride in his car, but I quite failed to see where the "joy" came in! We had a series of alarming crashes and collisions, owing to the fact that my uncle was driving a car for the first time. How we managed to escape with

"penny-farthing," which was a bit battered, but still rideable, and with a desprit leap I sprang into the saddle. I worked the peddles like fury—not that they wanted much working, for the beastly bike seemed to be driven by some misterious force.

I looked back over my sholder, and saw old Crump coming in hot pursuit. But he had about as much chance of catching me as a Southern Railway express would have of catching a tortuss.

On I flew, with the wind wissling in my ears, and my hare standing on end like the quills of a porkupine.

It was jolly dark by this time, and I had no lamps. It was like a garstly nightmare, dashing through the darkness—rushing out of the unknown into the unknown, so to speak. If a lorry or a car had happened to come along, I'm sure I should have biffed into it, for I had no control qver my old boneshaker.

Fortune favered me, however, and I managed to reach St. Jim's in one peace. I fairly flew through the school gateway, and it was unforchunit for Taggles, the porter, that he happened to step out of his lodge at that moment.

Crash!

I hit Taggles amidships, as a naughtycal person would say. He came a fearful cropper, and I believe he thought an earthquake had hit him.

As for me, I was knocked clean off my perch, and I landed on all-fours in the quad, moaning and groaning.

Old Taggles was the first to recover. He rushed into his lodge and fetched an old broomstick.

"I'll learn yer, you reckless young fapscallion!" he roared.

And he started to belaber me with the broomstick till the dust rose in clouds from my tight-fitting bags.

I roared and squirmed under the castygation. Looking back, I consider that was one of the most paineful moments of my life—and I've had a good many!

As for the old "penny-farthing," it didn't get off so lightly this time. It was battered beyond repair, and I hadn't the nerve to return it to its owner next day. After a few days he called at the school for it, and I instructed my study-mates to say that I was out! In reality, I was hiding in one of the box-rooms. I wouldn't have faced the owner of the boneshaker for worlds, after all that I had been through already! And you'll never catch me riding a penny-farthing again—not even if somebody offers me a penny-farthing to do so!

our lives I don't know. But I do know that I shall never travel in a car again except under compulsion! As for the charabancs, they have an unpleasant trick of turning turtle, and landing you in a frightful dilemma, or a still more frightful ditch! Push-bicycles I cannot stand, as my legs are too frail and feeble to propel the pedals. On the whole, I consider the finest method of transport is an antiquated cab, drawn by a cabhorse!

MR. RAILTON:

A smart two-seater car is my choice—until that happy time comes when we all have our own aeroplanes! I have flown as a passenger on several occasions, and I found the experience most exhilarating. I look forward to the day when I shall be able to say: "My dear Lathom, would you care to fly over to Paris with me for the weekend?" But perhaps Mr. Lathom, who is somewhat old-fashioned in his views, would NOT care!

EPHRAIM TAGGLES:

Which I considers that every school porter ought to 'ave a car of 'is own for runnin' errands. You can't expect a man wot's doubled up with rheumatics to ride a bicycle like a frisky fag in the First. An' you can't expect 'im to keep a-ploddin' on 'is pore tired feet all day long. I ain't never drove a car in me life, but it's as easy as pushin' a wheelbarrow. You jest presses this gadget, an' pulls that gadget, an' you races merrily along at fifty miles an hour or thereabouts. Why, I could get from 'ere to the Green Man, in Wayland, afore you could say: "Where's old Taggles got to?" I'd simply love to go a-road-hoggin'!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY:

The wight an' pwopah mannah of makin' pwogwess, deah boys, is by cah. I think it's a great pity that St. Jim's fellows aren't allowed to have cahs of their own. If they were, I should request my patah to send me a handsome Wolls-Woyce. How wippin' it would be to take my pals for joy-wides on half-holidays! Blake declares he would wufuse to come if I were the dwivah, because he's not insuahed against accident, fiah, or flood! I call it a deadly insult to suggest that I should win into another cah, or allow my own to burst into flames, or win into a duckpond! As a cah-dwivah, I should display that tact an' judgment which has always been associated with my name, bai Jove!

WALLY D'ARCY:

A fig for your cars and bikes and sharra-

Supplement II.

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GUSSY'S GUESTS!



(Continued
from
page 13.)

"Eh? Yes."
"You didn't get him, though."
"No; he bunked over the park palings," said Lowther. Wally stared.
"Pongo did?" he exclaimed.
"Pongo! Who's talking about Pongo?"
"I am!" grunted D'Arcy minor.
Lowther chuckled.
"I thought you were asking about that fur-capped gent. We got after him when we were looking for Pongo."
"Oh, bother him!" said D'Arcy minor. "You didn't see any trace of Pongo?"
"Not a giddy sign."
"The pater won't let me get out after him now," grunted Wally. "My idea is that the old beggar has sneaked back to his den in the deer-park. I've looked there twice to-day, but he wasn't there. But he will have to have a shelter at night, and I believe he will go back there. Isn't it rotten that the pater won't let me get out!"
"Well, a kid like you oughtn't to go out into the park at night," said Manners. "It isn't safe."
"Not so much of your kid!" said Wally. "I'm jolly well going, all the same."
Tom Merry looked grave.
"You can't disobey your father, kid," he said. "Don't be a young ass!"
"I'm not going to," said Wally. "I wouldn't, of course. He's told me to stay in till bedtime."
"That settles it, then," said Tom.
"Yes, till bedtime," agreed Wally. "After bedtime, I'm going. I'm jolly well going to look for Pongo. It hasn't occurred to the pater that I might get out of bed to go out for him, and I haven't mentioned it—see?"
"You young duffer! Better do nothing of the sort," said Monty Lowther. "Why, that fur-capped merchant may be still hanging about. We came on him quite near the deer-park."
"After my dog, do you think?" asked Wally anxiously.
"Ha, ha! Not likely!"
"Well, he was hanging about for something, I suppose, and he seems just the kind of rotter who would be a dog-stealer," said Wally. "Anyhow, I'm jolly well going after Pongo to-night. Ten to one he's in that old den of his under the hollow oak. Not a word, of course."
And Wally ambled away, before the chums of the Shell could answer.

CHAPTER 9.

Manners Means Business!

"COME along to my room, you chaps!" murmured Manners.
The St. Jim's juniors had gathered for a last chat before bed in D'Arcy's room, and now they were going. Blake and Herries and Digby went along to their rooms, and the Terrible Three bade good-night to Arthur Augustus. Wally & Co. had already gone to bed; and Tom Merry hoped that Wally of the Third had given up his harebrained scheme of going out to the deer-park in search of Pongo. Manners led his two chums to his room, heedless of the fact that both of them were yawning. The day had been a rather busy and exciting one, and as the hour was getting late, both Tom and Monty were ready for bed. But they followed Manners into his room.
"Well, what's the game?" yawned Lowther.
"I've got something to say to you chaps."
"It's past eleven!" murmured Monty.
"Never mind that."
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"Oh, all right."
Lowther stirred the fire in Manners' room, and sat down in an arm-chair. Manners was looking very serious, and it looked as if bed was not so near at hand as Tom and Monty had supposed.
Manners closed his door carefully.
"Well, old bean?" asked Tom Merry, manfully suppressing a desire to yawn.
"More Lagden?" asked Lowther, with a wink at the captain of the Shell.
"Yes," said Manners quietly.
"Give him a rest, old chap, now he's gone to bed."
"If he stays in bed till morning, all right," said Manners. "That's what I'm worried about."
"It isn't a night for taking a stroll!" remarked Lowther. "I sha'n't stir before morning, when I get to bed—if I ever do! I fancy Lagden is fast asleep by this time."
"Manners, old man—" murmured Tom.
"His room is in the next corridor," said Manners. "The window overlooks the south balcony. He could get in and out easily enough."
"Likely—on a night like this!" said Lowther.
"As soon as the servants are gone to bed, he will have the run of the house," said Manners.
"Oh dear!"
"You fellows think that I'm after a mare's nest, of course."
"Yes, rather!" said Tom and Monty together.
"Well, we shall see," said Manners quietly. "I don't trust the man, and I believe that he has butted into Lord Eastwood's house for reasons of his own. I believe that that attack on Gussy was a put-up job from beginning to end to get into touch with him, and the gammy leg a lying yarn to make an excuse for staying in the house over the night. The smashing-up of the motor-bike helped. Lord Eastwood is no fool; but a man chipping in to help his son against a footpad naturally got on his soft side. If I'm mistaken, I'm mistaken, and there's an end; but if I'm not mistaken, that man Lagden means mischief to-night."
"The giddy gold plate?" asked Monty.
"Yes."
"Pile it on!" said Lowther. "Pile on the agony, old chap! This reminds me of the jolly old films."
Tom Merry grinned.
"It's awfully thick, Manners, you know," he murmured. "Possibly. But we're Lord Eastwood's guests here; and if there's even the barest chance that he may be robbed, we ought to keep our eyes open."
"That's right enough, of course; but—"
"I'm going to watch to-night," said Manners steadily.
"Phew!"
"I'd like you fellows to help me. But please yourselves, of course."
"Oh dear!"
"Oh, scissors!"
"You don't seem to be keen," said Manners sarcastically. "Well, hike off to bed, and I'll go it alone."
"Oh, rats!" said Tom, a little crossly. "If you're set on it, we'll stand by you, of course. But it's all rot!"
"Bosh!" agreed Lowther.
"There will be a good moon to-night," said Manners. "It's windy, and the sky's clear. I can watch Lagden's window from this window, when the light's out, and if he clears, I shall know it. But if he clears, he won't go empty-handed. I want an eye kept on his door."
"It's too thick!" muttered Lowther. "You can't watch a man like that. It's too thick!"
Manners coloured.
"If you fellows trust him, don't watch him," he said. "I don't trust him, and I mean to watch him. As soon as the house is asleep, I'm going to watch in the corridor, and spot him if he comes out of his room. Will you fellows sit up here, in case anything happens?"
"Nothing will happen, except that you'll catch a cold mooching about the corridors when you ought to be in bed," said Lowther.
Manners made an impatient gesture.
"Let it go at that, then!" he snapped. "You fellows get off to bed, and leave me alone."
"Rats! We'll sit up," said Lowther. "I suppose we can take a doze in these arm-chairs? You can call us when the jolly old burglary begins."
Tom Merry laughed.
"We'll sit up," he said. "We shall be jolly drowsy to-morrow; but it can't be helped. It's barely possible that you're right, Manners. I admit that there are some queer circumstances in the case. We'll give you your head."
And so it was settled.
The chums of the Shell sat up till after midnight, and then Manners turned out the light, and only a dim fire-light illuminated his room.
By that time the whole of the great house was plunged in

slumber. The last door had closed, and all was silent and still, save for the wail of the wind over the roofs.

Tom Merry and Lowther were nodding off to sleep before the fire, when Manners rose and brought them back to wakefulness.

He had put on a pair of rubber shoes, and without a sound he left the room and closed the door silently behind him.

Tom Merry and Lowther looked at one another.

"It's all rot, of course," muttered Lowther.

"Of course."

"Manners is rather an ass."

"Well, he's a jolly sensible chap as a rule, and I can't say we've ever known him to make a fatheaded mistake like this," said Tom reflectively. "Of course, nobody knows anything about this man Lagden. He's got a footing here by playing up as a giddy rescuer to Gussy. It might be a put-up scheme, as Manners thinks. But—"

"But—" grinned Lowther.

"Well, we shall see. I—I suppose we ought to keep awake."

"Think so?"

"Well, take it in turns," said Tom.

"Good egg! As you're captain of the Shell, you take the lead," said Monty, with a sleepy grin. And he closed his eyes and dozed.

Tom Merry rose from his chair and walked about the room in the dim light of the low fire, to keep himself awake. It was not easy to dodge slumber when he was tired and sleepy.

He stood at the window at last, and looked out into the moonlight shining on snowy sills and leafless trees.

He could see the window Manners had mentioned as that of Lagden's room, overlooking a balcony. From the window to the balcony and from the balcony to the ground was easy climbing for an active man, though not for a man with a crooked knee. Tom Merry, as he gazed rather idly at the window, gave a sudden start. There was thick snow on the balcony under Lagden's window, and in the clear moonlight Tom discerned that the snow was broken as if feet had trodden there. He looked more intently, and was assured that there were footprints in the snow.

His face became graver.

It was odd, at least, that Lagden should have gone on the balcony late at night in a freezing wind. If Manners' suspicions were well-founded, it would mean, probably, that the man had been examining the place, with a view to making his escape after a robbery. But—

Tom Merry did not think that it was so. But he continued to watch from the window, no longer feeling sleepy. From somewhere in the great house came a soft chime; it was one o'clock.

Something dark and shadowy moved in the moonlight.

Tom Merry felt a thrill.

Monty Lowther, in the armchair before the low fire, was sleeping soundly. Tom, at the window, watched, with a beating heart.

CHAPTER 10.

The Midnight Meeting!

"MY only Aunt Jane!" murmured Wally of the Third.

He stopped.

Walter Adolphus D'Arcy was far from the warm bed in which he was supposed to be tucked up for the night.

Tom Merry had hoped that the scamp of the Third had given up his harebrained scheme, and, indeed, had almost forgotten Wally's idea of hunting for Pongo in the deer-park that night. But Wally of the Third was not the man to leave a stone unturned when it was a question of recapturing the elusive Pongo. While Eastwood House was buried in slumber, and the three Shell fellows, quite unknown to him, were sitting in Manners' room, Wally of the Third had slipped out of bed, clad himself warmly for his reckless expedition, and trod silently down the stairs. By a little back window the reckless fag had slipped out of the house, closing it after him, but leaving it unfastened for his return. Wilkinson had long since made his last round and gone to bed, and Wally cleared off unseen and unsuspected. Under the moonlight he tramped away towards the distant deer-park.

It was shadowy and lonely under the leafless trees, and Wally of the Third was not feeling quite comfortable as he tramped on. He had plenty of nerve, but the shadowy solitude was enough to try the nerve of any fellow. He had thought the matter over, and made his determination, in the lighted drawing-room, amid cheery company and the buzz of voices, and it had seemed to him a ripping idea. But it seemed quite different in the snowy, dim solitude of Eastwood Park. And the thought of the fur-capped ruffian came very unpleasantly into his mind. The Shell fellows

had seen the footpad hanging about the Eastwood estate, quite near the deer-park. Doubtless he had gone—but— In the silence and solitude it was not pleasant to think of the bare possibility that the ruffian might be still in the vicinity.

But Wally kept on resolutely.

Having put his hand to the plough, so to speak, he would not turn back. He knew that he would despise himself on the morrow if he did.

Besides, there was the chance—quite a good chance—that Pongo had crept back to his old den in the deer-park for shelter that bitter night. That chance alone was enough to spur on Wally of the Third.

So he tramped on doggedly into the old deer-park, heading for the hollow oak he knew so well.

But he kept his eyes well about him as he went, and trod softly and silently in the carpet of snow.

It was as well for him that he did, for as he drew near the old oak he suddenly discerned a figure standing under the bare branches.

He stopped at once and drew behind a trunk.

His heart beat fast.

The moonlight fell on the man who was standing under the tree, and Wally of the Third made out a thickset, bull-necked man in gaiters and a thick overcoat. The man wore a bowler hat jammed down on his head. After the first glance Wally could have no doubt who the man was. It was the footpad who had attacked Arthur Augustus in Easthorpe Lane that afternoon, and whom the Terrible Three had chased across the park that evening. He had not gone after all, for here he was.

He was smoking a pipe as he waited, and shifting from one leg to the other, stamping occasionally to warm his feet.

The snow about him was trampled a great deal, which looked as if the bull-necked man had been waiting there some time.

For what was he waiting?

That was a mystery to Wally. It was obvious that the man was waiting for someone, but why he had made an appointment in the lonely deer-park at night, and for whom he was waiting, simply mystified the fag of St. Jim's.

Every now and then the bull-necked man glanced round, as if angry and impatient.

Wally drew closer into cover.

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The ruffian had no suspicion that he was there; but if he discovered him, the fag realised that there was danger—serious danger. The man was a lawless ruffian, and it was clear that he was there for no good, though why he was there was a perplexing puzzle. Wally backed away silently in the snow, and placed a thick mass of frozen brambles, heavy with snow, between him and the hollow oak under which the ruffian stood.

The sight of the footpad had startled him, but he was not scared now. So long as the bull-necked man did not see him he was safe, and now he was secure from discovery. To search for Pongo while the ruffian was there was evidently impossible, and Wally debated whether he should wait for the man to go, or give up his search and return to the house.

He was extremely unwilling to give up the search for Pongo, but there was no sign that the man meant to go. The minutes passed slowly.

Suddenly, from the silence of the deer-park, there came the sound of a low, penetrating whistle.

Wally started.

The bull-necked man started, too, and removed the pipe from his mouth, and answered the whistle.

A figure came tramping through the leafless trees, passing a few yards from the mass of snowy brambles behind which Wally crouched with a beating heart. The newcomer came from the direction of Eastwood House.

Wally had a glimpse of his face in the moonlight as he strode on, towards the big oak.

He could scarcely repress a cry of astonishment.

For the newcomer was Cecil Lagden, the rescuer of Arthur Augustus, and the honoured guest of Wally's father. Wally's brain was in a whirl.

Lagden, supposed to be fast asleep in his room at Eastwood House—Lagden here, secretly meeting this ruffian at midnight!

It was too amazing to be true; and Wally of the Third almost wondered whether he was dreaming. But he had to believe the evidence of his own eyes.

For a few moments the amazed fag did not stir.

Then he peered out of his cover, and his eyes followed Lagden. The young man had stopped under the oak.

Wally heard the deep, husky voice of the bull-necked man:

"You've kept me waiting, Dandy!"

"Couldn't be helped," came the quiet, cultivated tones of Cecil Lagden, in reply, clear to the ears of the astonished fag in the deep silence of the deer-park. "I could not get away till the house was asleep."

"I s'pose not; but it's fair freezing here. And a man ain't safe, either, arter what's happened. I s'pose you know them schoolboys got arter me again this evening, when I was coming here to wait for you."

"Yes—that was unlucky. They were looking for a lost dog," said Lagden. "There's no danger now. Lord Eastwood's keepers are not likely to be abroad on a night like this."

"And it's gone all right, Dandy?"

"Quite!"

"You're the covey for such a job, you are!" said the ruffian admiringly. "You've got a nerve, Dandy!"

Lagden shrugged his shoulders.

"It was awkward, those boys butting in as they did," he said. "You were a fool to attack that young idiot D'Arcy, with three of his schoolfellows close at hand, Hookey."

"I didn't see them in the trees," growled the ruffian. "It was a lonely place enough, and I'd been watching for days and days for a chance at the young toff, and so had you, Dandy. The whole game was your idea—I never really believed that it would work. And it came near to being mucked up—with them schoolboys chipping in. If you hadn't taken a hand and got them off me, they'd have had me dead to rights; it would have been the stone jug for me. Mean to say they never smelled a rat when you held them back from collaring me?"

Lagden laughed.

"Not in the least; why should they? I fell in the ditch and pulled them down in falling—it was due to my knee giving way."

"Your knee?" repeated Hookey.

"Yes—an old wound received in Flanders."

"Oh, my eye!" said Hookey. "Why, you was in the States in the War-time, and in the stone jug most of the time."

"It was good enough for them, at all events; and Lord Eastwood, after taking me to his house, was so kind as to telephone for a doctor to see my unfortunate knee."

"Oh, my eye!"

"However, I evaded that easily enough; and I have had a very pleasant evening at Eastwood House," said Lagden, with a laugh. "It's his lordship's birthday celebration, you know. I fancy I played my part pretty well. It had all turned out right, although it came near to a disaster at the

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beginning, owing to those schoolboys being so unexpectedly on the spot when you handled young D'Arcy. You ought to have spotted them, Hookey, and waited for a safer time."

"Well, I didn't spot them," grunted Hookey. "I got your signal that young D'Arcy was coming up the road alone, and acted according to instructions. We might never 'ave got another chance."

"Well, it turned out all right, so no matter. It was not quite according to programme; but I chipped in quite well in the role of a generous stranger rushing to the rescue; and Lord Eastwood was very kind and grateful. As my unfortunate knee had given way, and my motor-bike was smashed in going to the rescue of his son, he could scarcely do less than offer me a lodging for the night."

The ruffian chuckled.

"And it's all serene, Dandy?"

"Quite."

"You've found out where the stuff is?"

"I've kept eyes and ears open, Hookey. The famous Eastwood plate is in his lordship's safe in the library. I know exactly where the safe is, though it is behind a dummy bookcase. You will get in at a window of the library, which will be opened for you."

"Good!"

"After you've finished and got out, you will take care to make it appear that the window was forced from the outside."

"You're staying on, then?"

"Certainly. I shall be fast asleep in my room, and quite surprised to hear of a burglary in the morning."

"You've got a nerve, Dandy!"

"I do not think I am likely to be suspected of being an accessory," said Lagden coolly. "We've played this game before, Hookey, and we haven't had any trouble yet. I shall get off on my motor-bike to-morrow—and if there should be any suspicions, it will matter little—I shall not leave my address—not the true one, at all events."

Hookey gave a husky chuckle.

"Then it's all plain sailing?" he asked.

"Quite. Come with me."

The two men moved away from under the oak-tree, and tramped through the snow in the direction of Eastwood House.

Wally of the Third, almost frozen with amazement and horror, stared after them, as they disappeared into the shadows. He was not thinking of even Pongo now.

CHAPTER 11.

Caught in the Act!

TOM MERRY stared from the window of Manners' room, in the moonlight, with startled, intent eyes. That moving shadow in the glimmer of the moon riveted his attention. An active figure had appeared from nowhere, as it seemed, and was climbing the balcony towards Lagden's room.

Tom stared at it.

According to Manners and his suspicions, Lagden might have left the house surreptitiously. But here was a dark figure climbing the balcony to his room. If a robbery was intended that night, it looked as if Lagden was to be the victim, not the perpetrator. And then, all of a sudden, Tom Merry understood, as something familiar in the figure of the climber dawned upon his apprehension.

It was Lagden himself!

"My hat!" murmured Tom.

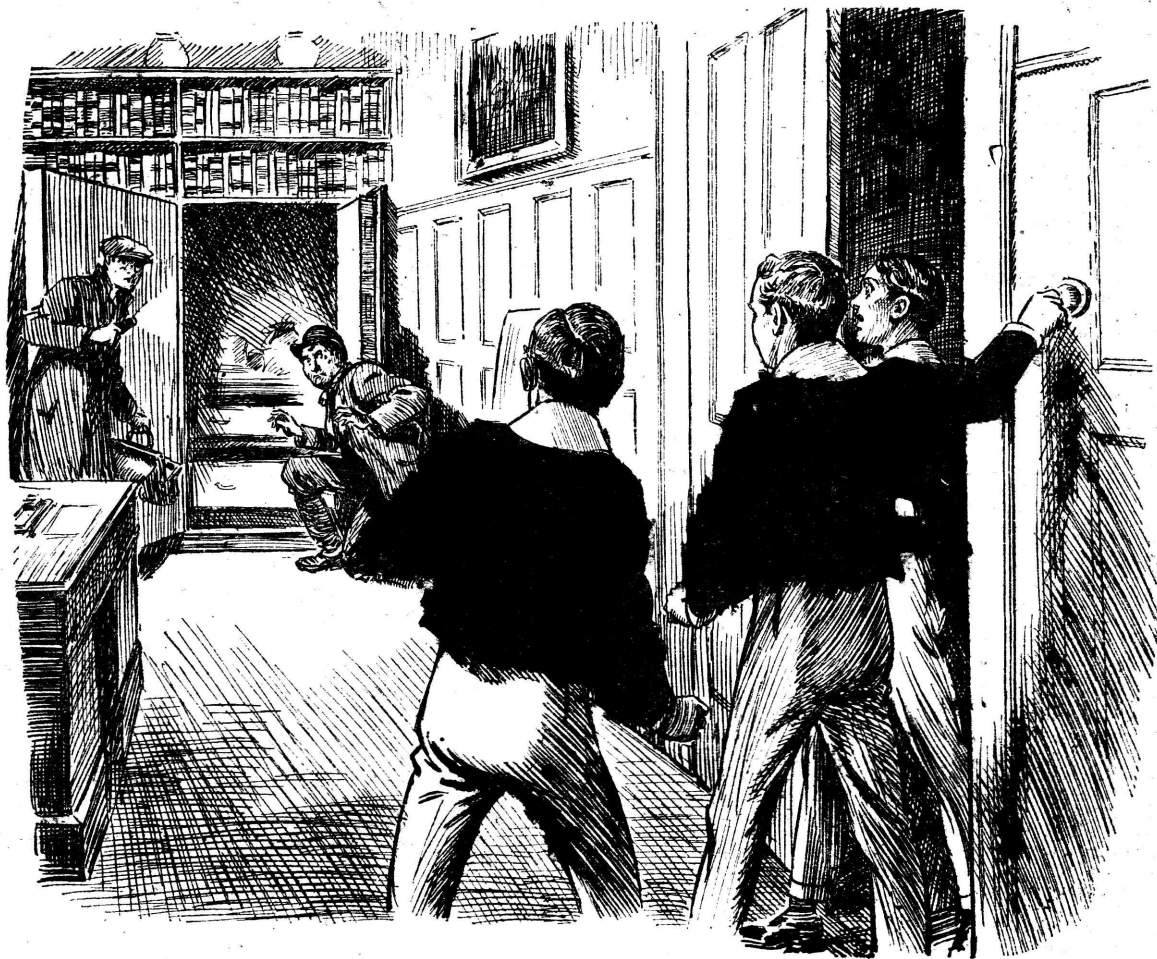
There was no mistake—he knew that active figure—with no trace about it now of a gammy knee. Indeed, the knee that was supposed to be crooked was planted on the rail of the balcony, and bore the young man's weight as he clambered over. And at the same time, Tom caught his profile, and recognised the handsome face—set and hard in expression now, looking strangely different, and yet the same.

Tom Merry understood now the footprints in the snow on the balcony. They had been made by Lagden, in getting out of the house; and now he was returning in the same surreptitious way. Doubtless he had gone before Tom took up his watch at the window—indeed, it was certain that he had done so; and now Tom was a witness of his return. As the Shell fellow stared at him, Lagden disappeared from the balcony into his room.

"Great pip!"

Tom moved back from the window. He was amazed and perplexed; but he was by no means of Manners' belief yet.

Lagden's movements were utterly mysterious and surreptitious; but the man had a right to get out of the house if he chose. If for some unknown reason he desired to do so, he might not have chosen to go downstairs and risk awakening and alarming the house. It was barely possible, at least, that his movements bore some innocent explanation. For he had left the house empty-handed; that was certain. Had a robbery been committed, Manners, on the watch in



There was a loud exclamation from Hookey, and a muttered imprecation from Lagden, as the library was suddenly flooded with brilliant illumination and Tom Merry & Co. entered the room. "Drop that bag, you scoundrel!" shouted Tom Merry. "The game's up, Dandy!" panted Hookey. "Hook it!" (See Chapter 11.)

the corridors, would have given the alarm. And no alarm had been given.

"Monty, old man!"

Tom Merry shook his sleeping chum by the shoulder.

Lowther started up, rubbing his eyes. He blinked drowsily at Tom Merry in the dying firelight.

"Hallo!" he murmured. "My turn, what?"

"No, no! Listen."

Tom Merry explained in a low voice what he had seen from the window. Lowther stared at him, quite wide awake now.

"My only hat! That's jolly queer, Tom!" he breathed. "Is Manners right all the time, and are we a pair of asses?"

Tom smiled faintly.

"Blessed if I know! But there's nothing tangible against the man. He's gone out and come in again, that's all."

"But he must have had a reason."

"I know! And—it's spoof about his gammy leg. Monty! The way he was climbing showed that his knee was sound enough."

Lowther sat upright.

"That bears out Manners, Tom! If he's spoofing on one point, he's spoofing on another! And—and that bull-necked brute who was hanging about—we wondered why he was risking keeping in the neighbourhood—Manners thinks they're hand-in-glove! Did Lagden go out to meet him, Tom?"

The captain of the Shell started.

That surmise, obvious as it was, had not occurred to him. His face set as he thought it over.

"I—I say, Monty, it looks like it! If they're hand-in-glove, as Manners thinks, the whole affair with D'Arcy and the footpad was a trick to get an entrance into the house, and they're planning a robbery. It couldn't mean anything else."

Lowther whistled softly.

"He got in alone when you saw him, Tom?"

"Yes."

"Then he wasn't letting a confederate into the house?"

"No."

"Blessed if I understand it all!" said Lowther, rubbing his nose. "It looks frightfully suspicious, and yet— What's that?"

The door opened softly.

Manners of the Shell stepped in, without a sound, and closed the door soundlessly behind him.

"You fellows——" His whisper was faint, but it had a thrilling note in it.

"Here we are!" whispered back Tom. "What is it, Manners?"

Manners came over to his two chums in the dimness of the room. There was only a ruddy glimmer from the fire.

"It's as I thought! Lagden has just come out of his bedroom and gone downstairs."

"Oh!"

"I was in the window-recess, only a couple of yards from his door," said Manners, in a breathless whisper. "He came out, and stood listening, and watching for a full minute. I never let on. Then he crept away to the stairs, as quiet as a ghost. I followed on, just as quiet as he was, and watched him over the banisters. You know there's a half-light left on in the hall downstairs. He went into the library."

"Oh!"

"The safe's in the library!" said Manners.

"I—I know."

"Well, what does that look like?" demanded Manners.

"After all I've said to you, are you going to suggest that he's going down to the library for a book he's forgotten, or something?"

"Tom's got something to tell you, old chap," said Monty.

Tom told for the second time what he had seen from the window. Manners' eyes gleamed with excitement in the gloom.

"It's perfectly plain now. I knew that fur-capped fellow was hanging about to see him. Lagden's been out to meet him. And now he's gone down, either to let him into the house, or to pass him the loot from a window."

Tom and Monty were silent.

It seemed likely enough now, almost assured, and yet—if it should be all a mistake—if the man had some innocent explanation to give—Manners read the doubt in their silence, and he broke out impatiently:

"Are we going to stick here doing nothing while Lord Eastwood is robbed? I'm not, at any rate!"

"It looks—it looks"—Tom Merry paused—"it looks jolly suspicious enough for us to chip in, Manners."

"I should think it does!" snapped Manners. "What is that man doing in the library at this very minute?"

"I—I wonder!" muttered Lowther uneasily.

"I don't!" growled Manners. "Either he's cracking the safe, or he's letting in his pal to do it. And I'm going to stop him. Do you think he's gone down to the library for a book, you ass?"

"No. Only, if he has—"

"If he has, he can't be surprised at fellows coming down, when he wanders about the house at past one in the morning."

"That's so," agreed Tom.

"Well, I'm going down!" said Manners. He groped in the fender, and picked up the poker. "I may want this! You fellows come if you like."

"Oh, we're coming!"

Tom and Monty followed Manners from the room.

The great house was still and silent. It was difficult to believe that a wakeful man was lurking below, engaged, perhaps, upon a nefarious robbery. But it was certain, at least, that Lagden had gone down. And the Terrible Three trod softly down the great staircase of Eastwood House, into the old oak hall. Softly, silently, they trod on to the library door.

There they stopped and listened.

It was some time now since Lagden had gone down—ten minutes, at least. It was difficult to suppose that he had been so long looking for a book, or for any other innocent purpose. And there was no gleam of light under the great oak door of the library, and surely an innocent man would have turned on the electric light there.

Neither was there any sound of a movement.

But as the three juniors listened breathlessly, the silence was broken. Something that sounded like metal clinked faintly.

"That does it!" muttered Manners.

He turned the knob of the door, and pushed it open. The great, heavy door swung silently on its well-oiled hinges without a sound.

Tom Merry & Co. stared into the vast, shadowy room, with its great, book-lined walls.

In one spot, as they knew, a dummy bookcase, which opened like a door, concealed the iron safe let into the stone wall behind. Their eyes fixed on the spot at once.

Tom Merry caught his breath.

The bookcase was swung wide open, the iron safe revealed. And the iron door of the safe was open, too; and standing before it was a bull-necked man, in an overcoat, with a bowler hat on the back of his head.

Close by him stood Cecil Lagden, holding in one hand an electric torch to light the ruffian at his work; in the other, a leather bag, into which the bull-necked man was cramming the articles as he handed them from the safe.

The gleam of gold caught the eyes of the juniors, in the light of the electric torch.

They stood dumbfounded for a moment.

The sight was a shock to Tom and Lowther, and even to Manners, stubbornly as he had expected it and believed it, it came as a shock, an overwhelming confirmation of his suspicions.

The two rascals, deeply intent on their task, had not noticed the silent opening of the library door in the distance across the great apartment, did not know that eyes were upon them.

There was another clink of metal, as gold plate clattered against gold plate in the cracksman's bag.

"Careful, Hookey!"

"All O.K., Dandy! They won't 'ear that!"

The whispers, faint as they were, reached the ears of the juniors in the doorway.

Only the evidence of their own eyes could have convinced Tom Merry and Lowther that Lagden was a thief and a scoundrel. But the evidence of their eyesight could not be doubted, astonishing as it was.

Manners whispered:

"Come on!"

He turned on the electric switch inside the door. The library was suddenly flooded with brilliant illumination.

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There was a loud exclamation from Hookey, a muttered curse from Lagden. The two rascals swung round towards the juniors.

"Drop that bag, you scoundrel!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Help!" roared Lowther. "Thieves! Burglars! Help!"

Hookey panted out a curse as the St. Jim's juniors ran forward.

"The game's up, Dandy! Hook it!"

Side by side the two rascals raced for the library window—opened by Lagden for the cracksman to enter.

"Stop them!"

"Collar them!" roared Manners.

Tom Merry & Co. were fairly at the heels of the cracksman as they reached the window. From all over the great house came the sounds of alarm now—the opening of doors, the calling of voices. Tom Merry grasped at Lagden as he was plunging through the open window. Manners and Lowther seized on Hookey and bore him to the floor.

There was a desperate struggle, and the two juniors rolled over and over, fighting with the desperate ruffian.

Lagden spat out a curse as Tom grasped him, and turned savagely on the Shell fellow of St. Jim's.

His scheme of passing the remainder of the night at Eastwood House, and departing unsuspected the next day, was quite at an end now. He was known, and the game was up! He was now only thinking of escape, of getting away before the whole alarmed household swarmed about him. Already footsteps were descending the stairs, lights flashed all over the house.

He swung round the heavy leather bag—heavy with the plunder that was crammed in it.

Crash!

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry.

The blow caught Tom on the chest with terrific force. He spun away, and rolled helplessly on the floor.

The next moment Lagden had leaped from the window.

There was a husky yell from his confederate, fighting savagely with Manners and Lowther, and unable to break loose.

"Dandy! Dandy! Stand by a pal! Lend a 'and here, Dandy, and I'll get loose."

But the Dandy did not heed.

He was gone. And Hookey struggled and cursed furiously, Manners and Lowther clinging to him like cats. Tom Merry staggered up as Wilkinson came dashing into the library, followed by Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, half dressed, and then a dozen others. Hookey, still struggling, was grasped by many hands and secured. But Cecil Lagden, alias the Dandy, was gone, and with him was gone part of the famous Eastwood gold plate.

CHAPTER 12.

A Hot Chase!

WALLY of the Third stood quite still when the two shadowy figures had disappeared among the trees of the deer-park.

He was too overcome for some minutes, with horror and amazement, to be able to think clearly.

The St. Jim's fag was almost inclined to pinch himself to make sure that he was not dreaming.

But it was no dream. It was grim reality. Cecil Lagden—the Dandy, as his confederate called him, evidently a "swell mobsman" of unusual ability—was a thief, who had by trickery obtained an entrance into Eastwood House to let in another thief, the skilled cracksman without whom his nefarious work could not be done. Eastwood House was to be robbed, as Wally of the Third dizzily realised. Even while he stood there, wondering what to do, the two scoundrels were hurrying to the robbery.

The fag moved at last.

Even his beloved Pongo was forgotten now. It was the search for the missing Pongo that had drawn him abroad at that hour of the winter's night. But now he did not even look into the hollow oak to ascertain whether his shaggy favourite was there. His father was to be robbed by those two scoundrels, and somehow or other he had to stop it.

He trod away through the snow towards Eastwood House.

Once, in an open spot in the moonlight, he caught sight again of the two rascals—hurrying. They disappeared from his view once more in the shadows of the park.

The fag hurried on.

But he realised that he could run no risk of being discovered by the rascals he was following. It was very evident that neither of them would have hesitated to knock him on the head without the slightest ceremony. And, apart from what might happen to himself, that would leave the way open for the success of their villainy.

Wally's brain was in a whirl as he wended his way through the snowy, shadowy park.

His first thought was to reach the house and raise the alarm there. But he realised that the cracksmen would be in the house long before he could do so. At the most he could only interrupt them at their work by raising the alarm.

He had time as he followed them towards Eastwood House, to think the matter out more clearly.

Instead of keeping on to the mansion, Wally of the Third headed for the cottage tenanted by Joyce, the head-keeper, at a little distance from Eastwood House, on the edge of the park.

He reached the cottage, wrapped in silence and darkness.

Knock, knock!

There was little likelihood of the cracksmen hearing him, as he judged that they must have reached Eastwood House by that time. But he knocked cautiously.

A window was opened and a face looked down.

"Who—"

"Little me, Joyce!" called back Wally.

"Master Walter—at this time of night!" exclaimed the astonished keeper.

Wally grinned up at his astonished face.

"Get up, Joyce, old bird, and come down, and call Dick! There's burglars in the house!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Two johnnies after the pater's safe!" said Wally.

"Don't stare, old man! Just get a move on! It's not a joke! Buck up, for goodness' sake!"

The keeper stared down at him.

"Master Walter, this isn't one of your larks?"

"Honour bright, old bean! I tell you the house will be robbed if you don't get a move on sharp!"

"I'm coming down."

A couple of minutes later the door opened, and the keeper appeared, half dressed, with a heavy overcoat thrown on hastily. His son Dick appeared behind him, rubbing his sleepy eyes.

"Now, Master Walter—"

"Listen to me, old bean!"

Wally hurriedly explained, the keeper and his son listening with wide-open eyes.

"They'll be in the library," concluded Wally. "I don't know how long the job will take them, but from what they said, the man Hookey will get out of the library window with the loot, and Lagden will go back to his room. Never mind him! We've got to stop the stuff being taken away—see? You two will keep under the library windows, while I get into the house and raise Cain."

"Yes, Master Walter."

The keeper put his gun under his arm, and his son picked up a heavy stick. Then they hurried with Wally of the Third towards the house.

They were about a dozen yards from the library windows when all of a sudden the windows were illuminated brightly as the light was switched on within.

"My only Aunt Jane! That looks as if somebody has given the alarm already!" exclaimed Wally.

"Come on, Dick!" exclaimed the keeper.

The two men rushed on towards the brightly-lighted windows, Wally racing at their heels.

There were the sounds of a struggle from within through an open window. From the open window an active figure



"There he is!" There was a sudden yell from Wally D'Arcy, for against the moonlight the figure of the crackman was seen, on top of the park palings. But the Dandy only remained there for a second before dropping into the road on the other side of the wall. (See Chapter 12.)

dropped out, and staggered with the weight of a heavy bag.

"That's Lagden!" shouted Wally.

Lagden leapt to his feet.

"After him!" shrieked Wally.

Lagden ran almost like a deer. But the bag was heavy, and he would not part with it. The two keepers followed him fast, and Wally kept pace with them.

Through the gardens the desperate man raced, and the pursuers were close behind him as he burst into the park, and dashed on among the trees.

"We've got him!" panted Joyce. "He'll never get over the palings. We've got him!"

"Put it on!" panted Wally.

There were the sounds of more pursuers behind. The chase had been seen in the moonlight from the library windows. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were already joining in the pursuit, and three or four of the men-servants of Eastwood House.

Lagden reached the sunken lane which ran between frozen woods to the old deer-park. He paused, panting, and looked back like a hunted deer.

His three pursuers were scarcely a dozen yards behind, rushing down on him. Farther behind in the moonlight nearly a dozen moving figures could be seen, shadowy on the white carpet of snow.

The Dandy gritted his teeth.

His cunning scheme, so successful at first, had gone to pieces. He did not even know how. Half the rich loot he had schemed for was in the bag in his hand—but the weight of it was telling on him, and he knew that he was losing this desperate race. But he would not, he could not, part with it! And he raced on again, into the deep shadows of the deer-park.

"After him!"

"We'll have him now!"

Lagden disappeared from view among the trees and frozen brambles. The pursuers plunged after him breathlessly. But the rascal had a respite. Only here and there the moonlight fell among the thick trees, and the hunted rascal was dodging in the shadows. To and fro among the trees and tangled branches and brambles they sought him, more and more pursuers arriving and joining in the hunt. All the keepers were out now, and most of the servants and guests at Eastwood House, and the old deer-park swarmed with eager seekers and flashing lanterns, and echoed to shouting and calling.

There was a sudden yell from Wally of the Third.

"There he is!"

Clear against the moonlight the figure of the cracksmen was seen on top of the park palings, but it was only for a second that it was seen. Then the Dandy vanished, dropping into the road on the other side of the wall.

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom clambered desperately over the palings and rolled into the road. He picked himself up and caught a glimpse of a running figure in the distance and dashed in pursuit.

But the Dandy, running hard, vanished into the shadows of the night.

CHAPTER 13.

Pongo!

EASTWOOD HOUSE was ablaze with lights, and from cellar to attic it throbbed with excitement.

The telephone had been at work, and Inspector Watkins had arrived in hot haste from Easthorpe.

He clicked the handcuffs on the wrists of Hookey. That bull-necked ruffian was a prisoner at least, although his confederate had escaped with the plunder.

Inspector Watkins listened with amazement to what the Terrible Three had to tell him. Lord Eastwood was still more amazed.

"Then the whole thing was a trick from beginning to end—a trick to obtain entrance to my house and let in a cracksmen!" he said.

"Evidently," said the inspector. "And this young gentleman seems to have been pretty keen to suspect it."

Manners grinned at his chums. He was justified at last.

"Well, Manners told us what he thought," said Tom Merry, "but we wouldn't believe it. We couldn't swallow it."

"We couldn't," said Lowther. "But Manners was right all the time; no doubt about that. We thought it was all rot when we agreed to keep watch with him, but it's lucky we kept watch."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But who would have thought that that chap would turn out such a waseal! He had vewy nice mannahs, and he dveswed vewy well indeed."

"It was very fortunate for me, my boys," said Lord Eastwood gravely, "you interrupted the two rascals at their work, and they have taken only half, or less than half, of what was at their mercy. I have to thank you for that, Manners—and I must compliment you upon your keenness and perspicacity, which seem to have exceeded my own."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Manners.

"I must confess, Mr. Watkins, that I was quite deceived by that young man," said Lord Eastwood.

The inspector smiled grimly.

"It is possible that the Dandy, as he is called, may be captured yet," said Lord Eastwood. "He had a very narrow escape, owing to the extraordinary circumstance that my youngest son was out of the house at that late hour, and called the keepers. They are still searching for him, and he may be found."

"It is quite possible, my lord. I shall be very busy to-night, and I hope you may have good news in the morning."

And Inspector Watkins took his leave, taking the scowling and savage Hookey with him.

There was little more sleep in Eastwood House that night.

Most of the St. Jim's fellows sat up till morning, and Manners of the Shell found himself the hero of the hour.

With the dawn of the winter morning Tom Merry & Co. hoped to hear news that the fleeing Dandy had been secured.

But there was no news of him till breakfast-time. Then Mr. Watkins telephoned that a man answering to his description had been seen at a place four or five miles distant, having seized a motor-cycle by violence and left the owner half-stunned in the road.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "If the feahful wottah has got hold of a motor-bike he's fah enough away by this time. I am wathah afwaid that the poor old pater will not see his gold plate again."

"It's rotten," said Tom Merry.

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"Yaas, wathah! But we're all fwithtfully obliged to you, Mannahs, old man, if you will allow me to make the wemarak again," said the swell of St. Jim's. "The awful wottah has got away with stuff worth about five thousand pounds, but it would have been a loss of ovah ten thousand if the bwutes hadn't been intewwupted. You've done us a good turn, Mannahs, and no mistake."

Wally of the Third came into the breakfast-room, tired, and muddy about the boots, but with a cheery expression on his face.

"Got him!" he said.

"What?"

"That's splendid!" exclaimed Blake. "Where was he bagged?"

"In the deer-park," said Wally of the Third joyfully. "Ripping, isn't it? I had an idea that he would sneak back there, you know—and he did. I got Joyce and his son to help me, and we rooted him out."

"Hurrah!"

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "But we've just had news that he was seen miles away from here, Wally!"

Wally stared.

"That's rot!" he said. "How could he be seen miles away from here, when he was rooting in the deer-park all the time?"

"But what did he come back for?" asked Monty Lowther in astonishment. "He got clear away all right. He must have been potty to come back."

"Eh? Rot!" said Wally. "Why shouldn't he come back? He got fed up with wandering, of course. He always does, in the long run."

"What?"

"Which?"

"Fed-up with wandering!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yes. I say, he looked awfully lean and hungry," said Wally. "I've left him in the stables now having a good feed."

"Wha-a-at?"

"And I've got the chain on him now," said Wally. "I'm not trusting him again—not for the present, at any rate. It's a bit too much of a worry to have him running loose."

The St. Jim's juniors stared blankly at Wally.

"In the name of all that's idiotic, what are you talking about?" hooted Tom Merry.

"Eh? Pongo, of course!"

"Pongo!" yelled the juniors.

"Of course! Didn't I say we'd found him in the deer-park—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You uttah young ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see where the cackle comes in!" said Wally. "We've found him in the deer-park. I thought he would come back there sooner or later, all the time. I've chained him up in the stables now, and he's having a jolly good feed. That's what I want, too! Shove the ham this way, Gussy! Make yourself useful if you can't be ornamental!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"You young ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing. "We thought you were talking about the cracksmen—the Dandy!"

"What rot!" said Wally derisively. "Catch me worrying about any old cracksmen when I was looking for Pongo. The poor old chap looked as lean as anything. I fancy he was rather glad to be found. I was going to give him a jolly good licking for getting lost; but the old beggar smuggled up to me, and so, of course, I couldn't! I'll keep the chain on him for a bit."

Wally of the Third started breakfast, and the St. Jim's juniors chuckled. Evidently Wally was satisfied with the way things were going now that Pongo was found at last and was safe on the chain.

During the following days the birthday-party at Eastwood House hoped to hear news that the "Dandy" had been taken and the gold plate recovered, but the news did not come.

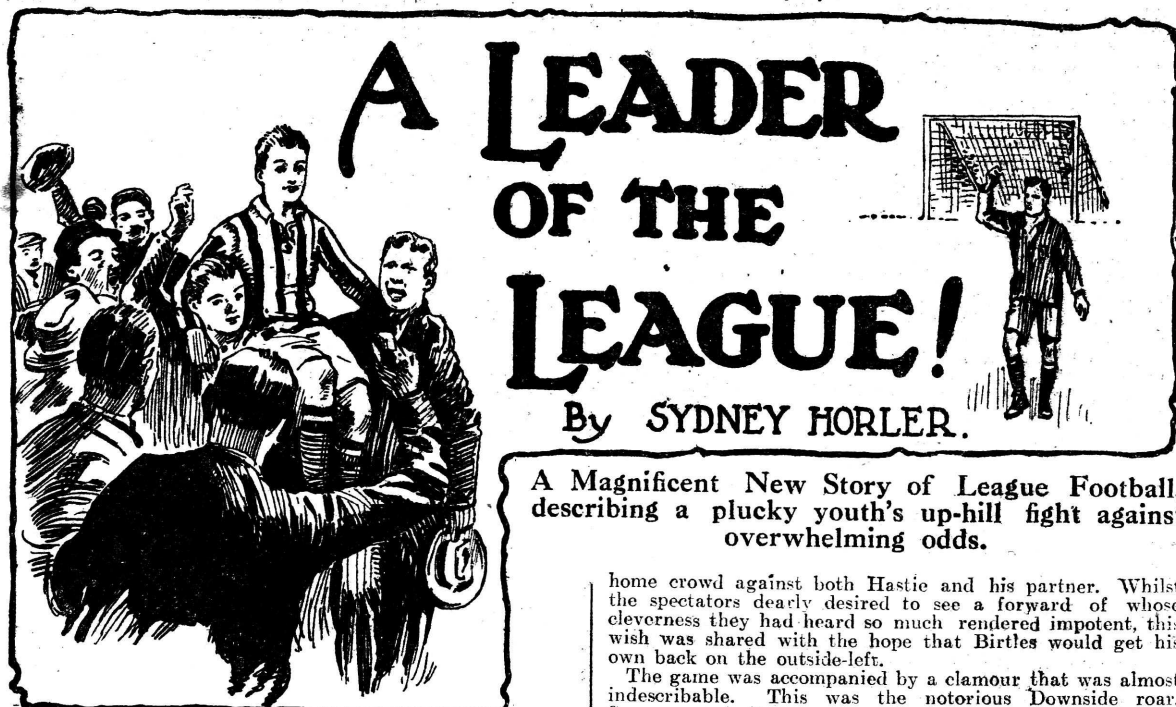
Far and wide the police and detectives were searching for the Dandy, but he had vanished, and with him the loot from Lord Eastwood's safe had vanished also. His lordship preserved an imperturbable calm upon the subject, but there was no doubt that he felt the loss keenly. But there was no news as the days followed one another—the Dandy had vanished. No one expected to see him again anywhere near Eastwood House.

But it was the unexpected that was destined to happen, and ere long the party at Eastwood House were to learn that they had not yet seen the last of him.

THE END.

(Don't miss the sequel to this magnificent story next week, chums, entitled: "Pongo Plays Up!" By Martin Clifford. You will vote it absolutely GREAT!

FOR FIFTY POUNDS! Ben Travers may have taken a back seat in Springdale footer since the Managing Directorship passed from his hands, but for all that he has sworn to crush Dick Hastie. And one man, for a "consideration," is willing to carry out Travers' fell purpose!



A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE!

By SYDNEY HORLER.

A Magnificent New Story of League Football, describing a plucky youth's up-hill fight against overwhelming odds.

Downside Gets Desperate!

DICK HASTIE had not caught the full meaning of his partner's warning; his mind was too occupied with the run of the game. Seeing an opponent with the ball he did the instinctive thing, running forward to the tackle.

The next moment he involuntarily uttered a sharp moan of pain. Birtles' left elbow had been driven into his stomach with vicious force. Unable to make the tackle, Dick reeled away, and Birtles, a malicious grin on his bad-tempered face, rushed onward.

He did not proceed very far, however, for whilst the home crowd were yelling with delight at the discomfiture of the visiting captain, that sturdy veteran, Bob Layton, putting forth a sprint that was an eye-opener, drew up alongside the Downside right-half, gathered his compact form together, and gave Birtles a real old-fashioned shoulder charge. The right-half staggered, lost control of the ball, and then fell to the ground. "Foul!" yelled the crowd.

The referee smiled, waved the clamouring Downside players away from him, and, with a motion of his arms, ordered the game to proceed. Of course, it was not a foul. Bob Layton's charge had been heavy, but it had been perfectly fair. The pity is that such good, honest, robust tactics have fallen into disuse in modern football. How much better are they than the sly ankle-tapping and ingenious tripping of which we see so much to-day?

The incident was the means, however, of arousing the

home crowd against both Hastie and his partner. Whilst the spectators dearly desired to see a forward of whose cleverness they had heard so much rendered impotent, this wish was shared with the hope that Birtles would get his own back on the outside-left.

The game was accompanied by a clamour that was almost indescribable. This was the notorious Downside roar. Savages encircling a victim at the stake might well have paid respect to the inflammatory cries of this modern football crowd. There was a savage note in the cries that set the nerves on edge.

"Tackle him, Joe! Good old Joe! Get into him, Joe!" Dribbling with the ball, Dick heard the cries, remembered the bony elbow that had been so foully used against him, and swerved aside.

"He's funking you, Joe!" now came the savage cry; and Hastie was so incensed at this untruthful charge that he halted for a moment. When the man Birtles came rushing up to him he foiled him neatly with a quick back-heel which sent the ball out to the waiting Layton, and then addressed a word to his scowling opponent.

"Can't you try to play the game, Birtles?" he asked. "I'll smash you before we're through!" was the meant-to-be intimidating reply.

"Carry on with your smashing!" said Dick, feeling that this creature was beneath contempt. "Only I should not advise you to go too far, otherwise I'll be waiting for you after the game."

A minute later the two came into collision once more, and once more Birtles applied that left elbow of his in a sickening manner.

Unable to control himself, Dick caught the man's shoulder and hurled him away.

"Chuck him off!" yelled the crowd.

The referee held up his hand in an endeavour to ease the clamour, and then called both players together.

"It was you who started this, Birtles," he said sternly; "and I warn you if I see any more of it you will be sent off the field."

"What about this feiler?" sneered the Downside right-half.

The referee replied promptly.

"Hastie's played a perfectly clean game all the

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

DICK HASTIE, a young fellow of twenty, and a born footballer, whose father,

ROBERT HASTIE, suddenly disappears, leaving behind him a host of clamouring creditors. Believing in his father's innocence, and holding himself responsible for the money entrusted to his father, Dick publicly announces that he will stay in Springdale until every penny has been wiped off.

DAVID MARTIN, Hastie's staunch friend,
JAMES BURN, a "live-wire" reporter on the "Springdale Gazette."

BENJAMIN TRAVERS, one of Mr. Hastie's creditors, and managing-director of Springdale Albion. Dick's enemy.

Some time elapses after Mr. Hastie's disappearance, and so strong is public opinion that Benjamin Travers is forced to give Dick a place in the Springdale eleven. This move on Travers' part is the beginning of a foul conspiracy, for Travers wants to see Dick out of the way. But the rife scheme falls flat, however, with the result that Travers is forced to resign his directorship. A new board of directors takes control, and Hastie is handed the captaincy. With his inexperience, but determined team-mates, Dick sets out to improve the Albion's low position in the League. It is an uphill task, but Dick acquires himself well. Then, when his fortunes are in the ascendant, comes news from his father to the effect that he is returning home.

The Albion are playing against Downside, when Dick learns that Mr. Garrity, a member of the Selection Committee, is watching his play. In the opposing eleven Birtles, an unscrupulous player, makes a dead-set at Dick, and, with the roars of the crowd ringing in his ears, the burly Downside right-half charges down upon the young captain of Springdale!

(Now read on.)

way through," he said. "I tell you again I won't have any more of this nonsense! If you can't play the game, I'll send you off. Understand?"

Birtles turned away with a half snort, but it was evident that the words of the official had had a sobering effect.

Maddened yells of execration were going up from the crowd during this brief stoppage. That "the spoilt kid of Springdale"—as Dick had been dubbed—should not be ruffled by the best fouler in the home team was a circumstance that the crowd could not accept without protest. Pandemonium reigned, and the home players, encouraged by the fierce cries of the crowd, threatened to lose all self-restraint. The example set by Birtles had become infectious, and even the stern warning of the referee looked likely to be ignored.

For a couple of minutes the play was desperate. Then a voice, clear and loud, rang out over the field.

"Keep your temper, boys!"

Dick Hastie, in time, had remembered his captaincy duties. Whatever temptation his comrades were suffering, they must remember their own self-respect and the cause of their club.

Instantly a change was seen in the game. The visiting players held themselves well in hand, and the referee, who had temporarily lost his sense of authority, promptly whistled up any fresh infringement by the Downside team.

Dick felt relieved. It had been an awkward situation, but, thank goodness, promptness had saved it. He did not mind a section of the crowd jeering him, because he had the satisfaction of knowing that his command had been instantly obeyed by his comrades. The threatening attitude of the Springdale players died down—responding to their captain's exhortation, they were now out to play the game, and nothing but the game.

But what followed was a nightmare. A referee, however competent an official, cannot see everything that takes place, and the Downside men were pastmasters at rendering their opponents partially hors de combat.

For the rest of the initial half many of the visitors were brutally handled by their opponents, yet they kept themselves well in hand, and, as long as they were on their feet, played fine football.

But the result was inevitable, of course; the Albion players were put out of their stride, and were not permitted to show the class of football of which they were capable. Even the fine combination of Hastie and Layton was upset. Neither was allowed to settle to his true game, and whilst both made heroic attempts, the nett result was not satisfactory to either. Each man could only do his best and leave the rest to Fate and the referee.

The latter, fortunately, was a very able official. Otherwise, the game would have degenerated into merely a desperate scramble. Mr. Howard Hartley had had experience of the Downside crowd before, and, in spite of the

growing threatening attitude of the spectators, he would not let himself be intimidated.

This was the reason of his pointing to the penalty spot when there was only a minute left for play in the first half. Once again Birtles, the home right-half, had offended, pushing Dick Hastie in the back when the visiting captain was bearing down upon the home goal.

Instantly the ground became a Bedlam! The crowd stormed and raved against this award, and the home players clustered round the referee, some of them even going so far as to catch hold of his arms and protesting violently.

Mr. Hartley shook himself clear with an effort.

"Hands off, all of you!" he ordered sternly. "Not only shall I award a penalty, but Birtles will be sent off the field!"

Watching the right-half leave the playing pitch was, of course, a fresh inducement to the crowd to become unruly; but the tumult was not so absorbing but what many were able to see Bob Layton place the ball to his liking on the penalty spot and bang it without hesitation past the home goalkeeper.

It was a tense moment and an unforgettable scene—the scowling Downside team, the almost maddened spectators, and the ball in the back of the net, with the Albion players jubilantly shaking hands with the successful marksman.

Then came the whistle.

"Get into the dressing-room quick, boys!" advised Bob Layton, and himself led the way at a smart trot.

Hero Worship!

IT was perhaps as well that, realising the possibility of awkward trouble, the inspector of the local police, who was on the ground, had ordered reinforcements. The constables had previously taken up a position near the entrance to the dressing-rooms, and under cover of this guard the visiting players safely reached their quarters. But even as the door closed they could still hear the threatening cries of the home crowd.

"Disgraceful!" declared David Martin. "A disgraceful scene, and I'm sorry that you lads have had to bear the brunt of it. But never mind, boys; you proved yourselves sportsmen, and no one can say the contrary."

Just then came a tap on the door and a voice muttered:

"Mr. Martin, you're wanted in the directors' room."

It had been a surlily spoken invitation, but David Martin promptly availed himself of it. He was anxious to give the home directors a piece of his mind.

Then the voice at the door spoke again.

"And you're to bring your skipper with you, too."

"Come along, Dick," said Martin. "I don't know what it means, but you can rely upon me to stand by you."

If Hastie had imagined that he was in for anything in the nature of a rebuke he was most agreeably surprised when he entered the directors' room and was promptly confronted by a man whose face denoted that he wished him well.

The man who held out his hand for him to shake was Mr. George Garrity, the Football Association councillor, who had proved such a good friend to him in the past.

"I congratulate you, Hastie," said Mr. Garrity directly the door was closed.

The speaker looked at the young footballer with keen, appraising eyes.

Dick felt his hand gripped strongly. He wondered what was due to happen, and sensed drama in the air.

This was quickly forthcoming.

Mr. Garrity turned to the home directors.

"I have asked Mr. Hastie to meet you, gentlemen," he said, with a slow smile, "because I think, if you will give him the opportunity, no doubt he will be pleased to inform you how to make a team play clean football. I take this opportunity of informing you gentlemen also that unless you make your side adopt different tactics from those they displayed in the first half it will be my painful duty to report the Downside F.C. as being unworthy of retaining their place in the English League."

Leaving the discomfited Downside directors to ponder over this smashing statement, Garrity drew Dick on one side.

"I thought it might encourage you to know, young man," he said, "that I am suggesting you as a member of one side in the International Trial Match next Saturday."

Dick could scarcely speak.

"But I've played a pretty rotten game to-day, sir," he managed to remark at length.

"You haven't been at your best, I know," was the reply; "but I've got sufficient faith in my judgment to know that

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I can spot a footballer when I see one. Now go back, and let me see what you can really do. I rather fancy your opponents will behave themselves better this half."

The wonderful news made Dick feel that he was stepping on air. He had barely time to whisper to David Martin what Garity had said before the team had to take the field again.

Evidently some of the Downside directors had spoken to their men, for there was less evidence of vicious intention to foul right from the start of the second half. The visitors were consequently allowed to show more of their proper play, and the Albion front line soon jumped into its true form.

Dick Hastie and Bob Layton became brilliant. It was true that the home side were a man short, but the visitors' left wing would have run through any defence in the country on the form they showed in the last half-hour of the match. Dovetailing in almost uncanny fashion, they outwitted the home defence time after time. Between them they scored three goals—Dick Hastie claiming two, and Bob Layton one. The last was a really marvellous effort, for Layton at the time of shooting was almost on the touch-line and at an acute angle. Yet the ball entered the net at an amazing speed, the home goalkeeper having no chance.

Gopher, in the meantime, had performed prodigies of valour for his new club. At first the crowd had mocked his somewhat uncouth appearance; but they would have been better employed in saving their breath, for Gopher only required this taunting to bring out all the natural—or, perhaps, unnatural—ability he possessed. Time after time he left his goal on what seemed a forlorn chance. When everything appeared lost he would make a disconcerting dive at the feet of an oncoming forward in the manner of a Rugby full-back, tackling low, and invariably he would emerge from the subsequent scrum with the ball safely hugged to his chest. Then the lifting of an ungainly leg, and the ball would be punted safely into touch. Gopher certainly emerged from his first ordeal with shining colours.

It was a very jubilant party that made the return journey to Springdale that evening. To beat Downside by four clear goals was a wonderful performance, in spite of the fact that the opposition was a man short for half of the game; and when the news became known that their skipper was to play in the International Trial Match on the following Saturday every member of the side clustered round Dick, offering his congratulations.

It had been a very remarkable day for Hastie, and the strain to which he had been subjected was beginning to show by the time the train reached Springdale. Here, however, a fresh situation had to be faced. The platform was black with people. The news of the Albion having beaten their deadly rivals by four clear goals had aroused the town to a state of the wildest enthusiasm, and those supporters who had not been able to make the journey to Downside had determined to give the victorious eleven a hearty welcome back.

Before Dick could imagine what was about to happen he found himself and Layton hoisted on to the shoulders of the men who pressed into the saloon. Despite their protests, both players found that escape was hopeless, and in the end both came to the decision that the best plan they could adopt was to submit to this hero-worship with as good a grace as was possible.

Out of the struggling throng a procession was soon formed, and this marched in triumph down the railway platform. At an hotel which stood in the main street that ran at the bottom of the railway incline a halt was made. The leader of the enthusiastic reception party then alarmed Hastie and Layton by saying that the crowd was deter-



Once more Birtles' left elbow sawed into Hastie's stomach in a sickening manner. Unable to control himself, Dick caught the man's shoulder and hurled him away. (See page 23.)

mined not to disperse until both players had said a few words.

"Not me!" exclaimed Layton, thoroughly alarmed. "Dick Hastie's the one to do any talking," he added.

"Coward!" returned Dick humorously; and then, anxious to get home and be at peace, he turned to the man.

"What is it you want me to say?" he asked.

"Oh, anything you like!" was the answer. "You can see what state the crowd is in—almost mad with excitement at the team having done so well to-day. Just a few words, Mr. Hastie, if you wouldn't mind."

"Yes, go on, Dick!" added Bob Layton, anxious to get out of the ordeal himself.

Dick Hastie shrugged his shoulders humorously. He had never made a speech in his life, and he scarcely knew what to say. But, still, if it meant doing Springdale Albion a bit of good—

The appearance on the hotel steps of the young captain of the Albion team was greeted with loud cheers, and it was some time before quietness could be obtained.

It was during this lull that the captain of the Albion side said the few sentences which he had composed so hastily in his mind.

"On behalf of the Springdale Albion team," he said, "I want to thank you one and all most heartily for the very kind welcome you have given us to-night. I need scarcely tell you that every one of us feels the honour most deeply. We feel it, not only on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of the club—which is an infinitely more important matter. The game to-day was a very hard one, and for a time no one thought that we should win eventually by such a big margin. Thanks to Bob Layton"—loud cheers greeted the mention of the old International's name—"we pulled it off, however. It was a splendid win, and I'm not going to say we didn't deserve it in the end." (Terrific applause.)

"I can only tell you, in conclusion, friends, that we hope the victories against Downside will be the forerunners of many other good wins. You can safely depend upon the team to do their very best. And now, as we're all very tired, please let us go home quietly."

But, though the main portion of the crowd were anxious to accede to the captain's wishes, there was a section which would not rest content until Bob Layton had been dragged out and made to add a few words to what Dick Hastie had already said.

"I'm not much of a speaker," stammered Bob. "As a matter of fact, this is about the first speech I've ever made in my life, and I hope it will be my last; but, since you have forced me to spout, I want to tell you that no team in the country has a finer skipper than Springdale Albion." (Loud cheers.) "Dick Hastie is a fine young chap." (Cheers.) "It's a pleasure to play alongside of him." (Renewed cheers.) "He's done wonders already, but he's going to do more yet. And here's a bit of news for you—he's been picked to play in the International Trial Match next Saturday. Considering the short time he's been in big football, this must be something of a record. And now"—waiting until the fresh tumult of cheers had died down—"we're all very tired, and Dick Hastie has said, so please let us go home in peace."

It was only then that the crowd finally dispersed, chattering eagerly about the news that had been given them.

Re-enter Benjamin Travers Again!

LIFE is full of strange contrasts. Whilst Dick Hastie was being carried in triumph through the main street of the town, there was another man in Springdale closely connected with the fortunes of the Springdale Albion Club, who sat not a mile away, wrapped in the gloomiest thoughts. This man was Mr. Benjamin Travers, the former chairman of the Springdale Albion Club. Travers was at home—at home to his thoughts; and, judging by the expression on his face, they did not constitute pleasant company. The truth was that Travers had seen himself beaten—beaten hopelessly by a mere slip of a lad, and this lad was none other than the son of the man he hated most in all the world.

In the case of Travers versus Hastie he had been the loser. Now, Benjamin Travers, not being a sportsman, did not like losing, and moreover, there were certain facts in this case which aggravated in a grievous manner his wounded vanity.

Time had been, and not long before, when he had held a certain amount of power in his native town. He had never been popular in the real sense, but he had been looked up to because of the position he held. Now he had lost that position, and the memory was bitter to him. How to humiliate the son as he had humiliated the father? That was the problem to which he was trying to find a solution that night.

Over the telephone he had already received the news of the wonderful victory the newly-constituted team had gained that day (4-0 on the Downside ground). It was a win which the old team would have been incapable of gaining. Every match since the new directorate had achieved power had been won. This, also, was a mortifying thought for Benjamin Travers.

With an oath, Travers turned again to the decanter by his side and helped himself liberally to its contents.

He looked at his watch. Five minutes past eight. That fellow Burleigh was late again. He would have to teach him that an appointment was an appointment.

Rising from his chair, the ex-football director commenced to pace the room. He was in a black mood. The thought of the youth whom he would have crushed to the earth

rising triumphantly from the ashes of despair taunted him mercilessly.

Suddenly he started. A knock had come on the door. The noise agitated him for a moment, and in that moment he looked as a criminal might look just before the hand of justice fell upon his shoulder. Then, recovering himself, he called:

"Come in!"

"Someone to see you, sir," said the servant.

"Show him in."

The next moment Burleigh, the former centre-half of the Albion team, slouchingly entered the room. He eyed Travers questioningly, fumbling with his cap, which he held between his hands.

"Why weren't you here at eight o'clock? Don't you know that I hate being kept waiting? What do you mean by it—eh?" commenced Travers in his bullying fashion.

The footballer took a step forward.

"I don't like that kind of talk, and I won't have it—see?" he declared. "I know too much about you, Ben Travers, to stand that. A word from me and you know what would happen."

Travers slunk back. The other had called his bluff, and he was not man enough to answer it. In that moment it was Burleigh who looked the dominating figure of the two.

"What do you want to see me about?" now demanded the footballer.

"I have a proposition to make to you, Burleigh."

"A proposition, eh?" sneered the other. "Well, let's hope there's some money in it, because it's money I want. In fact, I should not have come here to-night if I hadn't wanted money. I want a fiver, and quick—see?"

Travers restrained the hot reply which had already formed upon his lips.

"You can have fifty pounds, Burleigh—fifty pounds if you're willing to listen to sense."

The footballer sprang forward so quickly that he caught Travers' arm.

"Fifty quid! I'd do almost anything for fifty quid! What's at the back of your mind? What have you been brooding and plotting about, eh?"

"Let go my arm!" ordered the former director, with some return of his dignity. "How dare you put your hands on me? I'll have you thrown out of the house!"

If Travers' intention was to try to regain the mastery over the other, the scheme badly failed. Burleigh became infuriated. His eyes blazed beneath lowering brows.

"Throw me out of the house! Bah!" he sneered. "For one thing you couldn't do it, Travers, and for another thing, if you called the police, do you know what I'd do in return? I'd have you flung into gaol! That would keep you quiet for a bit, I'm thinking. But what about this fifty quid?" he went on, in a sudden change of voice. "You're a dirty cur, Travers, but, as I said before, I'd do almost anything for fifty quid!"

Benjamin Travers controlled his twitching features. Picking up the decanter, he poured his visitor out a stiff drink.

"We don't want to get heated, either of us," he said in a tone of conciliation. "Sit down and have a drink, Burleigh."

This was a Benjamin Travers of whom the other had had no previous experience, but a drink was a drink, and Burleigh, with a suspicious look at his host, complied with the request.

"Ah, that tastes good!" he said, after swallowing half his drink. "Now then, what is it you have at the back of

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IN THIS WEEK'S "MAGNET"!

your mind? You haven't brought me here on a fool's errand, I hope?"

Travers waved the suggestion aside airily.

"Of course not. And look here, Burleigh, I'm sorry for what I said just now. As a matter of fact, I've had rather a bad time lately, and my nerves are getting the better of me; but I've certainly a proposal to make to you— Won't you have another drink?"

Yes, Burleigh was perfectly willing to have another drink, and while he was disposing of this fresh supply of liquid refreshment, Benjamin Travers watched him critically. Could this man be relied upon? Would he keep his mouth shut? In other words, would he be a safe person to entrust with a very dangerous secret?

At length Burleigh laid down his glass.

"Now I'm ready to hear all about it," he said; "and let's have no more beating about the bush. Fifty quid, you said. I suppose you want me to do something dirty for it?"

Travers temporised.

"Fifty pounds is a lot of money, but I'm quite willing to pay you that if you will carry out a little scheme which I think will appeal to you."

"What is it? I don't like so much of this fine talking. I'm blunt myself, and I want you to be for once, Travers."

"I will be blunt," answered Travers, with a change of voice. "I take it that you have no great love, nor great admiration for the boy Hastie?"

Burleigh's reply took the form of an oath. He gritted his teeth as he said:

"I hate him! You know that! If that fellow Tunney had had the pluck of a rat he would have done him in the other night! But what happened? Hastie talks him round, and now the fool is going to join up with the Albion again! What do you think of that?"

"I think that Tunney is a weaker-minded individual than you are, Burleigh. I can't imagine Hastie talking you round."

"Bah! I'd like to see him try to do it! Is this precious scheme anything to do with Hastie?"

Travers poured himself out a drink.

"It is," he said. "Now listen. You may not know it, but our young friend has been selected for further honours. On Saturday next he is to play at Middleham in the International Trial Match."

Watching the effect these words had on his listener, Travers continued in a quicker tone:

"In order to get to Middleham Hastie will be bound to travel on Friday evening. Now, Burleigh," he added, "it will be to my advantage if this young man is made to disappear. What do you say?"

Burleigh scowled.

"Do you want him popped off for good?" he asked. "I'm not particularly anxious to have a rope round my neck, you know."

Travers laughed uproariously.

"You're not nervous, surely, Burleigh? Nervous of a mere boy! And as for popping him off for good, as you put it, I haven't said anything definite on that point! What I want is for Hastie to leave this country. Haven't you any seafaring friends to whom you could hand him over?"

Burleigh considered for a moment.

"When do I get the fifty quid?" he asked. "That's the main point."

"You get it," replied Benjamin Travers slowly, "directly I receive proof that Hastie is out of this country, and not likely to return. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"I shall want notes, mind. No bloomin' cheques for me!"

"You shall have notes," was the answer.

"And what about the police?"

"The police will never hear anything of it if you play your cards safely."

Burleigh considered again.

"Right!" he said. "I'll do it! And Heaven help you, Travers, if you try to doublecross me after I've done it! Good-night!"

He rose awkwardly, and lurched from the room without another word.



As the train entered the tunnel, Dick Hastie did not see the slinking figure that groped its way towards the corner he occupied. (See page 28.)

In the Dark!

IT was with a growing sense of excitement that Dick left his lodgings on the following Friday evening. As George Garrig had prophesied, he was due to play in the International Trial Match at Middleham on the following day; and, as there was no convenient train on Saturday morning, he was forced to make the journey overnight.

Carrying a suitcase, as well as his football-bag, Dick arrived at the station in time, and selected a corner seat. Before the train had steamed out, a crowd of at least a hundred people had gathered on the platform to wish him good luck in the game on the following day. Amongst these were David Martin, "Andy" Anderson, and Bob Layton.

"Mind you bring back your cap, Dick!" said the latter. "We shall be expecting it."

"I wish you were playing with me, old man!" Dick told his partner.

"Oh, you'll be as right as ninepence, whoever you play with!" was the old International's retort. "Just think it's an ordinary game. Don't get nery, and you're bound to be a success. Isn't he, Mr. Martin?"

"Of course, he is," readily replied the chairman of the Springdale Albion club.

Five minutes later the train steamed out of the station. There were not many passengers, and Dick had the carriage to himself. Picking up one of the papers he had bought at the bookstall, he concentrated his attention on what were considered the prospects for the game on the following day. The writer gave it as his opinion that England, if she wished to regain her place as the leading country in Soccer, must find new blood and fresh talent to fill the inside-forward positions.

"The policy of playing young Hastie is to be commended," Dick read. "Although he has been such a short time in big football, and although he is now only playing for a Third Division team, good judges are all agreed

that there is about this youngster's play a distinct touch of genius. If he can only reproduce his club form to-morrow, he is almost certain to get his cap. If he does not, many true football lovers in this country will want to know the reason why."

Dick felt a glow of just pride as he read this commendation. It was wonderful to think how much had happened in so comparatively short a time. Most of his troubles, big as they had seemed a few weeks back, were now solved. He had had an interview that morning with the manager of a local bank, and this official had told him that sufficient money had been sent from Canada to pay all Robert Hastie's debts.

"Not that in the strict sense they could be called debts," said the manager. "I am not in a position to tell you, my dear boy, exactly why your father so hastily left Springdale—no doubt he will do that upon his return, which I anticipate will be a quick one—but the worst crime he committed was in running away without cause. I am convinced that he had no real need, and that his action was due to a sudden and unaccountable loss of nerve. But you can take it from me, Hastie, that when all the circumstances are inquired into, not the slightest reflection will be cast upon your father's name."

That, naturally, was splendid news for Dick to hear. The world, indeed, had seemed golden as he stepped out into the busy Springdale street after this interview. His position with David Martin was a rapidly improving one, and by the time his father returned to the town, he need have no fear but what his dad would be proud of him.

Then, again, he had made good in football—his dearest ambition. Altogether, there was probably not a happier youth in the country at this particular moment than Dick Hastie.

He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he did not notice the malicious face peering in at him from the corridor. Had he done so, he would instantly have sprung up to defend himself, for the attitude of the slinking figure was suspicious in itself.

Five miles out of Springdale, on the way to Middleham, the train plunged into a long tunnel. At the same instant the electric-light in the carriage unaccountably failed.

The blackness was intense. Dick could not have seen his hand in front of him. Consequently, he did not notice the assailant who crept in from the corridor, and groped his way towards the corner the young footballer occupied.

Dick was only conscious of danger by hearing forced breathing. Instantly he sprang to one side, warned by a sixth sense that danger was near.

He was too late, however, to ward off the attack that his mysterious foe launched at him. There was a whistling sound through the air, and his right arm instantly throbbled with agonising pain.

This was sufficient for him. Hurling himself forward, Dick launched a desperate, haphazard left-swing, which met nothing but the empty air. But the breathing of his assailant gave the other man away, and within another couple of seconds Dick was at close grips. Backwards and forwards, the locked figures swayed. The darkness was still so intense that Dick could not see his foe's face. That the man was strong, however, he soon found to his cost; but the feeling that he might be incapacitated for the trial match on the next day gave him an added force, and, instead of weakening, he pressed forward his attack with renewed vigour.

Back, back he pressed the man. Now he had the fellow's throat between his hands!

(It was indeed a critical moment for young Dick Hastie—and his prospects for the morrow were none too rosy. Look out for another powerful instalment next week.)

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