

SCORNE

This week's extra-long story of the
Chums of St. Jim's.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

No. 942.
Vol. XXIX.
February 27th,
1926.

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



A NEAR THING FOR ERNEST LEVISON!

His clothes already ablaze, Ernest Levison's only chance of escape from the burning mill was to plunge into the stream
(See the Grand School Yarn Inside.)

THE OUTSIDER! At one time Ernest Levison was perhaps the biggest outsider St. Jim's had ever sheltered inside its walls. But he reformed and reinstated himself in the good opinions of his Form-fellows. Now comes proof that he is the "old" Levison, the breaker of bounds, the smoker, the gambler. And as a natural consequence he is—

SCORNE BY THE SCHOOL!



A Dramatic Story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, featuring Ernest Levison.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 1. Levison Explains!

"CARDEW, old chap—" "Cheerio, old bean!" Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, smiled lazily as his chum stopped him in the passage; yet he looked a trifle curiously at Ernest Levison's rather strained face.

"I've been trying to get a chance to speak to you since you came back last night, Cardew," said Levison quietly. "It was jolly decent of you to do what you did yesterday afternoon, and I'd like to thank—"

"My dear man, consider me thanked!" interrupted Cardew, raising a hand in mock distress. "You know how I hate heroics, Ernie. Let it go at that. I assure you that I quite enjoyed putting the giddy kybosh on that chery hot-air merchant."

"But it wasn't hot air," said Levison, in a low tone. "You don't know what you saved me from, Cardew. If that brute Snelson had got the chance to speak to Doris—"

He shuddered.

"So the merchant's name is Snelson—what?" said Cardew, his handsome face becoming more serious.

"Yes."

"He seems to know a lot about you, Levison," said Cardew, eyeing his chum fixedly. "He looks like a tramp; but he speaks like a public-school chap—if he doesn't act like one."

"Yes."

There was a pause.

"Look here, Levison," said Cardew, speaking abruptly. "Why not tell Clive and myself all about it? We're your giddy pals; we'll help you, if we can! Cough it all up, old bean!"

"You've already helped me, Cardew," said Levison gratefully. "And I know you'll help me more if you could. But you can't."

"You never know, old top!"

"Well, perhaps you can," muttered Levison. "I'll tell you all, Cardew, though you know most of it, and it's a wonder you haven't guessed the rest."

"I fancy I can guess it!" smiled Cardew grimly. "But

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go on, Ernie, old nut! It's to do with that letter you got the other day, isn't it?"

Levison nodded.

"Yes. The letter was from Wharton, at Greyfriars, my old school, Cardew. It warned me that Snelson had been hanging about there, and that Snelson had staid he was coming to St. Jim's to see me. Wharton knew he meant mischief, and he was good enough to warn me to be on my guard. Well, Wharton was right. Snelson's come here—he's hiding in that ruined shepherd's cottage on Wayland moor—and he's out to do me all the injury he can, Cardew."

"I saw that from the way he spoke yesterday afternoon," said Cardew. "He struck me as being rather a spiteful, dangerous sort of a snake, Ernie."

"He's all that. I know him only too well, Cardew. We were pretty thick at one time at Greyfriars—blackguards both of us," said Levison, flushing. "He was sacked and I was sacked. But, whereas I—well, I stopped acting the fool, he seems to have gone worse and worse. He's been sacked from another school for card-playing and betting, and now he's run away from home because his father was sending him to another school—a school he claims is a kind of reformatory."

"Phew!" remarked Cardew. "And now he's down and out?"

"Yes. He's an outcast—starving and tramping the country," said Levison, his voice low. "He's worse than a tramp; a tramp does know how to live without working. Poor old Snelson doesn't, and can't get work. He came here starving—a pitiable wreck, Cardew. And—and he blames it all on to me; he hates me with a bitter hatred for it all. He's determined to do me all the harm he can."

"But that's rubbish, Levison! You're not responsible for what another chap makes of his life."

"But I am—I feel I am, and he knows it!" said Levison, his face flushing with shame. "I was the fellow who taught him to gamble, to smoke, to set authority at naught. I was the fellow who influenced him. I used to take a delight in leading him on in the old dorm. He was a weak sort of worm always—a crafty, crawling sneak. You can imagine how I feel about it now, Cardew. I'm sorry—bitterly sorry for what I did now! I'm sorry for the poor wretch, and I'd give anything to undo all I've done!"

"You reproach yourself too much, Levison, old son," said Cardew cynically. "From what I saw of the chap he's a giddy merchant who would have gone to the bow-wows in any case."

"I don't know," said Levison. "In any case, he blames me for what he's come to. I mean to make amends if I can. I've offered to supply him with clothes and food for the time being. I've offered to write to my father, asking him to find him a job. I've offered to do all in my power to make amends. But—but he won't let me, Cardew."

"He's out for revenge—what?"

"Well, not if he can get what he wants," went on Levison thickly. "He's lost all sense of honour and decency; he's got other plans. He wants to batten on me, and on the fellows here. He's picked up some shady card tricks from somewhere. He's got more knowledge of betting than is good for him. He wants to stay round here, Cardew—to make a living out of the silly fools who go in for such rotten games. He's nothing less than a card-sharper and a swindler now."

"Phew. So that's his game!"

"Yes. I refused, of course, to aid him in his blackguardism. Then he showed his teeth. He vowed to show me up—to tell the Head here all about my past and why I was kicked out of Greyfriars."

"But the Head already knows all that, and has forgiven you, Levison!"

Levison nodded.

"Yes. I told him that; I defied him to do his worst. He was raging with fury and disappointment. Then he got to know about my sister coming. And he knows how terrified I am of Doris getting to know what an out-and-out-rotter I was in the past. You can guess the rest."

"Naturally," said Cardew grimly. "That was why you asked me to keep an eye open in case the rotter tried to meet your sister at the station yesterday afternoon?"

"It was. And I was right; he did try. But you were on the spot, Cardew," said Levison gratefully. "You got the cad away—how, goodness knows!"

"It was easy enough, my dear man," smiled Cardew. "I just collared the merchant and shoved him in a taxi. Then I ran him out to Wayland and dumped him there. He was fairly frothing at the mouth!" grinned Cardew reminiscently. "He fought and scratched like a giddy wild-cat. But there's something I don't quite cotton on to, Ernest. Why, if you defied the merchant, were you caught by Merry and Lowther smoking and card-playing in that giddy cottage? You know the fellows are all talking about it. That's not all. Those cheeky little rips in the Third—D'Arcy & Co.—claim they caught you with Racke and some other cheery gay dogs smoking and carding there yesterday afternoon."

Levison coloured, and hung his head.

"That's true enough," he said, shame-faced. "I was. I've told you what Snelson's ultimatum was. Well, I gave way to him—I had to do so. I couldn't bear the thought of Doris getting to know what a rotter I used to be—especially from the lips of that sweep. I caved in at last—meaning to stop it the moment Doris had gone and the danger was past."

"Yes; but—"

"I'll tell you," said Levison, clenching his fists. "It was yesterday afternoon. We were playing cards, and all that when young D'Arcy and his pals came round the cottage with Pongo—rattling, I believe. Anyhow, they spotted us through the window, and Wally shied some turfs in at us. Racke chased them away; but my brother Frank, who was with them, stayed. He—he was very much upset at seeing me up to my old games again."

"He would be," remarked Cardew.

"He was; he refused to go away without me," said Levison, with a gulp. "He's a good kid, Cardew. Anyhow, Snelson saw his chance to show his spite. He tried to make young Frank join us at the rotten cards."

"That did it," resumed Levison, his eyes flashing. "Snelson's idea was that, as I had tempted and influenced him to play the blackguard in the past, it would be a fine joke for him to tempt and influence me—my young brother. So he tried it on. I knocked the hound down and told him to do his worst—that I was done with him. Then I walked away, after sending Frank home."

"And then you came on to the station?"

"Yes. I knew the rascal would be raging and vicious; I knew he would go straight there, hoping to meet Doris and carry out his rotten threat. He would have done, too, but for you, Cardew."

Levison finished. His face was heavy and downcast. Cardew himself was looking thoughtful now.

"He's rather a teaser, Ernie, old lad," he said. "I saved you yesterday, old top; but methinks that ragged merchant won't take that as his Waterloo. Rather not! How long is your sister staying with the Head's wife?"

"A day or two, I believe."

"H'm! You're not much better off then, Levison. The cheery blighter is bound to get into touch with Doris some time or other."

"I know it only too well," groaned Levison. "We can't be always watching that he doesn't meet her, Cardew. I tell you, it's pretty hopeless. I shall have to see the sweep again. I must!"

"It's rather a puzzler to know just what to do, certainly," agreed Cardew, rubbing his nose reflectively. "We must get our intellectual motors working, Ernie, old bean. I fancy—Hallo, here's the noble Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came along the passage, and Levison abruptly left his chum and walked away. Since he had been caught smoking by Tom Merry & Co., Levison had not been at all friendly with the chums of the School House. He walked away, his brow dark and bitter. It was hard—very hard—that his old reputation, which he was trying so hard to live down, would persist in rising up against him. Yet it was natural enough—he realised that—that the fellows should think he was sliding back into his old ways again.

For some moments after his chum had gone Cardew chatted amicably with Arthur Augustus, and then he went out into the quadrangle for a stroll before morning lessons. And the first thing he saw—and heard—was Taggles, the school porter, arguing with someone at the gates.

He was a ragged, down-at-heel individual—a youth of Cardew's own age, with white, thin features and crafty, shifty eyes. Cardew recognised him at a glance.

"Snelson, by Jove!" he murmured. "He's an earlier bird than I had expected him to be. Now for it."

He ran up to Taggles, who was, apparently, refusing the youth admittance.

"Hold on, Taggy!" said Cardew. "I want to see this merchant."

"Which it's a tramp," grunted Taggles, opening his eyes wide. "He wants to see Master Levison. Though how Master Levison come to know—"

"I'll see him for Levison, Taggy," smiled Cardew. "You shunt off, old nut!"

Taggles grunted, and, with many curious glances at the two, he retired into his lodge, banging the door after him. It was plain that Taggles didn't approve of tramps visiting St Jim's.

Snelson eyed Cardew with glinting eyes.

"You!" he hissed. "It was you who tricked me yesterday—you who stopped me seeing Levison's sister, hang you!"

"Little me," smiled Cardew, unperturbed. "You've come to see your dear old pal Levison, what?"

Snelson snarled.

"I've come to do what you prevented me doing yesterday," he snarled. "I've come to see Miss Levison. But before I see her I'm going to tell Levison what he can expect, the hound!"

Cardew affected to look suddenly alarmed.

"Don't do that!" he said hurriedly. "Levison wants to see you—to make terms with you!"

"Oh!" Snelson grinned—an evil grin. "Oh, does he? I rather fancied he'd toe the line. Well, where is he?"

"I'll fetch him," said Cardew. "Hold on, though. You can't be seen here, Snelson. Come along!"

Cardew didn't give the ragged youth the chance to refuse. He slipped through the gates, and then started off at a trot alongside the school wall. Snelson hesitated, and then he followed, though his face was suspicious.

At the end of the wall, where the hedge bordering the playing-fields joined it, Cardew dived through a gap.

"Come on!" he called. "It'll be time for morning lessons soon. Buck up!"

Snelson dived through the gap after him.

"Look here——" he began savagely.

But Cardew was off again, running alongside the school wall. At that spot the wall overlooked the playing-fields, and after running for a few seconds Cardew stopped at a low lean-to shed.

At sight of it Snelson glared suspiciously as he stopped, breathless and panting.

"No games now, hang you!" he hissed. "If this is——"

"My dear man, what a suspicious individual you are," smiled Cardew. "You just wait here for Levison. He may not be long, but I fancy he will."

With that Cardew leaped like a panther on to the ragged youth, who yelled furiously and hit out. The next moment they were struggling and fighting furiously.

But it was an unequal contest from the first. Cardew was all steel and whipcord, whereas the youth was half-nourished, and weak from exposure and privations of his vagabond life.

Inch by inch Cardew forced the struggling, kicking, and scratching youth to the door of the shed. Holding him fast, he wrenched open the low door and kicked it wide. There followed a mad, furious struggle in the doorway, and then

Snelson went reeling backwards into the low interior of the lean-to shed.

He collapsed on the brick floor, gasping and panting.

"You treacherous rotter——" he panted.

Next moment Cardew had sent the door crashing to. There was no padlock, but the fastenings were still there, and with a peg of wood Cardew made the door secure. Then he hurried back to the School House. The bell for morning lessons was just ringing, and Cardew strolled into the Fourth Form-room with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his face. Several fellows noted the marks of combat on his features, but he did not satisfy their curiosity.

CHAPTER 2.

A Stunning Blow!

"LEIVISON, old bean!"

Cardew joined Ernest Levison as the two came out of the Form-room after morning lessons. Levison's brow was clouded, but there was a new, determined expression on his clean-cut features.

He looked round as Cardew spoke.

"Well?" he asked, with sudden hope. "Have you thought of anything yet—anything to get me out of this rotten fix?"

Cardew shook his head.

"I know I oughtn't to expect your help in a matter like this, Ralph," muttered Levison miserably. "But I can't expect you to advise me to defy the rotter, and I can't expect you to advise me to give in to his demands, either. But—but I thought perhaps——"

"You thought I might have hit on a wheeze to give him his Waterloo," said Cardew, shaking his head sadly. "Alas, no! I can only offer my humble advice, Ernest——"

"And that is——"

"It's like this, old bean," said Cardew in an unusually grave and earnest tone. "It's not for me to preach, or to give good advice on giddy conduct, and so forth. That's for fellows like dear old Thomas, our respected junior skipper to do. I haven't such an untarnished shield as he has. I've been a bit of a goer in my time, and I may be again. Who knows? But—but——"

"Go on."

"My advice would be to let him rip," said Cardew coolly. "Let the spiteful, scrubby beast do his merry old worst, you know."

"And tell all to—to Doris?"

"Exactly, old nut!" said Cardew. "Let him tell all. If Doris—for whose common-sense I have no end of respect—believes him, I'm a Dutchman!"

"But I can't deny anything. It's true what he will tell her—or most of it."

"Well, I don't think even that will matter much," said Cardew. "It won't be pleasant hearing for her, I'll admit. But you've got our testimony and dear old Merry and his pals' testimony to back you up and to prove that the old bad days are done with. I don't really think Doris will take it as badly as you think. It's what you are now that matters."

"You think that, Cardew?"

"Yes. I don't like to see you being led by the nose—blackmailed by that sweep, Levison. It's not like you," went on Cardew, his usual bland and cynical manner gone for once. "And that's not the only reason, Ernest. It's a thundering pity that you should chuck up all the respect and popularity you've earned just at the bidding of that sweep. You've already done yourself no end of harm, old bean. Fact! You've lost your place in the team through it, and the decent chaps are ratty about it. Take my tip. Biff that frowsy merchant a good old biff on the boko, and let him rip!"

Levison nodded. His face suddenly cleared.

"Thanks, Cardew!" he said quietly. "As a matter of fact, I had almost decided myself to do that. I've been thinking it over in classes. I biffed him yesterday. But I was sorry afterwards, fearing he would keep his threat. I thought of seeing him again and climbing down."

He coloured.

"It was feeble—I see that now. I shall see him and tell him to do his worst, the hound!"

"Good man. You'll find him in the old lean-to shed—the one against the school wall looking on the playing-fields, old nut."

Levison stared at him.

"What—what do you mean, Cardew?"

"What I say, old top," said Cardew coolly. "The early bird came to catch the giddy old worm just after brekker. I spotted him, and saw his game. I flured him to the giddy shed, and fastened him in there."

"You—you mean that Snelson is fastened in that lean-to shed now?"

"Yes. Right on the wicket, Ernest!" smiled Cardew. "Go and deal with him now—and give him an extra point-five from me. By Jove! I'll come along also; I'd like to see you wade into him no end!"

Levison smiled queerly.

"I sha'n't touch him," he said quietly. "I can't forget that he owes most of it to me. I'm sorry for the poor wretch even now. I couldn't hit him. I hit him yesterday, it is true, but I had lost my temper. I wish I hadn't touched him. Anyway, I'd rather you didn't come along, Cardew, thanks."

"Pleasure yourself, old bean. Trot along there now, then. But mind your giddy eye. I should think he'll be frothing at the mouth by this time!"

With a cool nod Cardew strolled on. Levison stood a moment, and then he got his cap and hurried out of doors. It had been a wretched, miserable morning for Ernest Levison. He had known that at any moment Snelson might carry out his threat. His sister Doris and her girl chum Ethel Cleveland, who were staying with Mrs. Holmes, would in all probability go out for a walk that morning, and most likely Snelson would be on the look-out for them—might ask at St. Jim's for them.

But the anxiety was over now. Levison had made up his mind to take Cardew's advice and defy the rascal. He felt curiously light-hearted as he ran round to the shed in the playing-fields. He would defy the rascal—tell him to do his worst, and that he had finished with him. Then he would seek out his sister and confess all—would tell her all before Snelson had the chance.

He heard a furious hammering from within the shed as he ran up, and he smiled as he withdrew the peg and flung wide the door. The next instant Snelson, his thin features ablaze with passion, staggered out, blinking in the wintry sunshine.

He glared at Levison, his face working with rage.

"You rotten cad, Levison!" he hissed. "You—you've played me one of your old tricks again! But it won't save you, hang you! I'm out to ruin you, and I'll do it. If your sister's gone——"

"My sister hasn't gone, Snelson," said Levison, keeping back his anger with an effort. "I've come to tell you that you can go to her, and you can do your worst!"

"You mean that?" snarled Snelson. "Yet you fastened me in here!"

"My chum did it, unknown to me—he did it to help me," said Levison quietly. "Stand back, Snelson! You know you can't handle me, so just keep your temper in check. I've stood as much as I can stand from you. But I still mean to help you all I can. I'll provide you with clothes, and I'll give you every penny I can. I'll also ask my father——"

"Cut it out!" said Snelson, with a nasty sneer. "I've told you I don't want that sort of help, Levison! I've told you what my plans are. Refuse to help me with them, and you'll bitterly regret it!"

"I do refuse to help you to swindle chaps from St. Jim's," said Levison quickly. "In a weak moment I agreed, and joined you. But I refuse now, flatly."

"I'll ruin you, then!" hissed Snelson. "I'll get you sacked from St. Jim's! Your father and the Head here won't forgive you a second time, Levison! I'll ruin you!"

"You can't do that, Snelson," said Levison calmly. "The Head here—and my father—already know about my past. They have forgiven me long ago. All you can do is to try to shatter my sister's faith and trust in me, you cad!"

Snelson laughed. It was a laugh that made Levison eye him quickly, uneasily.

"So you think that, Levison?" said Snelson, his eyes glinting with malicious satisfaction. "Well, you're offside, my precious saint! What about the night before last? And what about yesterday afternoon? What if the Head of St. Jim's heard about that?"

Levison started.

"What do you mean? Do you think that the Head would believe what you said about me? If you are thinking of that—of splitting about that—you might as well drop the idea. The Head would never accept your word, you rotter!"

"But he might accept the evidence of his own eyes," grinned Snelson, taking something swiftly from his pocket. "He might believe if I showed him proof—like that!"

As he spoke he held out something before Levison's alarmed eyes. It was the print of a photograph. It was a photo of the inside of a room—a bare, dilapidated room; with hanging plaster and broken woodwork, dusty and shattered. It showed a large packing-case, used for a table. On the table were coins and playing-cards and cigarettes. Round the table were seated four figures, and though the photo was none too clear, it showed up the faces and figures well enough.

Levison recognised them at a glance, and he staggered back with a cry. Three of the players round the table were



Before Frank Levison could examine the contents of the package the door of the cottage was suddenly thrust open and Snelson appeared upon the threshold. He was panting and gasping, but as he sighted the bag with the package in his grasp he leapt at him like a tiger. The two went crashing to the floor. (See Chapter 3.)

Racke, Croke, and Mellish; the fourth was himself. All were smoking, and their faces, feverish and excited with the gambling fever, were not healthy to look upon.

"How's that?" smiled Snelson cruelly. "Suppose I showed that to Dr. Holmes—that's his name, isn't it?"

"You—you crafty villain!" breathed Levison.

He stared at the photograph and at the crafty face of Snelson dazedly, a sudden, sickening dread clutching at his heart.

"How—how did you come by that, Snelson?" he muttered dully. "You—you must have taken that photo! You must have taken that photo when you went out of the cottage yesterday afternoon, saying you wanted a breath of fresh air. Oh, you rascal!"

Snelson chuckled.

"Right on the wicket!" he said. "I found a camera on the moor the day before yesterday. You remember that some of the chaps from your school came butting in when we were playing the same night? They came to see me about it—they imagined I had found it. They went away with dust in their eyes."

"I see," said Levison, his face going white. "So you found Manners' lost camera after all, you rotter! You took that photo with it!"

"I don't propose to deny it," grinned Snelson. "It is a jolly good camera. It's turned out thundering useful to me! It's given me just the hold over you, my pippin, that I wanted! I was afraid the picture wouldn't come out very clearly; but it has—clearly enough for my purpose, anyhow!"

And Snelson laughed aloud.

Levison made a step towards him, his hands clenched, his eyes gleaming dangerously. But just as suddenly he drew back again. Even if he could take the proof from the rascal, he would have the film in a safe place—he would not be fool enough to carry it about with him.

Snelson guessed his thoughts and grinned.

"No good playing any games, Levison!" he grinned. "This is only a print, remember. I've got the film in a safe place. I wasn't such a fool as to bring that with me—what? Well, what about it? Are you going to finish with me now you've seen this?"

Levison stood motionless. His face was grey with misery. Only a moment ago he had been congratulating himself that he was ready to meet the worst that the rascally outcast could do against him—was ready to face his sister's look of distress and dismay. He had steeled himself to tell her all, hateful as it would be to her and him. He could have snapped his fingers at the rascally Snelson then.

But he couldn't now. Through his own weakness—through his dread of his sister hearing the truth—he had given in to the rascal, and had gone back to his old ways again, meaning to stop the moment the danger was past.

And this was what it had led to. It had placed him more than ever in the power of the ruthless, vengeful outcast—the fellow who laid his own downfall at his—Levison's—door.

Levison knew only too well what it would mean if that photo reached the Head's hands. It would spell ruin for him—utter ruin and shame—and also misery and disappointment for his father and Doris and all who had trusted him.

His past was against him. Levison had been forgiven once; he would never be forgiven a second time, as Snelson had said. He would be expelled in disgrace, with no hope of mercy being shown him.

He would have to agree to the cad's demands—it was his only choice. He must make terms with him—for the time being, at least.

Snelson read his thoughts, and chuckled again.

"Well, what's the answer, Levison?" he asked coolly. "You always were a keen chap. But I fancy your keenness won't find you a way out of this. You'll have to toe the line, my beauty! Shall I expect you to-night?"

Levison stood without speaking for a moment. Then he nodded.

"Good! It'll be like old times, won't it, Levison?" said Snelson, with a bitter sneer. "The old times when you taught me to gamble and smoke, what? Right! Tell Racke and those other fellows I shall expect them, too. They know better than to refuse."

Levison looked at him.

"They know about that photo, then?" he asked dully.

"Not yet. But I frightened them into thinking I'd taken one of them the Saturday before, though I was miles from here then. The wheeze struck me when I heard them say they'd been at the cottage," grinned Snelson. "They fairly got the breeze up, and agreed to join in quickly enough then. Tell them to come. And bring some clobber for me to wear, Levison. It's time I was out of these rags now."

"Right. I'll come, Snelson," said Levison quietly. "You've got your way, you hound! I'll come. But I'm not standing any swindling, mind you! Any card-sharpping and I'll show you up for the rascal you are!"

With that Levison was turning on his heel, when he paused.

"If you'll wait here I'll bring you some clothes if I can smuggle them out," he said curtly. "Wait! You'd better get inside that shed again in case any of our fellows happen to be about."

"Good man!" smiled Snelson.

Levison moved away, his face showing his deep, hopeless misery. Snelson grinned after him, and then he slipped inside the shed, lighting a cigarette as he did so. As he disappeared inside a figure slipped into view from behind a thicket alongside the school wall a yard from the shed.

It was Frank Levison. He stared after his brother, white-faced, as he vanished through the gap in the hedge. For a moment Frank hesitated, as if undecided, and then his face set and he crept towards the door of the shed.

CHAPTER 3.

Frank Does His Best!

FRANK LEVISON had heard all and seen all. He had spotted his brother just going through the gates, and he had gone after him at a run, hoping to get a chance to speak to him—a chance he had been longing for since that meeting at the cottage the previous day.

He had been surprised to see Ernest dive through the hedge on to the playing fields, and he had followed, not thinking of shouting after his brother. It was only when he was quite close to the lean-to shed that Frank had felt thankful he had not thought of shouting.

He had stopped short then—stopped in utter dismay as a possible reason for his brother visiting that shed had occurred to him. He had gone there for a quiet smoke.

But even as the thought occurred to him, he saw Snelson stagger from the shed, and he had dived into the shelter of the thicket quick as thought.

Frank had had no thoughts of eavesdropping—far from it. But he knew his brother would be angry with him, and he had kept in hiding, hearing all and seeing all. With fast-beating heart and trembling limbs he had stood there until Ernest had vanished, and then, almost sick with dismay at what he had heard, the fag slipped from hiding.

And as he did so the daring idea occurred to him.

It was a desperate idea, but Frank was also desperate in that moment.

Setting his teeth, he crept to the open doorway of the shed, his footsteps making no sound on the grass. He reached it, and then he recoiled with a startled gasp.

Snelson was just within the doorway, leaning against the post smoking. He jumped as the fag appeared like a ghost before him.

"Here, what—Hallo! It's you, young Levison!" he said with a sneer. "What's this game, kid? I—"

He got no further. Like a young terrier Frank Levison leaped upon him and tore at his coat.

"You young hound!" gasped the outcast, staggered before the fury of the fag's attack. "Why, I'll smash—Oh, that's your game!"

His voice ended in a startled yell as Frank suddenly tore a hand free and snatched something from Snelson's coat pocket. It was the print, and before the ragged youth had recovered himself Frank was jumping away.

Just in time Snelson shot out his foot, and the fag tripped over it and went headlong, with the older fellow sprawling over him.

There was a brief, furious struggle, and then Frank Levison, active and slippery as a cat, tore himself free and leaped to his feet.

The next moment he was racing away at top speed, tearing the photo to strips in his hands as he ran.

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"You young hound!" roared Snelson, almost raving with fury. "Come back! I'll make you squirm for this, you little rat!"

He scrambled up and went in chase, shouting threats and savage imprecations. But Frank was in the lane by this time. He stopped running just outside the school gates. He was panting and breathless, but triumphant—for the moment.

He finished tearing the print into small pieces, and then he scattered them before the wind with a deep gasp of relief.

"That's done the cad!" he whispered to himself. "Ernie's safe now—safe! Thank goodness I stayed and heard all! I'll run and tell Ernie what I've done. He won't be angry when I tell him—"

He broke off suddenly, his face the picture of utter dismay.

Quite suddenly he had remembered Snelson's sneering words about the film. In his excitement Frank had forgotten that destroying the print was useless if Snelson still possessed the film.

The dismayed fag groaned.

"I must get it somehow!" he muttered feverishly. "I must! Oh, what a fool I am! If only I knew where the brute—"

He paused, and his eyes gleamed once again with determination. Then, without hesitation, he turned his back on the gates and tore off up the Rylcombe Lane as hard as he could race. There was a chance, and the loyal fag meant to make the most of it.

He would miss dinner, he would doubtless be late for afternoon classes, and he was breaking bounds; but he cared nothing for that. It would mean a terrific licking from old Selby; but a licking was nothing in face of the danger to his brother.

That dangerous film must be found and destroyed at all costs!

Alternately running and walking, Frank reached the stile leading on to Wayland moor at last, and made straight across the moor for the tumbledown cottage, which Snelson had made his home. It had already occurred to the plucky fag that Snelson might, after what had happened, guess what he intended doing.

The thought made him stumble on faster. He was breathless and panting hoarsely when the ruined cottage came into sight at length.

The door was unfastened—there was no means of securing it from the outside—and Frank dashed in, and started a feverish hunt with scarcely a pause to regain his breath.

The lower room was much as he had seen it the day before—except that the signs of habitation were absent, obviously hidden.

But he soon found them—rugs and foodstuffs and other rough comforts hidden in the packing-case. But the film was not there. Nor did a search of the cupboard reveal it. Then Frank noted the loose boards in the floor, and wrenched them up, panting with eagerness.

Again he was disappointed. Except for the playing-cards and cigarettes the hole beneath was empty.

"I must find it," breathed Frank. "Oh, if only I could!"

The back room proved to be absolutely bare, and Frank rushed upstairs. A bed of straw and a rug were on the floor, but save for those the room was bare.

Frank rummaged among the straw and rug, but the film did not come to light, and he started to examine the floorboards. Almost at once he found a loose one that had obviously been disturbed recently.

He got his fingers in a crack and tugged. It came up easily, revealing a wide cavity between the ceiling joists. In the cavity was a camera, and a small paper package.

It was Manners' missing camera, and the package—

Frank Levison snatched it out and straightened himself. As he did so his heart leaped, for sounds of running footsteps came from outside. Then he heard the door below crash open and heavy footsteps on the stairs.

Frantically the fag tore at the package—he had no doubt it was the film. He was too late, however. The next instant Snelson appeared in the doorway. He was panting and gasping, but as he sighted the fag with the package in his grasp he leapt at him like a tiger.

The two went crashing to the floor, Frank Levison falling with the weight of the older fellow above him. They rolled over, Snelson fighting to snatch the package from the fag's hand.

He grabbed it at last—Frank was half-stunned by the fall, and he was almost helpless in the grasp of the bigger fellow. A savage blow sent him rolling away, and Snelson jumped up with the package in his hand.

"You little rat!" he hissed. "It struck me some minutes after you'd gone that you or your dashed brother would try this on. But I've beaten you. Now get out!"

Frank Levison stood, panting. He knew it was useless to attack the rascal afresh. His chance was gone—he had

failed. Another minute and he would have been able to destroy the film.

It was a bitter thought, and, without answering, Frank moved to the staircase and descended, Snelson following. The rascal was grinning now.

"Hold on!" he said, as Frank made for the cottage door. "You heard all your brother and I were talking about this morning?"

Frank nodded dully.

"Well, I mean what I said—every word of it," grinned Snelson. "Your brother will come here to-night—he can bring those clothes with him then. If he doesn't he'll regret it. And you'll come, too, kid. Got that!"

"I won't come," said Frank quietly. "My brother would never let me, in any case."

"Yes, he will," said the rascal, with an evil chuckle. "Tell him I say he's got to bring you. He knows how keen I am to get you into our merry circle. He'll be delighted—I don't think! You'll come."

"I won't!" Snelson laughed and lit a cigarette. Then he held out the packet to the fag.

"Take one," he grinned. "You may as well make a start now, kid. You've got to toe

the line like your dashed brother. Take one or I'll—"

He broke off as a quick footstep sounded outside. Then a shadow darkened the open doorway of the cottage. Frank Levison gave a startled cry as he saw who stood there.

It was Eric Kildare—the captain of St. Jim's.

He eyed the scene in amazement for a moment. Then his eyes fell on the cigarettes and his face darkened.

"What does this mean, Levison?" he snapped. "What are you doing here?"

Frank said nothing. He was overcome with dismay.

"I was cycling back from the village, and I saw you start out across the moor, Levison minor," said Kildare sternly. "I wondered what game you were up to at this hour. I didn't expect this, though. Come with me, you young rascal!"

Frank nodded, and went past him out of the cottage. Snelson opened his mouth to speak, but a look from the stalwart Kildare caused him to close it again. Kildare followed the fag out, and the two started back across the moor, Frank trotting to keep pace with the senior's long strides. Not until they reached the lane where Kildare's bike lay did the captain speak again. Then he turned to the fag.

"Now tell me what this means, youngster?"

Frank was silent.

"Do you hear me?" snapped Kildare angrily.



In the beam of light from Jameson's torch Wally D'Arcy stood up on the roof, holding on to the squat, small chimney with one hand. Then, as Curly Gibson handed up the brushwood, he started to stuff it into the smoking aperture. "That'll smoke Racke and those other rotters out!" chuckled the reckless Third Former. (See Chapter 6.)

"I—I can't tell you, Kildare," stammered the hapless fag. "Very well. Were you going to accept the cigarette that—that fellow was offering you?"

"No—I swear I wasn't, Kildare!"

Kildare nodded, his keen glance searching the fag's frank face.

"Right!" he said briefly. "I'll accept your word on that, Levison. I've always known you for a decent kid. But you've no right to be out here at this hour. And St. Jim's fellows are not allowed to consort with disreputable-looking characters like that fellow appears to be. You know that, youngster?"

"Y-yes, Kildare."
"I shall take no notice of this," said Kildare. "But I propose to keep an eye on you in future, Levison. Let there be no more of this. Now cut off!"

"Thank you, Kildare," faltered Frank.

And he cut off, watched by Kildare. The fag was almost sick with dismay and disappointment. He had failed in his expedition—failed dismally. And that was not all. He knew his brother was under suspicion of shady practices. He now knew that he was also.

The run back to the school was a miserable one for Frank Levison. He arrived back in time for classes, but the knowledge that he would be caned by Mr. Selby for missing

dinner did not make him any the happier. It was a miserable morning for the Levison brothers—and the day was not ended yet.

CHAPTER 4. In the Depths!

ERNEST LEVISON managed to smuggle a suit of his old clothes out of the School House and down to the playing-fields—though it was far from being an easy task. But he managed it without being seen, and he hurried with the bundle to the lean-to shed behind the school wall.

He started on finding the place empty.

He waited some minutes with growing impatience, and then, realising that Snelson had gone, he hid the parcel in one corner of the shed and walked back. If Snelson had gone, Levison would have to get them that night and take them with him to the cottage. He intended to take the rascal the clothes in any case.

He was puzzled now, as well as moody and dispirited. He could not understand why Snelson had vanished—little dreaming of the truth. It made him more than uneasy.

With a troubled brow he entered the School House and made his way to Racke's study. He knocked and turned the knob; the door was locked. But as he called Racke's name, the door was unlocked and he entered.

There was a haze of cigarette-smoke in the room, and after he had closed the door Racke produced a cigarette from behind him and grinned at Levison.

In the old days Levison had been "thick" with Racke & Co., but of late he had given the shady black sheep a wide berth; a fact that had made Racke hate him with a bitter hatred.

But now Levison seemed to have changed to his old ways, Racke & Co. were only too pleased to be friends with him again.

"Take a pew, Levison, old top," grinned Racke. "Have a smoke?"

Levison ignored the packet of cigarettes held out to him, and Racke's eyes glinted.

"Funk a smoke here—what?" he sneered.

"No," said Levison curtly. "I've brought a message from that—that chap Snelson, Racke. He wants you to go there to-night for a game or two. He asked me to tell you. I'm doing so; but if you'll take my tip you won't go."

Racke looked at Levison sharply.

"Oh, and why not?" he asked curiously. "Are you going, Levison?"

"Yes. But that's no reason why you should, Racke. If you'll take a tip from me you'll give that hound a wide berth. He's an out-and-out rotter!"

"Yet you mean to go," smiled Racke. "Look here, Levison; there's something dashed queer about this. I thought you'd given up the merry old pace for good and become a Good Little Georgie? Why should you start again now this fellow Snelson's turned up?"

"That's my affair, Racke!"

"It's queer," grinned Racke. "Has the merchant got a hold over you like he has over us? I suppose that's it. It's rather funny, though. If you mean to go to-night, why did you buff the blighter yesterday and tell him you'd finished with him?"

"Mind your own dashed business!" said Levison savagely. "I came to give you Snelson's message, as I promised to. You can please yourself if you go or not."

"I'm going to please myself," grinned Racke. "No need to get waxy, Levison. We're in this together, and I'm jolly glad to see you've stopped acting the goody-goody business. I'm rather keen to know a bit about this fellow Snelson. Sit down and have a smoke."

Levison bit his lip. It made him rage inwardly to see Racke's sneering grin. He knew perfectly well that Racke knew he was under Snelson's thumb, and that what he was doing was under compulsion. Apparently Racke only guessed the reason, and wanted to know details.

"I'll tell you nothing, Racke!" he snapped. "I don't want your smokes, and I don't want your dashed friendship, you sweep!"

Racke's eyes glinted.

"You won't smoke here, yet you'll smoke and play your old games quickly enough at that hovel," he sneered. "You rotten hypocrite, Levison! You want to let Merry and the others think you a saint, while all the time you're— Here, keep off, you cad! None of— Yoooop!"

Crash!

Levison was in no mood for Racke's pleasant remarks. His fist shot out, and Racke went down with a howl and a crash. Levison walked to the door, unlocked it, and slipped out. He found Cardew, his chum, just passing.

Cardew eyed Levison's angry face queerly.

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"Was that dear old Racke who yelped just now?" he queried.

"Yes. I knocked the cad down," said Levison quietly.

"Good man! I hope you did the merry old same to that blighter Snelson," remarked Cardew. "I've been on the look-out for you, old bean; I'm dyin' to hear what happened!"

Levison's flushed and angry face changed. He shook his head glumly.

"I didn't touch him, Cardew," he said thickly. "I'm done; the brute's got me tight. I can't defy him."

"My dear man, what do you mean?" asked Cardew.

Levison told him of his interview briefly and moodily. Cardew whistled as he listened.

"Phew!" he murmured, shaking his head. "You've fairly landed yourself among the giddy ribstones, Ernie, old top. What a goer that merchant is! What are you goin' to do about it?"

"What can I do?" said Levison bitterly. "I daren't defy him now; I've got to toe the line, as he calls it. I shall agree—and have done—for a time, until I can think of a way out. But—but, look here, Cardew! Don't mention this to Clive, will you—yet?"

"Not if you'd rather I didn't, old bean," said Cardew, who seemed quite dismayed for once. "Well, this is rather a staggerer, y'know. We must put our giddy heads together, and try—Hallo, here's dear old Thomas! I fancy he's after you, Ernie."

Tom Merry was "after" Levison. He came up to the two, and he looked at Levison. Cardew sauntered away, looking very thoughtful and disturbed.

"Look here, Levison," said Tom Merry. "I've been wanting a chance to speak to you since yesterday afternoon. You know what about, I fancy."

Levison nodded without speaking.

"I couldn't speak when the girls were with us at tea; I had to treat you as usual," said Tom steadily. "But I'm going to speak to you straight out now. I told you yesterday afternoon that I would drop you from the team, Levison."

"You did. I don't blame you for it," said Levison.

Tom seemed rather taken aback.

"You admit, then, that you are in the wrong?"

Levison nodded slowly.

"I'm glad of that," said Tom Merry, in relief. "You've been a jolly decent chap for a long time now, Levison."

"Thanks," said Levison, rather sarcastically.

"You know what I mean, Levison," said Tom, a trifle curtly. "I am not the only one to be sorry to know you've started your old silly games again. But as the skipper of the junior team, that sort of thing won't do for me. I said I'd drop you, but I've been thinking it over since, Levison. You're too good a man to lose."

"Thanks again," said Levison.

Tom flushed at the bitter sarcasm. He was conscious vaguely that he was not speaking at all diplomatically. But he went on somewhat angrily.

"You can drop that attitude, Levison," he said. "You know what I mean well enough, and how I mean it. What I want to say is this: I'm ready to overlook what I saw myself, and what young D'Arcy claims to have seen, and what you owned up yourself when I tackled you. You've only got to give me your word that smoking and that sort of foolery shall stop, and the place in the team is open for you. That's fair enough."

It was—Levison saw that just as he saw the friendliness that prompted Tom's offer, a trifle blundering as his words had been. And he coloured quickly with something approaching shame.

Yet he could not give the answer Tom wanted. Snelson had placed it beyond his power to do that. The hopelessness of his position made him grit his teeth with helpless anger.

"I can promise nothing, Merry," he muttered through his teeth.

"You won't, you mean?"

"I suppose it means that—yes!"

"You mean to keep this rotten smoking and blackguardism up?" gasped Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"I won't promise you to drop it," said Levison doggedly.

Tom Merry eyed him curiously for a moment.

"I don't cotton on to this at all, Levison," he said quietly.

"I can't help thinking that that ragged rotter I saw you smoking and playing cards with is responsible for the sudden change in you. What does it mean?"

Levison hesitated. He wanted to tell Tom Merry all—he knew the junior captain of St. Jim's would be sympathetic. But he also had a vague feeling that Tom would advise him to do the thing he dare not do—face it out and defy Snelson. He also had an uneasy feeling that Tom would despise him for his weakness, for he had to admit there was that side to it. Moreover, Tom's method of approaching him had put his back up.

"I shall tell you nothing, Merry," he said curtly. "I'm not responsible to you for my actions."

"As an ordinary fellow in the school—no," said Tom, his temper rising; "but as a footballer—yes! It's my job to see that my men keep themselves fit to play. If you refuse to keep fit, then you're no good to me. You still refuse to give me the promise?"

"Yes," muttered Levison, biting his lips.

"Then there's no more to be said," answered Tom curtly. "I shall give Herries your place. We've no room in the team for smoky slackers!"

And with that Tom Merry walked away. He left Ernest Levison staring after him white-faced and wretched. Snelson had vowed to ruin him if he refused to "toe the line," and it was beginning to look as if that would come about whether he toed the line or not. It was a hopeless outlook for the reformed black sheep.

CHAPTER 5.

The "Ratters!"

"NOW is the witching time of night—what-ho!"

"Dry up, young Gibson, you awful ass!"

"Dry up yourself, young D'Arcy!"

"Will you dry up?" hissed Wally D'Arcy in a tone of concentrated wrath. "D'you want to let the whole

"Well, what will you do?" asked Jameson pugnaciously.

"I'd like to see you touch me, young Manners!"

"Look here, you rotter—"

"Look here, you cad—"

"Oh, for pity's sake dry up and stop squabbling!" hissed Wally D'Arcy. "Blessed if it isn't like taking a lot of monkeys out bringing you chaps on an expedition. Come on, Curly, we'll fetch old Pongo."

"Right-ho!"

Wally D'Arcy and Curly Gibson stole softly away, leaving Jameson and Reggie Manners crouching down among the shrubbery under the old elms.

It was past eleven o'clock, and at that hour of the night the four members of the Third Form of St. Jim's should have been fast asleep in their beds in the Third dormitory.

But the young rascals of the Third were very often not where they should be. Could he have seen them now, Mr. Selby would probably have had an apoplectic fit. Fortunately—for the fags—he could not see them, being fast asleep himself in his room in the School House.

It had been Wally D'Arcy's suggestion—as usual. The previous afternoon's ratting expedition with Pongo, Wally's dog, having been a failure, Wally had made the daring suggestion that they should visit the ruined cottage at night instead of waiting until the next half-holiday.

The suggestion had appealed to the young rascals at once. Even should there prove to be no rats in residence at the



St. Jim's Jingles!

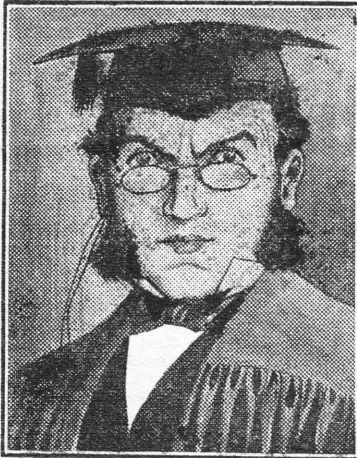


No. 25. MR. SELBY.

THE master of the Third does not
Command our admiration;
He lets the youngsters "have it hot"—
Caning's his recreation.
On discipline he's very strict,
In fact, a perfect Tartar;
His lashing cane has often licked
Full many a youthful martyr!

Of fagdom he's the reigning lord,
He's watchful as a warden,
And stalks in gown and mortar-board,
Preserving law and order.
His victims tremble when they hear
His footsteps, loud and fright'ning;
And they will promptly disappear
Like streaks of summer lightning!

The Head is liked by all the school,
And Railton is a "topper!";
While Mr. Linton, as a rule,
Inspires respect that's proper.
And Mr. Lathom wins our praise
With his mild toleration;
But Selby, and his surly ways,
Earn general condemnation.



The Master of the Third.

He has outlived the prime of life,
His locks are growing thinner;
And indigestion, like a knife,
Attacks him after dinner.
Doubtless this fact makes Mr. S.
So stern a disciplinarian;
So he'd be well advised, I guess,
To turn a vegetarian!

To spare the rod and spoil the child,
Is far from Selby's wishes;
And when he's feeling riled or wild,
He never spares his swishes.
Undoubtedly, the smaller fry
Well merit a corrective;
But there's no earthly reason why
It should be too effective!

"I do not love thee, Doctor Fell,"
Runs the old-fashioned jingle;
And as for Mr. Selby—well,
He sets me all a-tingle!
To tell the truth, I'm jolly glad
To finish with this person;
I much prefer some bright, gay lad,
To write my weekly verse on!

NEXT WEEK:—Mr. VICTOR RAILTON, M.A.

blessed school know that we're breaking bounds? Don't make such a row!"

"Who's making a row?" snorted Curly Gibson. "Can't a fellow speak, young D'Arcy?"

"You can speak, but for goodness' sake don't yell!"

"Who's yelling? If you say I'm yelling, I'll dot you one on the nose—"

"Will you? I should jolly well just like to see you dot me—"

"Oh, don't start squabbling!" hissed Jameson. "You'll muck up the whole show, fatheads! Are we all here? Where's that idiot Manners?"

"Here I am," said Reggie Manners. "But if you call me an idiot, Jameson, I'll thumping well—"

ruined cottage—which was scarcely likely—the sheer risk of such an adventure would make the expedition enjoyable and a success.

That was the unanimous view of the fags. And they had made their plans, and now here they were, trembling with excitement at thought of the sport before them. That they were likely to get into very serious trouble if caught did not seem to trouble the young rascals in the slightest.

Yet caution was wise and necessary. All of them realised that, though as the chums of the Third scarcely ceased squabbling from early morn until late at night, it was rather a difficult matter to observe the caution that was wise and necessary.

Scarcely had Wally and Gibson gone when Jameson and

Manners minor were arguing warmly again, but they stopped abruptly as a sudden rustling in the laurels announced that someone was approaching.

Thinking it was their chums, Jameson was about to hail them softly when Reggie Manners gave a warning hiss and clapped his hand over his companion's mouth.

"Quiet!" he breathed. "It's someone else!"

It was. Four dark figures loomed up suddenly among the laurels, and approached the wall. They were bigger fellows than Wally & Co. It was not a very dark night, and the starlight glimmered on their faces as they passed the fags' hiding-place and approached the wall.

"Racke and his pals!" murmured Jameson. "Gee whizz! Up to their old games again."

The four bound-breakers shinned up the wall by the old tree and vanished one by one over it, not one of them speaking a word. It was rather an eerie sensation watching them, and the fags were trembling with excitement.

They had scarcely vanished, however, when again came a rustling amid the laurels, softer this time, and a single form came into view.

At a glance it was obviously neither Wally nor Curly, but his face was clearly seen the next moment as he trod quietly past the two hiding fags.

"Levison!" breathed Reggie Manners. "Well, the rotter! Wonder what young Frankie would say if he were here now?"

"Blow Frankie!" snorted Jameson. "He would have been here now if he hadn't cut up rusty when Wally told Tom Merry about his brother smoking yesterday. Wally did right in telling. Mind you, young Levison's a decent kid, and I'm sorry we've fallen out. But he shouldn't have—Shush!"

It was the rustling of the laurels again, and this time it was Wally and Curly. Wally had his hand over the mouth of the trembling, excited, and whining Pongo, who was struggling madly in his grasp.

"Quiet, you old ass!" murmured Wally. "We'll let you loose soon, Pongy. All serene, chaps! Come on!"

"Hold 'em, Wally!" breathed Jameson.

He told what they had just seen, and Wally whistled.

"My hat!" he said. "Suppose the rotters are going to that cottage again?"

"Hardly likely," said Curly Gibson. "They wouldn't go there again after yesterday."

"I don't know about that," sniffed Wally. "That ragged merchant they were with must hang out there. Anyway, we'll chance it. Good job we didn't tell young Levison about the giddy expedition. He might easily have warned his brother and mucked us up."

"Yes, rather!"

"We'll chance it anyway," grinned Wally. "If they are there—well, perhaps we'll be able to pull their giddy legs a bit. Over you go! I'll hand Pongo up to one of you."

The fags swarmed like monkeys over the school wall, and Wally came last, handing the struggling Pongo up to Curly Gibson, who was astride the wall.

It was not a simple task, for Pongo objected strongly, but it was done at last, and, with Pongo leaping and prancing on a short lead, the daring fags started out for the cottage on the moor.

It was less than a mile to the outskirts of the moor, and less than another mile to the ruined cottage, and most of the way the fags took it easy, fearing to overtake Racke & Co. or Levison—should their suspicions be correct as to the destination of those youths.

But they reached the cottage at last, silent and forbidding in the dim starlight, and then Wally lifted Pongo up and placed his hand over his mouth.

"You chaps had better scout round first," he muttered. "We can let old Pongo do as he likes once we know nobody's there."

"Right-ho!"

Curly Gibson and Jameson trotted up to the cottage until they were a few yards from it, and then they crept up close. It was Curly Gibson who noted it first—a gleam of light from the shuttered window. Then he noted something else—a column of smoke curling up from the broken chimney of the ruin.

"Phew! Wally was right, then," breathed Curly Gibson. "Someone's there, and the beggars have lit a fire in the place, too. Quietly! We'll have a squint."

He crept up cautiously to the ruin, and peered through the crack in the boarded-up window. He saw a sight somewhat similar to what they had seen the afternoon before.

The ragged youth was there. He was undoing the string from round a parcel on the floor. Racke, Crooke, Scrope, and Levison were there, also, and they were drawing boxes to the large packing-case that did duty as a table. On the

table were playing-cards. All of the juniors were smoking excepting Levison.

Curly Gibson touched his chum's arm, and the two fags stole back to Wally and Reggie Manners, and reported what they had seen.

"Blow them!" growled Wally wrathfully. "That about mucks up our rattling, anyhow. What rotten luck! Never mind. What d'you fellows say to ragging the smoky rotters?"

"Eh? How can we?" grunted Reggie Manners. "The cads would smash us if we started any monkey tricks."

"I think I've got a wheeze," grinned Wally, looking up at the chimney. "Do you chaps remember seeing a stack of old straw and brushwood at the back of the giddy hovel? Well, what about stutting the chimney up with that and smoking 'em out? The rotters seem to like smoke. Let 'em have some more."

"Yes, but they'd only rush out and collar us," grunted Reggie Manners.

"Not if we fasten the giddy door up," grinned Wally. "My hat! We'll do it, chaps! It'll be a rare lark, and one up to us. If those Shell and Fourth Form chaps can't make these smoky rotters play the game, we will—what? We'll teach 'em a little lesson—eh?"

"Phew!"

"Good wheeze, Wally!"

"We'll show 'em what's what!"

"What-ho!"

"Then hold this giddy dog, then, and I'll see to the rest," chuckled Wally. "You'd better hold him, Reggie!"

And, shoving the struggling Pongo into Reggie Manners' arms, Wally cut a length from his lead and started towards the cottage.

CHAPTER 6.

Smoked Out!

WALLY D'ARCY reached the door of the cottage, and cautiously switched on the light of his torch. He saw the handle of the rickety door at once, and, pocketing the torch, he tied the length of leather to it. Then, feeling about in the darkness, he wound the rest of the rope round a strut of the posts that held up the porch.

It was done in a flash, and, with a soft chuckle, Wally rejoined his waiting companions.

"All serene," he grinned. "Now come on round to the back, chaps. We'll soon get the rest done."

The young rascals hurried round to the back, Wally leading the way, his torch switched on now. He soon came to the heap of straw and brushwood, and then he looked up at the cottage. An outhouse jutted out at the rear, and Wally chuckled as he looked up at the roof.

"It ought to be easy as winking to get up there," he said. "You chaps hand this rubbish up when I give the word."

"What-ho!"

Wally climbed up on to a rotting rain-water butt, and balanced himself gingerly on the top, then he reached up to the roof and drew himself up. The next moment, without waiting for his leader's instructions, Curly Gibson had also clambered up and joined Wally on the roof of the outhouse.

"Now, young Manners, and you, Jameson, yank us some of that stuff up," whispered Wally. "You can let old Pongo go now."

Reggie Manners released Pongo, and started to help Jameson as he lifted a pile of the brushwood and straw and threw it up to Wally and Curly. Wally announced that they had enough at last, and the two began to work their way up the thatched roof of the cottage towards the belching chimney, pushing the piles of rubbish before them.

To the agile and reckless youngsters it was an easy matter, for the roof was sloped at a wide angle, and the distance was short. They soon reached the chimney, and while Jameson down below turned the beam of the torch on them, Wally stood up on the roof, holding on to the squat, small chimney with one hand.

Then, as Curly Gibson handed up the brushwood, he started to stuff it into the smoking maw of the chimney.

The brushwood and rubbish was soaked with the recent rains, and there was small risk of fire, if any, though the young rascals never gave that a thought. Wally certainly did not. He stuffed the rubbish cheerfully into the smoking aperture, heedless of the smoke and soot that belched out into his face and over him and his chum, and made both of them almost choke.

But the smoke gradually grew less and less as he stuffed the chimney up, and presently he announced that it was enough, and the two fags scrambled down the thatched roof again, and dropped, chuckling, to join their waiting companions.

"Done it!" chortled Wally D'Arcy. "But, oh, my hat! Aren't I just in a mess? Phew! I'm bunged up with smoke. Now just—Hallo! There they go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Third-Formers roared as a sudden outcry came from within the cottage, and they rushed round, heedless of being heard now.

As the fags reached the front of the cottage they heard gasping yells from within, and then came a sudden banging and rattling at the front door.

"Hear us smile!" chortled Wally D'Arcy. "Listen to the beauties! They don't seem to like smoke, after all. Let's have a squirt at them."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes."

Pongo was barking excitedly now, and, with the dog at their heels, the Third-Formers dashed to the shuttered window and tried to peer in. But they could see little save for vague figures and a dim light through the billowing smoke within.

They heard violent coughing and yelling from the room, however, and then they heard Racke's raging voice above the uproar.

"It's someone playing a trick, you fools!" he howled. "They've fastened the dashed door and stuffed the chimney up. It's those confounded fags again, I bet! Can't you hear their dog?"

"The window!" came Levison's voice in a coughing shout.

"Tear those boards down, you idiots!"

"Look out!" chuckled Wally.

He had scarcely spoken when one of the boards fastened across the window was torn away, followed by another and another, letting out a volume of choking smoke.

Through the smoke Wally D'Arcy glimpsed Levison raking madly at the fire in the grate, and then Racke showed himself at the window, and gave a howl as he saw the fags outside.

"It's those dashed fags! I told you it was!" he gasped furiously. "I'll—I'll smash them for this, the little fiends!"

He left the window, and joined Crooke, Snelson, and Scrope, who were tugging madly at the door. Then came a sudden splintering sound, and the door flew inwards—the rotting strut of wood had given way, not the lead.

"Look out!" Wally yelled the warning this time, and the fags scattered, roaring with laughter, as five coughing and gasping figures dashed out of the cottage amid volumes of acrid smoke. "Run for it, chaps!"

"After the little fiends!" roared Racke furiously.

But his companions needed no urging to do that. Even Ernest Levison took up the chase, his face smoke-begrimed and savage. He was seething with fury—more at being caught by the fags than because of their daring "rag." He had felt humiliated and shamed enough the previous afternoon; he was far more so now.

That his brother Frank was with Wally & Co. he did not doubt; they were rarely apart. He had not spoken to Frank that day, and he was ignorant of the fact that his brother had fallen out with his chums. And it was Frank that he wanted to get hold of.

He ran hard, dimly conscious that someone was thudding behind him, and he heard Racke's furious voice in front. Then he glimpsed a youthful figure through the darkness ahead of him, and he gave a shout.

"Come back, you little rotter! Stop!"

It was Reggie Manners, and he had no intention of stopping. He had got separated from his chums but even as he heard Levison at his heels he also heard Pongo barking excitedly to the left ahead of him, and he changed his direction abruptly.

As he did so he stumbled and went down headlong, his head striking something with terrific force.

Unfortunately, Ernest Levison stopped running just then, failing to see that the dim form ahead had fallen. He turned abruptly and began to retrace his steps, suddenly conscious that the fag ahead could not be Frank. His brother would have stopped at once on hearing his voice, and Ernest had no desire to add further to his humiliation by chasing any of the other Third-Formers.

Someone else had, however, for as Ernest turned away a dim form ran past him. It was Snelson; but Levison failed to recognise him. He grunted, and hurried back to the cottage, his face dark with rage.

Though he little dreamed it then, Ernest Levison was fated soon to regret having dropped out of the chase.

For though Levison had failed to see Reggie Manners go down, Snelson had not. He had been running a few yards to the left of Levison, and he had cut across to intercept the running fag. Then he had seen the dim form plunge headlong, and the next moment he was on the spot.

He glimpsed the dark, prostrate form of the fag at once, and with a snarl of triumph his grasp closed on him viciously.

"Got you, you young cub!" he hissed.

Manners minor heard the voice dazedly, faintly as in a dream. He was half-stunned, and the shock of the fall had shaken all the breath out of his body. But as that savage grasp closed on him, he gave a weak cry.

"Let me go, Levison!" he panted faintly. "I've hurt my—my head! Don't! Oh!"

Snelson's answer was a brutal blow that sent the hapless

fag rolling over helplessly. Then the rascally outcast gripped the fag by the back of the neck, and ground his face into the earth.

The next moment something rose and fell across the fag's prostrate form with savage force.

It was a heavy stick the rascal carried, and despite the youngster's feeble cries, it fell again and again. Snelson seemed to be mad—mad with ungovernable rage, and he rained a shower of savage blows on the injured fag's body.

But suddenly Snelson stopped, panting, struck with alarm as the youngster went limp in his grasp. Reggie Manners had fainted.

The panting ruffian caught his breath, and, stooping, he peered into the youngster's white and dimly-seen face. What he saw there terrified him. He dropped the stick, and stood trembling a moment. Then without another glance at the silent form, he hurried back to the cottage.

The barking of Pongo was faint in the distance across the silent moor now, and as Snelson reached the cottage door, Racke, Crooke, and Scrope ran up, breathlessly, and entered the cottage behind him. Levison was in the cottage. He had lit the lamp which had been knocked over in the confusion, and the room was fairly clear of smoke now. He was putting on his coat as the other four entered.

None of them seemed to notice that Snelson's face was white and his eyes filled with fear.

"No dashed luck!" snarled Racke viciously. "The little brutes had the heels of us! Oh, I'll pay the little beasts back for this though! You clearing out, Levison?"

Levison nodded. He gave Snelson a bitter, savage look.

"Yes, I'm going," he said thickly. "I've had enough of this. I'm not coming to this hole again. You'll have to find another place for your rotten parties, Snelson, after this. Those kids have got us marked."

"Hang them!" said Racke through his teeth. "I'm not coming here again, either—no fear!"

"Nor me," said Crooke and Scrope.

Snelson said nothing for a moment. He seemed to have difficulty in speaking. When he did speak, his voice was cool enough, though.

"Well, I might tell you that I'm more fed-up with the rotten show than you chaps are," he said, with a sneer. "How would you chaps like to have to live and sleep here? But I'm not staying here long, I can tell you. I'm going to take a room at the Green Man to-morrow."

"With the cash you've swindled us out of!" said Racke, with a bitter sneer. "Well, you won't get us there, anyway, Snelson."

"We'll see," said Snelson, his eyes glinting. "I fancy you will if I want you to come. Anyway, what's the good of going now? Don't be fools! Those—those young hounds have gone, and it's safe enough. Better stay and have a game."

There was a threatening tone in the fellow's voice, and Racke hesitated. Then he growled.

"Oh, all right!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "After all, what's the good of coming this way for nothing? We'll stay for a game, anyhow. What do you say, Levison?"

Levison had finished fastening up his coat. He was looking about him now.

"You fellows seen anything of my stick?" he asked curtly.

"I've seen no stick," said Racke surlily.

"I had one when I came," said Levison. "I had it to carry that bundle of clothes on, Snelson. Have you seen it?"

Snelson's face was white and strained. While Wally D'Arcy had been on the roof, he had been busy changing into the clothes Levison had brought him. He looked a different fellow altogether, though nothing could alter the crafty face and hard eyes.

"No, I haven't seen your dashed stick," he muttered. "Look here, Levison, are you really going?"

"Yes. I suppose I must have rushed out with my stick and left it out—though I don't remember doing so," said Levison. "Anyhow, I'm going!"

"Better stay!" snarled Snelson.

"Yes; don't be a fool, Levison," said Racke. "Stay for a game and go back with us."

"You can go to blazes, the lot of you!" said Levison savagely.

He opened the door, and passed out into the dark night. Racke & Co. had said they were fed-up, but Levison was much more so. He had had enough for that night.

CHAPTER 7.

The Work of a Brute!

"HALLO! My hat! Where's old Reggie?"
Wally D'Arcy asked the question in no little alarm as the youthful adventurers dropped down from the stile into Rylcombe Lane. They had just stopped running, breathless with their exertions, and

almost helpless with laughter. The discomfiture of the frequenters of that dingy cottage had amply compensated Wally & Co. for their disappointment over the rattling. Indeed, it had proved more exciting and enjoyable than any rat hunt would have done.

But now, as they dropped down into the lane from the moor, Wally ceased laughing, suddenly aware that Reggie Manners was not in the party. In the darkness and the excitement of the chase they had not noticed his absence at all.

"Phew!" said Curly Gibson, with a groan. "The fathead must have got himself collared!"

"Now isn't that just like young Reggie!" said Wally gloomily. "Oh, my hat! Won't he just get it hot from Racke!"

"Levison major won't let Racke or anyone else lay it on too thickly," said Jameson hopefully. "He's not a bad chap, you know."

"I don't know," said Wally grimly. "He was in a fine old bate when he rushed out. I heard him yell, and I bet he was raving at us catching him again. He wouldn't be inclined to let young Manners off easy. Oh, the awful idiot, to let himself get collared by old fogies out of the Fourth and Shell!"

"Better wait for him!" grunted Jameson.

"We'll wait by the school wall then," said Wally, growling. "The ass might have escaped after all, and he may return another way. Come on, Pongo."

He led the way with Pongo trotting at his heels. The fags reached the school wall at last, and halted under the shadow of the trees. They had scarcely been waiting there a minute when hurried footsteps sounded along the dark lane, and a form came hurrying up, stopping at the wall close to where they were hiding.

But it was not Reggie Manners—they had already seen that. It was Ernest Levison. He was about to shin up the wall when Wally D'Arcy called to him.

"Hold on, Levison!"

Levison jumped violently. His eyes gleamed angrily as Wally stepped out of the deep shadows, with his chums behind him. But Wally & Co. were three to one, and they were not afraid of any Fourth Former with those odds on their side.

"You—you little rotters!" breathed Ernest Levison.

"You big rotter—bigger rotter, in fact!" returned Wally D'Arcy coolly. "No good calling us names, Levison, old top! What we did was for your own good, you know. But what's happened to Reggie Manners? Have you seen him?"

"No. Hang you, and hang Manners!"

"He wasn't collared, then?" said Wally, a trifle anxiously. Levison major did not deign to reply. He swarmed up the wall and vanished over the top. They heard him drop down on the far side, and after a brief rustling, silence fell.

"Phew! He was in a wax!" said Wally, grinning. "But—my only hat! If Reggie wasn't collared, where on earth is he? Look here, chaps! I'll just run and shove Pongo in his kennel, and if Manners hasn't turned up by the time I come back, we'd better go back and hunt for him."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Wally shinned up the wall, and Pongo was handed up to him. And a couple of seconds later Wally was hurrying round to the kennels with his pet. He was not away long, and soon appeared at the top of the wall again.

"Has that fathead turned up yet?" he inquired breathlessly.

"No, blow him!"

Wally dropped down and joined his chums with a grunt. "Come on!" he snapped.

They started back along Rycombe Lane, all of them fagged out by this time, and they would have been only too glad to get back to their warm beds now.

But Wally's word was law, and in any case all three were anxious on behalf of Reggie Manners now. If he had not been collared—and it seemed so from Levison major's attitude—then what had happened to him?

It was certainly alarming.

At a brisk trot, all caution forgotten now, the fags hurriedly retraced their steps to the stile that led on to the moor. They reached it in no time, and barely had they crossed it when Wally gave a warning hiss as a form loomed up in the darkness.

"It's Manners!" muttered Wally after a second's wait. "Jingo, what's the matter with the ass?"

He switched on his torch, turning it full on the approaching form. It was Reggie Manners right enough, and the three fags gave startled gasps as the light lit up his face and form clearly.

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His face was deathly white save for streaks of red on his forehead—obviously dried blood. He had a hand to his head, and he staggered as he walked towards his chums, blinking dazedly in the white light from the torch.

"Reggie!" panted Wally.

He dashed forward and caught hold of his chum.

"What—what on earth's happened, Manners?" he went on in alarm. "You—you look—"

He broke off and caught his chum as he swayed drunkenly. "Help me, chaps!" panted Reggie Manners weakly. "I—I hardly know what's happened. I've been through it. That—that brute—"

"What? Has someone been pasting you like that?" gasped Curly Gibson, taking the swaying fag's other arm.

"Yes. It was Levison. He must have been mad," muttered the fag. "He lammed into me with a stick. I—I must have fainted. I remembered nothing until I came round and found myself alone. I—I don't know how I managed to get here. It was awful!"

"Great Scott!"

"Well, the hound!"

Wally set his lips.

"You can tell us about it later, Reggie," he said. "Never mind that brute Levison now; he can wait. Let's help him along, chaps, and get him to bed. He's been through the mill, and no mistake!"

Curly Gibson and Jameson said nothing. Together they helped their injured chum over the stile and along the lane. They stopped several times at Manners' faint request, but after what seemed an age the school wall loomed up before them.

"You'd better rest a bit before we get you over," said Wally thickly. "So—so Levison major did this, Reggie?"

"He didn't do this," said Manners minor, touching the nasty bruise on his forehead tenderly. "I stumbled and biffed my head on a stone or something. Levison was running just behind me. I scarcely know what happened after that. He rammed my face into the ground, though I was half-stunned, and then he started lammng into me with a stick. He didn't care where he hit me, either. More than once he hit my head. I—I couldn't defend myself. And then—then I must have fainted."

"Well, the rotten, cowardly bound!" breathed Wally D'Arcy. "By Jingo, but we'll make things warm for him after this, young Manners, don't you worry. What's that stick you've got now?"

"It was this stick he did it with," said Manners. "I found it lying by me when I came round. I couldn't have got along over the moor but for that."

"You—you're sure it was Levison?" said Jameson doubtfully. "I can scarcely believe Levison would do such rotten work. It was the work of a brute."

"It was Levison who lammed me. I heard him shout after me just before I went down, and I heard him run up. It was Levison, the brute!"

"Of course it was!" snapped D'Arcy minor through clenched teeth. "Here, give me that stick, Reggie. My hat! Yes, it is Levison's stick," he went on, shining the light from the torch on to it. "That settles it. Don't you chaps remember he had a stick, and he held it in his teeth when he shinned up the wall here when he was starting out? Oh, the rotter!"

Reggie Manners' chums were fuming with indignation now. They waited until their chum felt fit to try the climb, and then they helped him up the wall and down the far side. It was not an easy task for the injured fag, but it was done at last, and, safe inside the grounds, they hurried him to the lower box-room window.

They almost expected to find that Levison had fastened them out; but the window was slightly open, and after another struggle they helped their chum up on to the leads and through the window into the box-room.

"Thank goodness that's managed!" breathed Wally D'Arcy. "And now for bed, young Manners. I'll take charge of this stick, and we'll have this out with that brute Levison in the morning, you men. Come on!"

Wally D'Arcy led the way to the Third Form dormitory in the deep gloom, and soon all four of the midnight adventurers were in bed, and thankful to be there for once. But it was long before Reggie Manners got to sleep, at all events. His head throbbed, and he ached all over from the effects of the brutal thrashing he had received.

He was not the only fellow at St. Jim's who slept little that night. Until long after the creak of the Shell dormitory door told him that Racke & Co. had returned Ernest Levison lay in bed staring into the dark and striving to think of a way out of his troubles. But sleep came at last, though it would be safe to say he would never have slept at all had he known what the morning held in store for him.

CHAPTER 8.

An Interrupted Fight!

"LEIVISON, just a minute!" Ernest Levison halted and looked round. He was walking round by the chapel just after breakfast the following morning. He had gone there because it was a lonely spot, and he wanted to be alone.

But, apparently, he was not fated to be left alone. As he looked round he started at sight of D'Arcy minor, Manners minor, Curly Gibson, and Jameson. His brow darkened, though he was startled at the looks on the faces of the four fags.

"We've been looking for you, Levison," said Wally D'Arcy deliberately. "I fancy you can guess what we want to see you about."

"Clear out!" snapped Levison, his handsome face flushing. "I had enough of your games last night, you young fools! Cut off before I boot you! Here, what's that you've got, young D'Arcy? That's my stick!"

"Yes, it's your stick, Levison," said Wally, holding it out. "We've brought it for you to see—to make absolutely sure it is yours."

"It is mine. I lost it last night. I suppose you little rascals picked it up. Hand it over sharp!"

"Not yet," said Wally grimly. "We want to know what sort of a cowardly sweep you think yourself, Levison."

Levison stared at the four fags. He was too surprised to think of taking notice of their cheek in speaking to him like that.

"What on earth do you mean?" he snapped. "You know jolly well what we mean," said Wally D'Arcy indignantly. "What about last night? Look at your rotten work, Levison! Look at Reggie Manners' face, you cad!"

He pointed to several ugly marks across the face of Manners minor. Levison gave a start as he noted them, also the dark shadows under the fag's eyes and the pallor of his face.

"My work!" he echoed. "I don't understand you, you silly young idiots! Somebody's been hammering young Manners, I can see that. You talk as if I had done it."

"Of course you did it!" burst out Curly Gibson hotly. "It's no good trying to deny it now, Levison. You did it last night. You caught Reggie, and you thrashed him with that stick, though you must have known when he fell that he'd injured himself. You weren't content to lay it about his back, either, you brute! You struck his head and his face with the stick, too!"

Levison was too astounded to lose his temper. "Easy on, kids!" he said quietly. "You're right off-side with your charges, let me tell you. I suppose you really think what you say is true, or you wouldn't say it. I didn't touch Manners last night. I didn't even come within reach of him. I can't think any fellow would be brute enough to lam into him like that, either. Don't be young fools!"

Wally D'Arcy drew a deep breath. His eyes were blazing. "So you mean to brazen it out—to deny it, Levison?" he snapped.

"Deny it—of course I deny it!" said Levison, with sudden anger. "You have the thundering nerve to tell me I did that? Why, if you repeat it again I'll—"

"Bai Jove! What is the mattah here, deah boys?" The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy interrupted Levison. Turning swiftly, the five saw that seven juniors had just come round by the chapel. They were the Terrible Three and Blake & Co.

Levison set his lips hard as he saw the looks all seven gave him as they came up. It was clear that it was no accident that had brought them there just then.

Manners hurried forward and grasped his minor by the arm and looked in his face. Then he gave a growl.

"So it's true enough, Reggie?" he snapped, his voice thick. "That fat ass, Trimble, was spreading a yarn round, and we came looking for you to find out if it is true. Young Piggott told us you had come round here. Was it Levison who made your face in that state, Reggie?"

Reggie Manners nodded, his eyes glinting as he glanced at Levison.

"Yes, the brute!" he muttered. "He caught me and lammed me with that stick."

"That's enough, Reggie!" breathed Harry Manners, his eyes suddenly blazing. "All right, kid, I'll settle accounts with Levison."

He started as if to rush at Levison, who was standing quietly by, but Tom Merry grabbed him and held him fast. "Hold on, Manners!" he said briefly. "Fair play's a jewel. Let Levison speak for himself before you start any settling."

"Then let him speak!" shouted Manners furiously. "Let him deny it and prove he didn't do it! If he can't I'm going to hammer him as he hammered my brother—with my fists, though."

"We'll hear the yarn first," said Tom Merry, glancing

curiously at Ernest Levison's rather white face. "I'd rather hear the facts first before acting on Trimble's yarns. Now, Reggie, let's hear what you have to say. Then we'll hear what Levison has to say."

Manners minor glared at Levison and rubbed his face. He glared at Wally D'Arcy, and Wally stepped forward.

"Let me tell the yarn first," he said coolly. "It happened late last night. Reggie, Curly Gibson, Jameson, and I broke bounds and went out. We took Pongo, and we went rattling to that ruined cottage on Wayland Moor."

"Great Scott!"

"You young wascals! Bai Jove, Wally—" "Dry up, Gussy," said Wally calmly. "Keep your chin still in this act. Well, we went rattling, but when we got to the cottage we found Levison, Racke, Crooke, and Scrope there. They were up to their shady games with that shady merchant we saw there yesterday. They were smoking, and just about to start playing cards."

"Phew!" All eyes turned on Ernest Levison. He flushed a deep crimson.

"We spotted them through a crack in the shutters," went on Wally, grinning faintly. "And I thought of a wheeze to teach the smoky rotters a lesson. We mucked them up yesterday, and I thought we'd do it again then. We fastened the door and stuffed the chimney up."

"Stuffed the chimney up?" echoed Tom Merry blankly.

"Yes, They had a fire going, you see," said Wally airily. "We thought, as they were so fond of smoking, we'd give them some more smoke, and we did."

He was interrupted by a splutter from Monty Lowther, and even Tom Merry grinned.

"Go on," he said.

"We smoked them black," grinned Wally. "But they managed to get the door open, and they chased us. That's when it happened. We got clear, but Reggie here stumbled and fell, striking his forehead on a stone." Wally paused, and his grin faded. "Then Levison came up, and though he must have known Reggie was half-stunned he lammed into him like a brute with his stick. He was mad with rage at being caught again, I suppose, and he lost control of himself. Anyway, he thrashed Reggie until the poor kid fainted. Look at his face. Those marks were made with the stick."

There was a dead silence. Levison broke it.

"I didn't do it, you young fools!" he shouted furiously. "It's a rotten lie! I didn't touch the kid—didn't even get near him. I was chasing him right enough. I thought he was my minor. But I stopped and turned back. I never even saw him fall."

"Rubbish!" said Wally D'Arcy. "It's no good, Levison."

"I tell you I know nothing about it!" shouted Levison.

"Manners, you young rotter, you must know that I didn't do that to you!"

"I know you did," said Manners minor stubbornly. "I heard you running behind me, and I heard you shout out to me to stop. I also heard you snarl something out as you caught me. And what about that stick? I found that lying by me when I came to. You admit it's your stick, you rotter!"

"Here it is," said young Wally, holding it up. "We brought the stick back with us. Here it is. Let the rotter deny it now."

"I do deny it," vowed Levison, glancing round at the accusing faces of the juniors with a sinking heart. "You fellows ought to know me better than that."

"We thought we did know you—until you started your old games again, Levison," said Tom Merry curtly. "If you have no defence to offer other than that—"

"I tell you I didn't do it!" shouted Levison desperately.

"It must have been another fellow! Oh, I remember now. I—I remember another fellow rushing past me when I stopped and turned back. It must have been that hound Snelson!"

"It was you!" cried Manners minor indignantly. "That other fellow in rags—we saw him just before through the window, you cad! I caught a glimpse of the chap's white collar who lammed me. It couldn't have been Snelson, or whatever his rotten name is. He wore no collar at all."

"I tell you—" began Levison fiercely.

He was interrupted. Manners major had been held back by Tom Merry until now. But he suddenly broke free just then, and, leaping forward, he struck Levison clean across the mouth.

"Take that, you cowardly hound!" he hissed, his face blazing. "Now put your fists up! I'll make you leave my brother alone after this!"

He tore off his coat as he spoke. Tom Merry saw that nothing could prevent a fight now. Levison had staggered back with his hands to his mouth. But he suddenly dropped them and wrenched off his coat, his own face red with sudden rage.

"Yes, I'll fight you quickly enough, Manners!" he panted. "And I'll ram your rotten lies down your throat, you cad!"

He rushed at Manners, and the next moment the two were fighting furiously.

Manners was the older fellow, and he was slightly taller, but he was in a far more furious rage than his opponent, and his sheer rage made him careless, and he lost what advantage in age and height and weight he had.

"Go easy, Manners!" called out Lowther anxiously. "Keep your temper, you ass!"

But Manners did not heed if he heard. He drove Levison before him under a shower of furious blows. But Levison had regained his usual coolness now, and after that first lightning exchange of blows he retreated steadily before the hurricane of hitting, guarding himself cleverly and neatly.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Tom Merry. "The awful ass is simply giving the fight away! Steady on, Manners!" he shouted.

Manners, however, usually the coolest of fellows, seemed to have lost his head completely. He rushed to the attack again and again, wasting his powers on futile blows that Levison either guarded swiftly or allowed to hit him where they counted for nothing.

By this time other fellows came running on the scene. News of a fight always spreads with amazing rapidity, and the news drew the fellows like magnets. Cardew and Clive were among the newcomers, and they were quickly in possession of the reason for the trouble.

But whereas Clive, after hearing the news, watched the fight in gloomy silence, Cardew raised his voice again and again with encouraging words to Levison.

It was the only single voice that did, however. Very obviously Levison was already condemned, and save for Cardew's voice the shouts were all for Manners.

"Hallo! Oh, hang it! He's down! The brute's got him beat!" It certainly looked like it. Manners was down, his face sadly battered, his nose streaming red. But he was not down and out by any means. He was up again the next second. It was a non-stop fight—both combatants had silently agreed upon that—and he was about to rush to the attack again, when the roar of voices was hushed abruptly.

"Stop! Ernest, stop fighting at once! Oh, how could you?"

Levison crimsoned to the roots of his hair, as did Harry Manners. Neither of them needed to look round to see whom it was.

It was a girl's voice—a very familiar voice indeed to Ernest Levison, at all events. It was the clear voice of his sister, Doris Levison.

CHAPTER 9.

Cardew Stands by Levison!

THERE was a dead silence.

Both combatants jumped away from each other instantly. The next instant Doris Levison, followed by Miss Ethel Cleveland, stepped between the two.

"Ernest!" panted Doris, glancing at Manners' face in horror. "Oh, you wicked boy! How could you? With a chum of yours, too! Stop this fighting at once!"

Levison drew a deep breath. He was dismayed and somewhat ashamed. But he was also angry—bitterly angry. In the moment of victory he felt he had been robbed of it. He longed to rush in and finish it.

But he couldn't now, of course. The fight was ended. "Look here, sis," he stammered. "Cut off, for goodness' sake! This—this is only a little matter between Manners and me. I sha'n't kill him, and he won't kill me. Do go and leave us to finish it."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Doris quietly. "We came for a stroll in the chapel ruins, but we never expected to find you fighting with a chum. Whatever your difference is it can be settled without fighting like this, I am sure. We shall stay here until you promise not to fight any more, eh, Ethel?"

Miss Cleveland nodded.

"Please stop it," she said, glancing from Levison's face to that of his enemy. "It is horrid to see such old friends fighting like this. We saw there was something wrong between you when we came the other day," she added, glancing at Tom Merry & Co., who were as red as Levison and Manners themselves. "Won't you stop them quarrelling, Tom Merry?"

"I—I—I—" Tom stammered, and stopped.

There was a chuckle from someone—it sounded like Aubrey Racke. Most of the fellows were looking serious and dismayed enough, but several were grinning.

There was a silence. Levison looked at Manners, and the latter nodded an unspoken agreement. In silence they both took their jackets and put them on.

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"You won't fight again?" asked Doris eagerly.

"Not if Manners says he won't," said Levison a trifle sulkily.

Manners hesitated, and then he shook his head.

"I've finished," he said frankly. "I give you best, Levison. You had me licked then."

"Good!" said Miss Cleveland, smiling. "Then won't you shake hands and be friends again?"

"I won't!" said Manners quietly, turning away.

"Neither will I!" said Levison thickly.

"Very well," said Miss Doris. "Perhaps you will, though, when you are calmer. We'll go, then. Come, Ethel."

The girls walked away, and there was silence until they had vanished round the walls of the chapel. Then Tom Merry grunted.

"Well, that's that!" he said grimly. "You got the best of the scrap, Levison. But we haven't finished with you if Manners has. What you did last night cannot be overlooked by any decent fellows. It was a bit too thick, and the fellows will know how to treat you. I for one refuse to speak to you again. Come on, chaps."

He started away, and the crowd broke up, buzzing with the recent events. A few moments later Levison found himself alone save for Ralph Reckness Cardew. That junior was smiling blandly.

"Well, Ernest, old bean," he remarked. "You seem fated to drop with a sickening splash into the soup every time."

Levison glared at him.

"Go on!" he said bitterly. "Why don't you go on after Clive and the others? I wonder you speak to me when you know what a brutal ruffian I am!"

"My dear man, how you do misjudge me," sighed Cardew. "It's scarcely complimentary to a pal to class him with those blithering, bleating sheep. I ask you, Ernest: have I showed by as much as the wink of an eyelid that I think you a brutal ruffian, old nut?"

Levison looked at him eagerly.

"Then—then you don't think I hammered young Manners like he says I did?" he said quickly.

"My dear old fathead, should I be staying behind now if I did?" remarked Cardew, with unusual frankness. "You didn't do it, Ernest—you couldn't, old bean. It isn't in you to biff a youngster like that. And there's my giddy fist on it."

He held out his hand with a dramatic flourish, and Levison grasped it gratefully, his eyes glistening. Mockingly as Cardew did it, Levison knew well enough that the whimsical Cardew was in deadly earnest, and that he meant what he said.

In silence they walked round to the quadrangle.

"Tell me all about the bisney," said Cardew suddenly.

Cardew listened grimly as Levison told him.

"It was that cheery merchant, Snelson, of course," he commented at last. "Pity you hadn't the chance to explain how the frightful blighter came to be wearing a collar afterwards. You'd better explain that he changed his clobber while those merry old fags were doing the chimney-stuffin' stunt, old top. It's an important point in the evidence."

"They didn't give me a chance!" said Levison savagely. "And I'm hanged if I'm going to explain now! Hang them—hang them all!"

"And hang the dear old Snelson bird!" muttered Cardew. "He's rather a nut of the nuts. But leave him to me, Ernest; I'll queer his pitch, old top, before I've finished with him. We really must get that merry old film from him somehow. That'll settle his hash, I fancy."

"But it won't settle this Manners affair," said Levison in a low voice. "He isn't likely to own up. It's pretty hopeless, Cardew."

"We'll see," remarked Cardew, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "Pity the merchant is moving his quarters to the giddy old Green Man—makes things a bit tougher. Still—Hallo, there's the bell at last, Ernie, old nut! What a bore lessons are!"

And Cardew led the way indoors for morning classes, looking very thoughtful indeed. But he wasn't thinking of lessons. Neither did he give lessons much thought that morning. It was Saturday—a half-day holiday—and immediately dinner was over Cardew slipped away on his own. He had a half-formed plan in his mind—a plan that was as mad and reckless as all the fellows claimed Cardew himself to be.

But it was after Cardew's own heart, and he was thinking it over as he strolled along Rylcombe Lane. He had not gone a hundred yards, however, when he heard his name called, and a youngster came running after him.

It was Frank Levison, and Cardew eyed his miserable face curiously as he trotted up to him.

"Go it, kid!" he called encouragingly. "Stick it; you'll be a giddy Dorando yet. What's the merry old trouble?"

Frank Levison reached him, panting and breathless.



Wally D'Arcy gave a cry as a form loomed up out of the darkness. "It's young Manners!" he muttered. "Jingo, what's the matter with the ass?" Wally switched on his torch. Manners' face was deathly white except where daubs of crimson appeared on it, and he staggered towards his chums, blinking in the white glare of the torch. (See Chapter 7.)

"I wanted to speak to you, Cardew," he said eagerly. "It's about my brother."

"Cough it up, Frankie!" said Cardew. "You—you don't believe what Manners says, do you?" asked Frank haltingly. "I—I've heard the fellows saying you—you're backing Ernest up. They're wild with you for speaking to him when he's practically in Coventry."

"Right on the wicket!" smiled Cardew cheerfully. "We're giddy outcasts—scorned by the school, as it were! Are you one of the scorned, too, old bean?"

"Yes, I am!" said Frankie stoutly. "I had three fights only this morning in the Third because I wouldn't let them slander Ernie. But—but it's about something else, Cardew. You—you know about that photo—Ernie's told you?"

"Yes, old top." "I—I wondered if you could help me to get hold of it," gasped Frank Levison. "I daren't suggest it to Ernest. But I've already destroyed one photo, and I've had the film in my hands. If only I'd been stronger—"

"Good gad!" murmured Cardew, stopping short in his walk. "You—you've already had the film, kid?"

"Yes. I snatched the photo from that brute Snelson, and then I rushed to the cottage and found the film—at least, I'm nearly certain it was that. But he came and caught me. If only I'd been stronger I should have beaten him, and saved Ernest!"

"Phew! Tell me all about the merry old deed, youngster."

Frank told him, and Cardew whistled. "I was wrong, old top," he remarked. "You'll make a better giddy politician or a burglar than a runner, after all. Gad, what a pity I wasn't there!"

"I wish you had been there, Cardew!" faltered Frank. "I—I was wondering, though, if you'd help me to try to get hold of it again."

"I'm your man, Frankie!" said Cardew, with a chuckle. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking of doing something of the sort myself, kid. Where's dear old Ernest now?"

"I don't know. I daren't tell him what I'd tried to do. If I'd succeeded I should have told him, of course."

"Never mind," smiled Cardew. "We must move on our giddy own, Frankie, my son. If this bright youth Snelson's left his giddy domicile and taken a room at the Green Man it's not much use seeking the old top there. We'll cut through the wood. Follow me, my dear Watson!"

They reached the spot just then where a stile gave admittance to the path through Rylcombe Woods, and soon the two were hurrying along it. Cardew seemed not a little excited, for all his careless manner. His eyes were gleaming.

They were half-way through the woods, when suddenly Cardew stopped and drew his companion into the shelter of a thicket.

"If this isn't the cheery old Snelson I'm a Dutchman!" he breathed. "Get behind a blade of grass or something, Frankie. Methinks I have a wheeze!"

Frank Levison slipped swiftly into hiding; but not before he had glimpsed a well-known figure approaching along the path towards them.

It was Snelson right enough. He was lounging along, his hands driven deep into his pockets, a cigarette hanging loosely from his drooping lips. He was dressed in an old lounge suit of Ernest Levison's, as Frank saw at a glance.

"Quiet!" murmured Cardew. Snelson was almost level with them now, and the next instant Cardew had slipped from hiding and was on him. Snelson yelped with fright; but as he glimpsed his antagonist he started to struggle and kick furiously.

Frank Levison jumped out to aid Cardew, but his aid was never needed for one moment. It was the third time Cardew had dealt with the blackguard, and he was not gentle in handling him now.

He had his hands behind him after a moment's swift struggling, and he held them tightly.

"Fish his hanky out if he's got one," grinned Cardew. "I fancy I've some string in my pocket, too. Get it out, Frankie, old nut!"

Frank soon found some string of his own, but apparently Snelson did not possess a handkerchief. In a flash, obeying

Cardew's instructions, Frank had tied and knotted the string round the rascal's wrists behind him.

It was done at last, and Cardew grinned as he surveyed the snarling prisoner.

"Fancy you becoming a giddy kidnapper in your old age, Frankie!" he said, shaking his head. "I wonder what dear old Ernle would think about us? Now, my pippin—march!"

"Hang you—hang you!" hissed Snelson, his eyes glinting with helpless rage and dismay. "What's the game, you cheeky hounds? I'll make you sorry for this! I'll—I'll have the police on you!"

"I fancy you won't," grinned Cardew cheerily. "I fancy you'll just take it stowling if you can't take it smiling, old bean! The dear old bobbies might not have a liking for blackmailers—what?"

"Hang you!"

"March! Stick this pin in his leg if he stops, Frankie. Here, I'll do it—you might be too gentle."

He rammed a pin swiftly into Snelson's calf, and with a howl Snelson marched, Cardew gripping his bound wrists and urging him on. Cardew was not a particular youth in many ways, and he had little compunction in showing no mercy to the rascally outcast. After stopping and vowing not to move several times, Snelson saw it was useless, and he tramped on through the woods, almost frothing at the mouth with rage and apprehension.

He seemed to guess what his captor's object was—indeed, after tying him up, Cardew had run a deft hand through his pockets in search of the film. Cardew was ruthless when it suited him.

The little procession emerged from the trees at last, and before them was the shimmering river. On the bank, twenty yards away, rose a tall, ramshackle structure, rearing a gaunt frame above the shining Rhyll.

It was *Barnet's Mill*, a ruined, deserted building, with mill wheels clogged with green slime and with sails jammed fast in their sockets long ago. But it was obviously Cardew's objective, for he stopped outside the low door in the brick basement of the mill.

Snelson's face grew livid with rage and fear.

"Let me go!" he panted. "You can't shove me in there! I know your game, you hounds! You're after that film; but you won't get it, hang you!"

"I shall be quite used to locking you up soon, old pippin!" smiled Cardew. "Now, just a few bright words before we part, old top. We want that film, and we mean to have it. That's not all, Snelson. You did something last night that our dear old pal Levison got blamed for. You brutally thrashed a half-stunned youngster until he fainted."

Snelson's features broke into an involuntary grin.

"So Ernest Levison got blamed for that, did he?" he said viciously. "I'm thundering glad!"

If Cardew had been at all inclined to have mercy on the gloating scoundrel—which he hadn't—he might have changing his mind again then.

"It's rather funny, isn't it?" smiled Cardew, though his eyes glittered. "We'll see how funny you find a little surprise I've got for you. I'm going to keep you a prisoner in that rat-infested mill, Snelson. You'll stay there, not only until we've got that film safely in our hands, but until you're willing to give us a written confession that it was you who thrashed that youngster last night. Understand?"

"You—you daren't!" hissed Snelson, white to the lips. "And I'll never do what you ask, you brute! You're only making it all the worse for Levison!"

"We'll see," said Cardew coolly. "Now, in you go, you cad! We'll come and see you presently to find how you like your new quarters. I might tell you that it's useless to shout—there's nobody ever about here to hear you. Open that giddy door, Frankie!"

Frank hesitated; then he remembered his brother, and, setting his teeth, he wrenched open the door, which was merely secured by a thick wooden bar through iron slots. Then Cardew grasped Snelson, and the outcast yelled and kicked and fought furiously in his grasp.

But it was useless. He was sent spinning into the dank interior of the old mill, and Cardew slammed and secured the door again.

"Now for the Green Man!" he remarked calmly. "Come along, Franky. I fancy we've got our friend in the merry old soup for a change!"

But Cardew was not quite right there.

CHAPTER 10. Caught!

"YOU—you mean to go to the Green Man, Cardew?" gasped Frank Levison.

"Why not? It is the only way, as that what's-his-name remarked somewhere in the giddy play.

Come on, kid! Nothing to be afraid of!"

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But Frank Levison was uneasy if he was not afraid. He knew Cardew, and he did not quite approve of his ruthless methods in some respects. But he said nothing. He trotted on by Cardew's side as that cool worthy led the way to Rylcombe, via the towing-path.

They very soon reached the Green Man. It was a river-side inn of doubtful—very doubtful—repute. Cardew led the way past the garden hedge, and round into the lane at the far side. He stopped a few yards away from the side entrance of the inn.

"Now, Frankie, old nut," he remarked, with a quick glance about him, "just you make yourself look small, and mind you keep your giddy peepers open!"

Frank Levison started, eyeing Cardew in sudden alarm.

"You—you're not going in there?" he breathed, aghast.

"Just that, Frankie! Here goes!"

And before Frank could say anything more Cardew had walked calmly to the side entrance and opened the door. He vanished inside, leaving Frank Levison staring after him in horror.

Cardew knew the inside of the inn fairly well; a fact that did not speak well for Cardew's wisdom. A fat, flabby individual with a walrus-like moustache was lounging at the bar, and Cardew nodded affably to him. It was Mr. Banks, and Mr. Banks started, and then he nodded affably in return. He knew Cardew—which again was not to Cardew's credit.

"Jolliffe about?" asked Cardew coolly. "Ah, here is the dear man! Cheerio, Jolliffe!"

Jolliffe, the fat innkeeper, looked at Cardew, and then he beamed.

"Well, young sir, this is a pleasant surprise," he remarked, coming round the bar. "Want to see me, or Banks?"

"You, old top," smiled Cardew. "I've come from a pal of mine—chap named Snelson. He's just taken a room here."

"That's so."

"Well, he asked me to call for his things," said Cardew carelessly. "He's staying as my guest for a few days, and he won't need the room for a bit."

"Well, the chap ain't as much luggage as 'ould go in a 'atbox," grinned Mr. Jolliffe. "But if he wants it—"

"He asked me to call—" Cardew stopped. At that moment the outer door swung open swiftly and a boy rushed in. It was Frank Levison.

His face was full of alarm.

"Quick!" he panted. "Kildare is outside, Cardew!"

"Oh gad!"

"He must have seen you enter—though he can't have seen your face," said Frank excitedly. "He came round by the towing-path on his bike. He jumped off, and I saw him staring after you."

Cardew quite lost his habitual coolness for once. It was not of himself he was thinking, however.

"You little fool!" he gasped. "Why did you come in, then? You should never—"

"Kildare hurried round to the front entrance. I saw my chance then, and rushed in to warn you!" panted Frank. "Oh, do be quick and come out, Cardew, before it's too late! Quick!"

Frank spoke in an agony of fear, his eyes fixed on the glass door behind the bar through which a glimpse of the front entrance could be got.

"Oh gad!" groaned Cardew again.

Cardew bit his lip hard. He was blaming himself bitterly for having brought a youngster like Frank into such a risky adventure. But he quickly recovered his coolness.

"Hold on, Frankie!" he said. "Keep cool; I'll see you out of this."

He ran to the front parlour and peered cautiously through the window. Across the road he saw Kildare standing, his eyes fixed on the entrance. From his face and attitude Cardew guessed that the captain of St. Jim's was not at all certain as to what he had seen.

Cardew ran back and looked through the smoke-room window which gave a view of the side-entrance. Then he groaned.

Another senior was on guard—Darrell of the Sixth, like Kildare, a prefect, and Kildare's chum.

"Phew!" breathed Cardew. "It looks as if we've fallen with a sickening splash into the soup. I—Gad!"

Cardew's keen eyes gleamed suddenly.

His eyes had fallen upon something—something that brought a daring scheme into his mind.

Before the fire-grate of the smoke-room a grimy individual was at work—a chimney-sweep, busy sweeping the chimney. Cardew caught him by the arm.

"Hold on, my man," he said calmly. "Would you care to earn ten bob for a few minutes' work?"

The grimy individual looked round, taking his clay pipe from between his teeth. Then he grinned up at Cardew.

"Jest you try me, mister!" he said.

He got to his feet, and Cardew fairly dragged him to the

window. He pointed through a jagged hole in the gauze screen before the window.

"There's a fellow out there wants to catch my friend and myself in here," he remarked. "You see him?"

"I see 'im all right, mister. But—"

"There's ten bob for you if you manage to smuggle us out without being spotted," said Cardew swiftly. "Have you a fairly clean sack?"

"'Ere's one as ain't bin used yet. But—"

Cardew snatched the sack up, and then he beckoned to Frank Levison who was trembling in the doorway. Frank hurried in.

"Into this sack with you, kid!" snapped Cardew.

"Cardew—" Frank was faltering, but Cardew cut him short.

"Get in!" he snapped. "Get in, you young fool! I'll see you clear."

There was a note of savage command in Cardew's voice, and Frank stepped into the sack he held open. Cardew wrenched it up over the head of the trembling fag, and twisted the top of the sack.

"There you are," he said to the staring sweep. "Here's your ten bob. All you have to do is to carry this on your back out past that chap on guard outside. When you get round the corner, out of his sight, let the youngster go. But don't glance at the chap outside whatever you do. Just kid yourself you're carrying a sack of soot. Then you can come back for me. Savvy?"

"By hokey!"

The sooty individual stared at Cardew, and then he nodded and grinned. He took the ten-shilling note and pocketed it. Then he spat on his hands and swung the sack gently and easily on his broad back.

"I reckon I ken manage this 'ere game on me 'ead," he grinned. "I'll be back 'ere for you in a brace o' shakes, young sir."

"Buck up, then!"

Releasing one grimy hand, the sweep picked up his pipe again from the table. Then he rammed it between his teeth and strode after Cardew. Cardew opened the side-entrance door, standing behind it as he did so. The sweep winked at him and strode outside. Through the crack of the door Cardew watched him anxiously.

He need not have feared, however.

Stolidly puffing at his clay, the sweep strode away without a glance at Darrell across the street. Darrell just glanced after him carelessly, and then he resumed his watch on the door.

Cardew drew a deep, deep breath and chuckled. He turned to Mr. Jolliffe who had been looking on open-mouthed.

"Now what about that merchant's luggage, Jolliffe?" he said coolly. "Buck up, old bean!"

"My heye!" he said. "My blinkin' heye! You're a regular cute 'un and no error, Mister Cardew."

"Buck up, old bean—do!" said Cardew.

Jolliffe hesitated a moment, and then, as Cardew calmly produced a ten-shilling note and laid it on the counter, he grinned and hurried away. He came back a moment later with a small, brown-paper parcel in his hand.

"'Ere's 'is luggage," he grinned. "He sort of travels light, that there young gent. I suppose it's all right me 'anding it over like this 'ere—" His grin faded, and he suddenly looked uneasily at Cardew's bland features.

Cardew calmly tore open the parcel. It was scarcely the sort of thing even Ralph Reckness Cardew would have done in dealing with an ordinary fellow. But Snelson was no ordinary fellow. In Cardew's view strong and ruthless methods were needed in dealing with the unscrupulous young scoundrel. It was a case of desperate ills requiring desperate remedies; that was how the iron-nerved Cardew looked at it.

So he tore open the parcel without a scruple. Inside was a box of cigarettes—Cardew smiled as he recognised them as the brand Racke smoked—a pack of playing-cards, and a small, folded package.

Ignoring the other things, Cardew unfolded the paper wrapping, his eyes showing eager excitement now. Then he drew a deep breath—a breath of relief.

In his hand was a film, and with it were several prints. To make sure Cardew glanced quickly at them, and then he chuckled and placed all of them in his inside pocket. And at that moment the swing door opened, and Cardew dodged to one side as the burly chimney-sweep strode in.

He winked at Cardew, as he swung the empty sack from his shoulder.

"Ready, young gent?" he grinned.

"Quite ready, old bean," smiled Cardew. "You look beefy enough to carry two of little me—what?"

"I reckon as 'ow I won't drop yer, mister—don't you fear o' that!" grinned the sweep. "'Ere you are."

He held the sack open. Cardew looked inside and groaned. There was certainly no soot in it, but it did not

look inviting for all that. Cardew was a somewhat fastidious youth.

But there was no help for it. He stepped in.

"'Ere, aren't you takin' these other things, Mister Cardew?" asked Mr. Jolliffe.

"No; I've got all I wanted," remarked Cardew coolly. "Now, old black bean; I'm ready for the vanishin' bisney. Buck up!"

"'Ere goes, then, mister! You jest sit tight!"

The grinning sweep pulled the sack over Cardew as that youth crouched down, and then he twisted the loose end and swung the sack and its bulky contents on to his back. Then, winking at the staring landlord of the Green Man, he opened the swing doors and lumbered out—not quite so easily this time, however; Cardew was no light-weight even for the burly sweep.

Again Darrell glanced at the sweep as he emerged, and this time he watched him until he vanished round the corner, a fact the sweep noted out of the corner of his eye.

But no running feet followed him, and after plodding along the quiet street for some yards, the grinning sweep turned down a wide entry between the backs of two rows of dwelling-houses.

In the first doorway Frank Levison was crouching, his face white and anxious.

"'Ere's your mate all safe," announced the sweep, lowering his bulky burden gently and winking at Frank. "Out you gets, young gent. I reckon I done that neatly."

Cardew clambered out of the sack, gasping and grimacing. "Gad!" he gasped. "I wouldn't go through that for a pension, old bean! But—Hallo—haven't you gone, you young ass?"

"I—I wanted to know if you were safe first, Cardew," faltered Frank.

"You young ass! Well, we'd better hook it now, kid! We'll put a bit of distance between our giddy selves and this salubrious spot before we dust down. Then I'll hand you a little present I've got in my pocket for you to give dear old Ernie."

Frank jumped.

"Cardew! You—you've got the—the—"

"Yes, old top. Our merry expedition has been a complete success. We've put the giddy kybosh on Snelson and his little game, I fancy, Frankie. Now come on. Cheerio, old sport!"

And with a bright nod to the grinning sweep, Cardew grabbed Frank Levison by the arm and rushed him away. And as they ran hard back to St. Jim's, Cardew chuckled to himself more than once. He was wondering how long Kildare and Darrell would remain on guard outside the Green Man. The problem seemed to amuse Cardew.

He would not have been quite so amused, however, had he known that Darrell had seen Frank Levison enter the inn, and had recognised him.

CHAPTER 11.

What Racke Knew!

"W HITHER away, Thomas?" Jack Blake of the Fourth asked the question as Blake & Co. met the Terrible Three on the steps of the School House that afternoon. There was no footer on, and Blake & Co. were just wondering what to do with themselves that half-holiday.

Tom Merry looked glum.

"We're going to visit that giddy ruined cottage on Wayland Moor," he answered. "Nice job for a half—eh?"

"What the thump are you going there for?" gasped Jack Blake, staring. "Not starting on the giddy loose like Levison, I hope?"

"'Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus, turning his monocle on Tom Merry's face. "I weally twust not, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Not quite!" he said, with a chuckle. "It's this burbling ass, Manners, who insists upon going. He's still hoping to find his giddy camera, though I bet it's been popped long ago in Wayland or somewhere—that is, if that tramp merchant has taken it."

"Of course he has!" snorted Manners wrathfully. "I tell you he must have done. That awful ass Lowther says he dropped it, and that chap must have seen it when we went away."

"Oh, dry up, Manners!" groaned Lowther. "I'm fed-up to the chin with hearing about that thumping camera. How could I help the dashed thing disappearing like that? And Tommy and I have been to the cottage once about it, and that ragged merchant swore he hadn't seen it."

"He would do, of course!" snorted Manners. "You ought

to have searched the blessed cottage then. That fellow's pinched it. I'm certain—my camera! My twelve-guinea camera! How would you fellows like to lose a twelve-guinea cam—"

"Oh, don't start again, for goodness' sake!" groaned Tom Merry. "We've had that rotten camera on the carpet for days now, and I'm weary of it. Anyhow, we're going now, Manners, and we'll search the cottage. We sha'n't get any peace until we do, I can see. You Fourth chaps wouldn't care to join us. I suppose?"

"Sure," said Blake, "we'd be pleased to. Let's get away now."

The juniors walked fast, and in less than twenty minutes they reached the ruined cottage, and Tom Merry tried the door. To their relief it was unfastened, and they tramped in and looked about them.

"Nobody at home, apparently," said Tom Merry. "Jove! Fancy having to live—Hallo!"

From the room upstairs came the sound of someone moving about.

"That chap must be here, then!" snapped Tom grimly. "Come on up, and we'll tackle the blighter about it."

As he spoke Tom stepped to the foot of the staircase, and started up the stairs followed by the others. It was only a short way up, and as he stepped into the garret above he gave a startled cry, echoed next moment by the rest of the juniors.

In the room was another junior. It was Ernest Levison. He was kneeling on the floor before a hole in the boarding from which two planks had been removed. In his hand was a camera—Manners recognised it at a glance if the others did not.

"Great Scott! My camera!" he shouted.

Levison was on his feet now. His startled face flushed a dull red as he noted the looks on the faces of the juniors in the doorway. In his surprise and indignation Tom Merry forgot that he had vowed not to speak to Levison again.

"You—you rotter, Levison!" he gasped. "What are you doing with that camera? It belongs to Manners—you must know it does."

Levison bit his lip.

"I know it does," he said quietly. "I have just found it here. I was looking for something else, though."

"It looks queer, anyhow," said Blake roughly. "Did you know it was hidden here, Levison?"

Levison hesitated, and then he nodded.

"I knew it must be somewhere here," he said quietly. "But—but—well, I forgot all about the camera itself; I'd meant to get it from—from that chap and bring it to Manners. But I've forgotten about it actually until now. I've just found it in this hole. You can believe me or not, just as you like."

The other juniors were silent. Manners had no eyes for anything but his precious camera. He opened it feverishly and examined it.

"It's all right; not harmed at all," he announced suddenly, in deep relief. "The roll of films are gone—that's all. Thank goodness!"

Levison said nothing. He could have told only too well where that roll of films had gone, and what had happened to them.

Tom Merry eyed him steadily, and then with a shrug of his shoulders he turned to the door.

"Come along, chaps!" he said curtly. "I suppose it's no good saying anything more about the camera. If Levison won't say—"

He broke off, for at that moment voices and footsteps sounded outside. Then came the tramp of feet on the bare boards of the room below.

What made Tom do it he never could tell. But he gave a warning hiss, and held his hand up for silence.

The next moment they recognised a voice—Racke's loud, sneering voice.

"Here we are," he said. "That rotter's gone, then, right enough. I suppose he's moved his quarters to the Green Man as he said he would. Now, what about those dashed fags and things! I'm thumped if I'm going to let him collar all those—unless the brute's taken them already."

Somebody crossed the room below, and they heard a board being moved. Then came Crooke's voice:

"They're gone, anyway," he said. "The cad's taken them, Racke."

"Hang him!" snarled Racke. "Anyway, we'll soon see him again. It's a wonder we haven't heard from the brute telling us to meet him at the Green Man."

"Look here, Racke!" came Crooke's voice thickly. "I'm not going there—it's too thundering risky, you fool!"

"We'll have to go!" muttered Racke savagely. "He's got us with that photo just as he's got Levison in the same way, I reckon. He's got some hold over him, anyway. I hope he makes the beggar squirm, too."

And Racke laughed harshly.

"It was a bit thick what Levison did last night, though," came Scrope's voice. "Blessed if I could believe it was him at first."

Racke laughed again—gleefully this time.

"You silly fool!" he sneered. "It wasn't Levison who did it at all. It was that brute Snelson."

"Great Scott! Do you know that, Racke?" said Crooke.

"Yes, I do," grinned Racke. "You see, I happened to see Levison rush out when those fags bolted, and he hadn't got his stick with him. Then I saw Snelson rush out, and it was Snelson who had the stick. That's not all. I came back just a couple of secs before you chaps, and I spotted Snelson coming back just after Levison had got in. I noticed he hadn't got the stick then, and I remember wondering why he looked so white about the gills. It was that brute who did it."

"Phew! Then why didn't you chip in and tell the chaps the truth this morning, Racke?" gasped Scrope.

Racke laughed—a cruel laugh.

"What about yesterday?" he said savagely. "Didn't that cad Levison knock me down? It isn't the first time the cad's handled me lately, either. I wasn't going to save him—not likely! I was thundering glad to see him in the soup, hang him! It was rather a joke, too, to see him scrapping with one of his old pals."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath, and looked at Levison as Racke's voice ceased. All the juniors were looking at Levison. Manners' face was as red as a turkey. But Tom Merry did not wait for anything further to be said. He was seething with indignant anger, and without waiting another second he pushed his chums out of the way and dashed down the stairs pell-mell.

From below came a startled cry, and the next moment Tom was in the lower room. He rushed at Racke, and caught him by the collar and shook him.

"You rotten outsider, Racke!" he snapped. "Say all that again—repeat what you were saying just now, you cad!"

Racke's face was the picture of startled alarm. His chums looked on in dismay, more so when Levison and the rest of the juniors came in sight.

"You—you eavesdropping cads!"

"Never mind that; I'm thundering glad we did overhear it all if it comes to that, Racke. You were there this morning when Levison and Manners were fighting; you knew jolly well what they were fighting about. Yet all the time you could have stopped it with a word."

"Let me go, hang you!"

"Not much; not until you've repeated what you said. Sharp now, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Wepeat what you said, Wacke, or I will give you a feahful thwashin' myself, bai Jove!"

Racke glared round as Tom Merry & Co. closed in on him. Levison looked on, his face calm and composed. It was not for him to say anything.

"I don't know—I only suspect that it was Snelson who thrashed young Manners!" hissed Racke, seeing there was no help for it.

"You saw him run out with Levison's stick?"

"Yes!" grunted Racke.

"You saw him come back without it, and he looked upset, I think you said?" insisted Tom.

"Yes."

"Well, isn't that enough?" demanded Tom, his lip curling. "You're a beastly rotter, Racke, to stand by and see an injustice done like that. We know that this fellow Snelson is a rank outsider—we might have guessed the truth."

"Hold on," said Manners quietly. "There's one point you're forgetting, Merry. What about Snelson's clothes? He was in rags. My young brother says he distinctly caught a glimpse of a white collar."

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His face badly battered, and his nose streaming red, Manners was about to make a further attack upon Levison when a clear voice called: "Stop! Ernest, stop fighting at once! Oh, how could you be?" The two combatants dropped their hands, and turning round they beheld the familiar figure of Doris Levison. (See Chapter 3.)

Racke looked sulkily at Levison.

"Levison will explain that," he muttered savagely. "He brought him some of his old clothes, and the brute changed when those fags were on the roof, I suppose."

"Oh!" said Tom, in relief. "Is that right, Levison?"

Levison nodded.

"Then that settles it," said Tom Merry, looking round. "That point about the white collar was the evidence that convinced me. I should have believed Levison when he said it was that other fellow but for that."

Manners was looking at Levison queerly now.

"You rotten worm, Racke!" said Tom Merry. "If you'd spoken up as any decent chap would have done, that fight need never have taken place this morning. If I were in Levison's shoes, I'd give you the hiding you jolly well deserve."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison smiled bitterly.

"Let him go," he said quietly. "I don't wish to touch the worm."

"Right!" said Tom briefly. "Out you go, Racke—get out before I deal with you myself."

He spun the cad of the Shell round and sent him spinning through the open doorway. Racke tripped and sat down hard on the weed-grown pathway. But he was up again in an instant, and with a savage glare back at the juniors he hurried away. His two chums were not slow to follow him.

"So—so it wasn't you who did that to Manners minor?" said Tom Merry, turning to Levison.

"I told you it wasn't me," said Levison quietly and bitterly. "I think you ought to know me better than that."

Tom was silent.

"I'm sorry, Levison," he said presently. "Sorry for having believed that of you. But—but you've not been yourself the last few days—you know that."

"Well, that's so, I suppose," admitted Levison gruffly. "It's my business, anyway."

Tom Merry eyed him steadily.

"Look here, Levison," he said calmly. "Racke said just now that this outsider Snelson has some hold over you. Is that true?"

"Racke says so."

"And I believe it's true!" snapped Tom. "I believe that explains everything. The rotter is forcing you to do as you are doing—gambling and smoking. Isn't that so?"

"Bai Jove!"

Levison said nothing.

"I can see it is," went on Tom grimly. "Now, look here, old chap; we were your pals before, and I, for one, want to be your pal again. Why not tell us the trouble? We may be able to help, and we'll be glad to help."

"Yaas, wathah!" assented Arthur Augustus eagerly. "Pway tell us all about it, Levison, deah boy."

Levison hesitated. It was a great temptation to speak and clear himself, bitter as he felt against the juniors. He valued their good opinion, however, too greatly to refuse.

So he told his story quietly—a story the juniors already knew something of. Yet they were staggered to hear it for all that.

"Well, I'm hanged!" breathed Tom Merry, when he ended. "What an utter outsider that brute must be, Levison! So that explains why Cardew shoved the brute in that taxi—when your sister arrived at the station? He knew about it?"

"Yes. Cardew saved me then."

"Well, my hat!"

"And you were searching for the film just now—when we came in, Levison?" stammered Manners.

"Yes. I had forgotten the camera, and only just found it as you came in. I couldn't find the film, though," he added, with a groan. "The brute must have it with him at the Green Man. You fellows can see now that it's hopeless; the rotter has me in his power; he plays the tune, and I have to dance to it."

"It isn't quite hopeless, Levison," said Tom quietly. "I suppose you wouldn't care to take advice from me. But—"

Levison looked up and coloured.

"I think I can guess what your advice would be, Merry," he said. "You'd advise me to go straight to Railton or the Head and own up."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; I would, Levison," he said. "I don't want to

preach, yet the straight way is always the best way. It's a big mistake to give in to blackmailers. That fellow is out to ruin you, and he will ruin you if you go on as you are doing. It's a great pity you didn't do it at the beginning. Yet it isn't too late. You know Railton and the Head—you know they're both bricks, and would understand what a frightful position you were in, and the temptation it was to you to give way. They may punish you, but I'm certain they'll be merciful. Keep a straight bat and defy that hound to do his worst. You won't regret it. Will you go?"

Levison nodded.

"Good man!" said Tom. "You'll be doing the right thing, anyway. We'll come with you and see how you go on, and if we can help you in any way, you can rely on us."

The juniors reached the gates of St. Jim's almost at the same moment as another junior and a Third Form fag. They were Cardew and Frank Levison.

They stared as they sighted Levison, apparently on the best of terms. Levison understood their looks.

"All serene, Cardew," said Levison quietly. "These fellows are satisfied now that I was not the chap who injured young Manners. You've been justified, old man."

"My dear fellow, don't mention it," remarked Cardew blandly. "I was satisfied long ago, old top. By the way, dear old Frankie here has a little present for you. I can see he's itching to hand it to you."

Frank Levison handed his brother the films and prints without a word. As he took them and glanced at them, Ernest Levison staggered back with a cry.

"No heroics, mind!" said Cardew, with a chuckle. "Lend me your giddy ears, and I'll tell you the yarn; it will make you smile."

It did. The juniors could not help grinning as Cardew told them, in his own whimsical way, how he had got himself and Frankie out of a nasty hole at the Green Man. Ernest Levison placed the film and print slowly in his pocket. He felt dazed—overwhelmed. He was saved. The crafty, vengeful Snelson could never harm him now. Moreover, he was cleared of the foul charge of having brutally ill-treated Manners minor.

It seemed too good to be true. His troubles were over. His heart was beating with thankfulness.

And then, in that moment of overwhelming joy, the blow fell.

Two seniors dismounted from their bikes at the gates and approached them. They were Kildare and Darrell.

"Levison minor," said Kildare grimly, "you'll come with me to the Housemaster at once. Come!"

Frank Levison went white to the lips. A startled look came over Cardew's face; he was quite taken aback. Ernest Levison went as white as his brother.

"Kildare," he stammered, "what—what is the matter? Why do you want my brother?"

"To report to Mr. Railton for breaking bounds and entering forbidden premises—the Green Man," replied Kildare grimly. "I have a very good idea who his companion was, too," went on Kildare, with a keen glance at Cardew. "They played us a cute trick—a trick we only tumbled to when it was too late. But, as it happened, Darrell saw Levison minor enter the place. Come along, you young rascal!"

Frank Levison's lips trembled.

"Kildare—"

"Come!" said Kildare, not unkindly. "I warned you that I would keep an eye on you the other day, Levison, when I caught you talking to that rough chap at that ruined cottage on the moor. You've chosen to ignore my warning. It was worse than I had suspected. Come!"

He took the terrified fag by the shoulder; and Frank, with a despairing glance at his brother, went.

"Oh gad!" groaned Cardew. "I'd better put this right!"

He stared after the two seniors and the hapless fag for a moment, and then he hurried after them.

Ernest Levison stood as if stunned. In the moment of his triumph, of his joy and relief, the blow had fallen.

CHAPTER 12.

Ernest Levison Makes Amends!

"COME in!"

Mr. Railton looked up and glanced with surprise at Kildare as he brought his two prisoners into the room. Darrell had left the matter for Kildare to deal with.

"Well, Kildare," asked the Housemaster, with a sharp look at Cardew and Levison minor, "what is the matter?"

Kildare explained. He was only doing his duty, and he disliked doing it. He felt no anger against Cardew for the trick that worthy had played upon him. He told his story quietly and without any embellishments.

"This is very serious, Kildare," the Housemaster said, when he had finished. "Cardew—"

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"If you will allow me, sir," said Cardew calmly, "I should like to explain that Levison minor is entirely innocent in the matter. He entered the place to warn me—to save me. I asked him to wait outside for me and to keep cave. I was a rotter to do so, and I wish to take all responsibility in the matter. Kildare must know that he only rushed in to warn me, sir."

"If that is the case, then the matter concerning Levison minor is not so serious," said Mr. Railton, his gaze fixed on Frank's wretched face. "He should never have entered the place, however, and in doing so he has broken the rules of the school. It is, however, a matter for the Head to deal—Come in!"

As the Housemaster broke off to utter that invitation the door swung open and Ernest Levison came in quickly. His face was flushed and his eyes were gleaming strangely.

"May I speak a moment, sir?" he asked pleadingly.

Mr. Railton eyed him.

"Yes, you may, Levison major," he said.

"It—it is about this matter, sir," began Levison, his voice eager and excited. "Cardew and my brother only went to that place to help me. They had no real wish to break school rules. They—they did it for my sake. I have a confession to make, if you will listen to me, sir."

"A—a confession, Levison?"

"Yes, sir. May I go on?"

"Very well, Levison. You may proceed," said Mr. Railton.

He felt, from the junior's strained and haggard face, that he was to hear something unusually startling. And he was not disappointed. Ernest Levison started from the very beginning, and he did not spare himself in the least. He told the whole wretched story from the time he had received the letter from Wharton at Greyfriars, stating that Snelson was on his way to see him, and warning him to beware of him.

Mr. Railton's face was expressionless. He asked several questions, and at last he nodded.

"Very well, Levison," he said quietly. "I will repeat the story you have told to Dr. Holmes. You have acted very wrongly, my boy. You should have come to me or to the headmaster, and told us in the first place of that wretched runaway's arrival, and of his purpose in visiting you here. It would have saved all this—this distressing affair."

"I regret exceedingly that you did not do so, for I cannot help seeing how his threats have affected you. I cannot hold out any hope that you will escape punishment, but I have every hope that Dr. Holmes will be merciful. The fact that you have owned up of your own accord will weigh heavily in your favour. For the present, you may go, all of you."

He nodded a dismissal, and the three boys went out, leaving Kildare and Mr. Railton alone.

Cardew was the first to speak as they walked along the passage.

"Oh gad!" he groaned. "What a life! Let's go and have tea, for goodness' sake!"

It was not a merry meal in Study No. 9 by any means. But it ended at last without the expected call from Dr. Holmes, and when it was over Levison got his cap and went out, not giving his chums the chance to ask where he was going.

He hurried out of the School House and out of gates, his face set and determined. Once clear of the gates he set off at a run, making for the river. He knew he ought to have remained indoors as he was expecting the summons from the Head, and he knew that his chums would have stopped him going had they known his destination. For it was the old mill Ernest Levison was making for.

The thought of the hapless outcast lying bound in the basement of the mill had proved too much for Ernest Levison. He knew that Cardew had forgotten all about the rascal, and he knew that Mr. Railton would send someone there sooner or later. Yet he was determined to release the rascal himself. Even now Ernest Levison felt deep pity for the runaway. He could never forget his desire to make amends for the days that were past.

It was already deep dusk, and the shadows of the trees lay blackly across the glimmering river. Levison ran hard along the towing-path. He stopped suddenly, however.

Above the trees he had seen something that made his heart beat with sudden fear—a black cloud—dark against the dusky sky.

It was a dense cloud of smoke—he saw that at once. Even as he looked he saw a tongue of lurid flame shoot above the tree-tops ahead of him.

The sight brought sudden terror into the junior's beating heart. He knew in a flash what it meant. The only building along that stretch of the river was the old mill!

The mill was on fire—the mill in which his enemy was a prisoner.

"Good heavens!" panted Levison.

He stared at the flame-riven smoke for an instant, and

the next he was running harder than he had ever run in his life before.

Quite suddenly he turned the bend in the winding tow-path, and then he saw that his surmise was only too true. He was past the black maw of the woods now, and the old mill was in sight—tall, gaunt, ghostly, and forbidding at any time.

But just now it was a terrifying sight.

It was enveloped in black, choking smoke, and tongues of flame were leaping out of the rotting woodwork.

As Ernest Levison dashed up a couple of farm labourers, followed by several scared-looking people, came rushing upon the scene.

"By hokey!" gasped one of the farm-hands. "The old show's done in this time, and no mistake. Anybody know how it started?"

Just then Ernest Levison dashed up, and he grasped the foremost man's arm.

"Quick—for Heaven's sake, follow me!" he cried. "There's a fellow fastened up in the basement. He's— Oh, look!"

Ernest Levison's voice ended in a shriek, and he pointed high up the crazy structure to one of the small windows.

High up in the burning mill could be seen at intervals in the helching clouds of smoke a windowless hole in the mill-tower. The onlookers caught a momentary glimpse of someone there as they looked—someone who called down faintly and appealingly to them, and then abruptly vanished.

"By hokey!" gasped the man in horror. "E's done for an' no error! Who on earth—"

But Ernest Levison was gone. He dashed straight towards the basement of the burning mill, and tore frantically at the door, heedless of smoke, and falling brands of burning timber and showers of sparks.

He got it open at last, and as he did so he gave a horrid cry of dismay. The basement was a blazing inferno—no man could have gone alive through it.

"A rope!" shouted Levison frantically. "If we had a rope—"

"Here's a rope!" yelled the other labourer, rushing up just then. "I were think' as—"

Ernest Levison did not wait for the man to finish. He fairly tore the rope from his shoulder, and then he dashed round to where the gaunt arms of the great sails stood out in the glare of the fire.

The nearest sail hung down at a gentle angle some eighteen feet or so above his head, and, retaining a grip on the end of the rope, Levison flung the coil with all his force upwards.

The first throw missed completely, but the next sent the rope sagging down one of the rotting laths. The rest of the coil came dropping downwards, and Ernest Levison caught it.

But would the rope hold? The junior knew the sails would never turn—the rusty cogs within the mill had been locked long years ago. And Ernest did not wait to test the strength of the rope or the arm.

He dodged the restraining hand of one of the men—who grasped his daring intention a second too late—and the next moment he was swarming up the double rope like a monkey.

Straddling the great arm, holding on with hands and knees, he fought his way upwards, the rope slung in a coil over his shoulder now. The rotting laths of the vanes crumpled and snapped beneath his hugging knees, but he went on doggedly.

"By hokey, 'e'll do it yet!" gasped one of the men.

By this time the crowd was growing in numbers every moment, and they watched breathlessly as the plucky junior worked his way along. He reached the great iron axle at last, and began to work his way along it to where it jutted out from the walls of the mill through a jagged hole in the woodwork.

For a brief moment his figure was seen through the smother of smoke, and then it vanished abruptly.

Several anxious seconds passed after that. Then there came a sudden shout from the river side of the mill.

There was a rush for the spot, and then, heedless of falling sparks and burning brands, several of the men watchers gained the narrow staging at the water's edge and looked quickly upwards.

Then a roar went up.

High up at one of the tiny apertures in the wall of the mill a figure was seen, and even as they looked a shout came down to them, and then they glimpsed a bulky, inanimate bundle twirling down to them.

Lower and lower it came through the spark-riven smoke, and then it swung within reach, and willing hands grasped it, and lowered it gently on the staging.

"By jingo! If it ain't a kid!" gasped one of the helpers. They had the rope off in a flash, and two of them lifted the unconscious form of Snelson—for it was he—and bore it

away gently. The hapless outcast's face was scorched and blackened with smoke.

"Now the other feller!" gasped the man who had untied the rope.

He made a cup of his hands, and hawled up to the vague figure seen at the aperture, telling him to haul up the rope.

But the rope was not fated to be used again.

Even as the man shouted up a sudden burst of flame shot from the tower and licked at the rope, parting it like a thread in a candle-flame.

A thrill of horror went up as the loose end of rope dropped down ablaze.

The shout that went up was hushed suddenly, however, as the figure of Levison was seen framed in the aperture above.

Amid a smother of sparks and smoke it remained there a brief instant, and then it swooped downwards and outwards.

For several agonising seconds the crowd held their breath, and then a deep gasp arose as Levison's athletic figure cut the fire-reflected surface of the Rhyll with scarcely a splash.

As the eddying ripples widened out his dark head showed above the blood-red surface several yards out.

He was swimming feebly, but he did not need to swim for long.

There were two splashes as two St. Jim's seniors dived into the river and went racing towards him. The two were Kildare and Darrell, who had been sent after the junior, Taggles having reported that he had gone out of gates. Having failed to catch the junior up, the two prefects came just in the nick of time to save him—though they were far from realising that it was Levison at the moment.

They reached the struggling form almost together, and together they swam with him to the bank, and willing hands helped them ashore.

And only just in time!

As the drenched three were dragged ashore a dull crash came from within the mill, and then followed a terrific roar as a huge tongue of flame shot skywards, lighting up with a lurid glow the shining river, the surrounding country, and the white faces of the crowd.

But even that roar was drowned in the cheer that went up as Levison was laid on the grass.

"Good man, Levison!" panted Kildare. "But who was it you saved?"

"It—it was Snelson!" choked Ernest Levison. "I—I wanted to make amends, Kildare!"

"And, by Jove, you've done it, kid!" breathed Kildare.

But Ernest Levison did not hear that. He was unconscious.

A car was hastily brought, and Ernest Levison and Snelson were placed in it and taken to St. Jim's together, and there they were soon in the hands of the school nursing staff in the sanny.

It was a couple of days before Levison was back in the Form-room again, and it was then that he learned what his punishment was—a mild lecture from Dr. Holmes, followed by kindly words of praise for his pluck. For Dr. Holmes agreed with everybody else that Ernest Levison had made amends—in more ways than one. And after letting Levison off so lightly, the Head could scarcely punish Cardew and Frank Levison; neither did he.

When Levison came back amongst his school-fellows again it was a happy occasion for Ernest Levison—if it was somewhat embarrassing.

And, strangely enough, the affair was fated to end happily for Hubert Snelson also.

It was a fortnight before the doctor allowed him to see anyone, and then he asked to see Ernest Levison. That junior was shocked at the change in his pal of other days, and in some ways pleased. For Snelson was a wreck; but there was something in his eyes as he took Levison's eagerly-offered hand that had never been there before. And as he saw it Levison knew that by his act at the fire he had indeed made amends. Snelson was changed in other ways than in looks.

It was, too, a change that lasted, happily. A few days later Snelson's father took him away, and the day following Ernest Levison received a letter from him—a letter sincere in its regrets of the past, and hopeful for the future.

THE END.

(Look out for another magnificent yarn of St. Jim's, next week, entitled: "FRIENDS DIVIDED!" By Martin Clifford. This powerful story features such popular favourites as Marie Rivers and her staunch pal, the Toff.)
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SMILER SMITH MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO PRONOUNCE THE KING'S ENGLISH, BUT BY JINGO, HE'S A RARE LAD IN AN EMERGENCY! HE PUTS THE KYBOSH ON A PRETTY LARGE SIZE IN CROOKS, ANYWAY!

BAT BARSTOW'S SPORTING TOUR!



By
CECIL
FANSHAW

CHAPTER 1.

The Run to Folkestone!

BAT BARSTOW'S little two-seater hummed along the London-Folkestone road. Dusk was at hand. The red sun was sinking. Bat seemed in a bit of a hurry.

Beside the big man, who crouched over his steering-wheel blinking through his gold-rimmed spectacles, sat Smiler.

And the Cockney boy, his enormous cheek cap back to front, chuckled happily. He liked speed, did Smiler. He got it, when his huge boss, the Bat, drove!

"Phew! A close shave! Through by an acid drop!"

Bat whistled softly. He had cut between a lorry and a powerful Rolls-Royce, narrowly escaping violent destruction. He steadied down.

"Garn, gov'nor!" scoffed Smiler, twisting round to yell shrill repartee at the Rolls driver. "We ain't bust anything! 'T' er up! We'll miss the boat else!"

Bat laughed. He didn't want to miss the boat from Folkestone to Boulogne any more than Smiler did. For he was going on a sporting tour through France.

Naturally the good-natured giant was taking his fast runabout. Naturally, too, he was taking Smiler, the kid he had rescued from the London streets, turning him into a fair mechanic, making him fairly respectable.

"Too much traffic here, my lad," he grunted. "We can't break records on this road—"

"Bust our bloomin' necks more like!" grinned Smiler.

"Not blooming, Smiler!" shouted Bat, changing gear to roar up a hill. "Your choice of words doesn't improve any, my lad! What's the use of my jawing at you? Say 'putrid necks' if you like. Blooming! Ugh!"

Smiler's grin bisected his round, freckled face. The lad knew his big boss' bark was worse than his bite. And Bat turned off into side lanes, hoping to find less traffic, and so reach Folkestone quicker.

"Hi, gov'n!" yelled Smiler, a few moments later. "Look aht! There's a putrid car right ahead—ablockin' up the putrid road!"

Bat glared at his small, impudent companion. But Smiler's face expressed only alarm and impish innocence.

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"What's wrong, gov? Ain't I used the rite word this time? You said—"

Bat snorted. Then he pulled up with a grinding of brakes.

For a large motor was certainly blocking up the hedged-in lane. It looked like a racing car and appeared to have broken down.

"Hi, hi!" yelled Bat.

"Aht of the way!" piped Smiler.

From behind the low, long-bodied car shot forth a fat, little man, sallow-skinned, with a short black beard, and a bowler hat jammed down on his bullet head.

"T'ousand pardons!" he screamed, waving his hands. "But my car—she is glued. Zat ees she ees stuck, yes! I cannot make 'er biige—budge! You 'elp? Ah! I cannot 'ank you sufficient, monsieur!"

"Don't want any t'anking!" grumbled Bat, heaving his vast frame from his seat and moving forward. "What's the trouble? Two cyinders missing? Humph! Soon fix that. Sooner, the better. We sha'n't catch the Channel boat otherwise."

Bat jerked open the racing car's bonnet while the plump foreigner capered excitedly behind him. He poked about in the machinery, then bawled to Smiler to bring a spanner.

Five minutes later the job was done. Bat knew as much about cars as he did about rifles—and that was a heap. He dived at the self-starter and the engine of the long racer roared to explosive life.

"Marvellous!" yelled the foreigner, gaping as much at Bat's great size as at his amazing skill. "You 'ave ze mag-neto touch, I mean ze magic touch, my beeg friend! Now I go catch ze boat for ze Continent, hey presto!"

"We're goin' to France, too!" grunted Bat, pulling on his leather gauntlets and turning away.

"So?" exclaimed the plump one. "Zen I 'ope we meet later. You und your funny little mechanic boy! My name is Molensky—Russian, yes! To whom do I owe ze t'anks?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter!" grunted Bat. "But see here, Mr. Moleskin, if you don't buzz off quick, you'll miss the bus. So shall we—which is even more important!"

Molensky nodded, jabbered, waved his hands about, then bounced into his great car and roared off.

"Nasty little man," said Bat, as he

lowered himself into his two-seater again and started up.

"The putrid limit—!" began Smiler, but broke off sharp, catching a steely glint in his boss' grey eyes.

Then they hummed off in the wake of the racer. And neither guessed that the meeting with the fat little foreigner would bring them both mighty close to unpleasant ends!

On and on! The little car went like a bird, purring like a ten-horse-power cat. Darkness fell. But Bat's lights cleaved the blackness, revealing the twists and turns in the country lanes.

Of a sudden from right ahead, came three sharp reports.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

"Great snakes!" barked Bat. "That wasn't a tyre exploding! 'Twas a gun! Who's doing hold-up business on English roads?"

Smiler sat up with a jerk, eyes flashing with excitement. Then the two-seater whizzed round a bend, and Bat stopped dead with a shout of amazement.

"That racing car again!" he belated. "What's up?—It's a public nuisance!"

For the bright lights of Bat's runabout plainly revealed the big racer anchored again! And the trouble seemed serious this time. Both Bat and Smiler saw the plump Molensky dashing towards them, wildly waving a red lamp.

"Ah, my beeg friend once more!" cried the Russian, pulling up panting. "T'ank goodness! You do me good turn back zere, yes, and now I save your life!"

"What the crimson blazes are you driving at?" roared Bat.

"You 'ear ze shots, monsieur?"

"Yes," cried Bat impatiently. "I'm not deaf!"

"Vell," panted Molensky. "Zose shots were for me! A man shoot from ze dark 'edge. And just ahead I see a chain across ze road. I nearly go into ze chain, stop in ze click of time, and ze man shoot once more!"

"Why?" yelled Bat.

"Cripes!" muttered Smiler. "'Ere's a go!"

"A go!" yelled the Russian. "No, I no go. I stop! I 'ear your car coming. I t'ink maybe it is my beeg friend who is so kind. I take my back lamp, and race to give warnings. I want to prevent you run into chain. I save your life!"

"It seems you did!" growled Bat, glaring at the black chain he could plainly see stretched taut a few yards beyond the racer. "Have you any idea who shoved the thing there?"

Molensky had. With much hand wagging he plunged into a long yarn about desperate bandits.

"Cut it out!" barked Bat, heaving himself out of his seat. "I can't stop for yarns. Come on, Smiler, we'll jerk that chain away in two shakes!"

Bat, Smiler, and the frenzied Russian quickly removed the wicked chain trap. All the time the Russian screamed that more bandits might be lurking in the darkness.

But Bat and Smiler paid little attention. They were wondering if they'd catch the Channel steamer. When the iron chain had been cleared away Bat extended a hamlike fist to the excited Molensky.

"We owe you one for that, Moleskin," said the huge man. "You certainly saved us a nasty jar. If you'd quitted your car and chased the gunman we'd—"

"You would have crashed into my motor or ze chain!" yelled Molensky.

"Yes, but I no leave ze road. I defy ze pistol! I take my lamp and run to warn you. I save your lifes!"

"No doubt of that," replied Bat crisply. "But we've got to buzz on now. Will you give me your address; I'll write you later, and—"

"No, no! Do not write!" shrieked Molensky, hopping about first on one foot then the other. "Take me wiz you! My car is bent—bust—totally ruined. Ze assassin make ze plug in ze engine. She stock still—stick, stock, stuck!"

"My hat!" groaned Bat, as the fat, sallow Russiau spluttered vainly for words. "You oughter set that rhyme to music. But I've got you. The gunman plugged your engine, eh? Right-ho! Hop into my bus. I'll run you to Folkestone in time for the boat."

Molensky boiled over with thanks. He bumbled about losing his life if he lost the boat, so Bat hustled him into his own car, yelling to Smiler to climb into the dickey-seat.

In a moment they were off, humming through the night at forty an hour, with the cold wind shrieking in their ears.

"What's it all about?" roared Bat, as they shot forward. "Who are you?"

"I am Molensky," bawled back the Russian, "ze man who save your lifes!"

"I know that," grunted Bat, pressing on the accelerator in sudden irritation.

"And I sha'n't forget it. But tell me more. Why did the gun-gent try to plug you and spread his objectionable chains on the highway?"

"Because," yelled Molensky, his mouth close to Bat's ear, "I am a Russian who escape from Russia wiz a wonderful diamond. Ze stone belong to my family, what you call hairloom—no, heirloom."

"Bad men attempt kill me in London. I make to dash to France. But I am warned more bad man look for me in coast towns—p'raps at Folkestone! Already, you see, zey try for me on ze road. It is fearful! I am afright!"

"Don't worry," yelled Bat above the hum of the engine and shriek of the wind, "we'll see you through. I've got your yarn all right. It seems scoundrels trailed you from Russia to England. And they mean to get you—to grab your diamond—before you quit this country, eh? So that's why you drove a racer?"

"Yes," cried Molensky, clutching his short, black beard in frenzy. "I am 'unted! Doubtless there will be attempt to kill me in Folkestone!"

Bat clenched his teeth. He was determined to help this fat Russian who had saved him and Smiler from a fearful crash. He drove on faster than ever, whirling round corners on two wheels.

"What are the scoundrels like, Mole-skin?" he bawled suddenly. "D'you know any of their nugs by sight? I mean have you ever glimpsed their faces?"

"Ze face of one," cried the fat Russian. "An' 'e is at Folkestone, I t'ink. He is broad, ugly, red-faced, wiz a crooked scar across his nose. Horrid! Terrible!"

"He sounds a bit foul," shouted Bat. "Is he the gang boss—the ringleader? The big noise, as the Americans say?"

"He ees the leader, yes," was the yelled reply. "He pass for an Englishman, but I do not know if he makes much noise. But he weel attack if he sees us. Vill you 'elp me? I save your life."

Bat nodded grimly. He thought the Russian rubbed it in a bit about the life-saving. Nevertheless, he meant to see the fellow was neither robbed nor killed.

For Bat wasn't the man to be scared by bandits, English or foreign. He had spent half his life elephant-hunting in African jungles. He blinked rapidly through his glasses, squared his jaw, and drove on furiously.

Behind, in the dicky-seat, sat Smiler, eyes popping in his head, a spanner gripped in one small, grimy fist. The lad was game for any scrap in which his big boss joined.

The hedges reeled past. The telegraph poles seemed an endless fence. Soon the lights of Folkestone showed yellow in the surrounding blackness.

Came suddenly a yelp from Smiler: "Steady gov'nor! Another blinkin' car stuck in the road. Crumbs! There's cars lyin' abaht everywhere to-night! And, my 'at! There's guys jumpin' aht an' comin' at us!"

"My enemies!" screamed Molensky. "Look! Ze man wiz ze scarred, red face! Zey weel kill! 'Elp! 'Elp! Ze gang must have wired zat I come by zis road!"

Came a shrieking of hastily-applied brakes. Bat was forced to stop. But with a roar of battle he heaved his vast frame up in his seat.

"Keep calm, Mole-skin!" he bellowed. "I'll chew this gang up an' drop 'em in the ditch!"

Then feet pounded on the roadway, brilliantly lit by the lamps of Bat's car. With shouts of triumph the three assailants flung themselves forward.

CHAPTER 2.

The Hand of a Foe!

"THAT'S the fellow!" roared the red-faced leader, pointing at Molensky. "Got him at last!"

Bag his pals, too, if possible. Didn't know he had any!"

"The diamond!" howled another. "He'll have the big stone on him!"

The throbbing of the engine, the stamping of feet, and the wild yells drowned further words. The fight was on.

And the attackers were bold enough. Seeing Bat making to defend the fat Russian, two men jumped at him. The third sprang on the running-board, trying to drag Molensky from his seat.

"'Elp! Fight!" screamed Molensky, cowering back and clutching the door. "Hit hard, my beeg friend! I save your lifes!"

Bat did hit hard. He smote with a grunt of rage. And the two men who unwisely grappled with him thought they'd collared an earthquake.

Crash! Bat's great fist connected with a jaw with the crisp smack of billiards balls meeting. The head of the smitten one snickered back. Down he dropped in the road, hopping and floundering, then lay still.

But the scarred, red-faced leader had got Bat's knees. He clung like a bulldog, heedless of the timed automatic blows Bat rained on his back.

It was pandemonium. The little car rocked beneath the weight of the struggling men. All the time Molensky let fly queer little yelps of fear and dismay.

"Out of it! Come out of it!" yelled the fellow who'd got the Russian, and, with a dexterous heave, he yanked the plump Molensky from the car.

Bump! The screaming Russian was in the road. His assailant whirled round, to see Smiler coming full tilt at him.

"Foot-pad!" piped Smiler. "Diamond-pinchin' boulder! I'll dot you one where; you'll feel it most!"

The fellow snarled. He was a lean, active-looking chap, and plainly took the lad for easy meat.

He shot out a sinewy hand, gripped Smiler's neck, and had the kid in a lock-grip as quick as winking.

But Smiler was used to rough handling. He had graduated in London back streets.

He ducked swiftly, spinning round and round like a human top. The hand that held his neck was fixed in his collar. As Smiler spun, the man found he couldn't let go. And the bones of his fingers were being crushed together.

"Ouch! Ugh!" he yelled, as the kid's collar tightened like a vice. "I'll flay you alive, you cub! I'll—"

But Smiler stopped spinning, to revolve rapidly now in the opposite direction. His coat collar loosened.

Released, the lean man staggered back. Before he could start anything fresh, Smiler jumped in.

Biff! The fellow went down on his face, gasping. Smiler had spread him out with a shrewd jab in the stomach.

Bat, meanwhile, had settled his man. Blows seemed useless. The red-faced man with the scarred nose seemed made of iron.

Stooping swiftly, Bat gripped him round his middle. A wrench, and the powerful Bat swung him up bodily. Then down he dashed him in the white dust, to lie motionless beside his pal.

"That's all, I think!" cried Smiler's gigantic boss, as calmly as if he'd been shelling peas. "We'll leave these lads here to cook."

"Did you drop that one, Smiler? Excellent! Feeling O K yourself?"

"It's Jake wiz me, gov'nor!" piped the Cockney lad, jerking his vast cap straight. "An' I don't fink this 'ere Mole-skin's 'urt much. Though he's 'owlin' 'orrible!"

"Oh, shut him up an' plant him back in the car!" growled Bat. "I'll go and shift that limousine. If we don't get a skate on we'll miss the Channel boat for a snip!"

Two of the assailants were still senseless. The third lay gasping and groaning.

Bat ignored them. He reached the blocking limousine in a few great bounds, leapt into the driver's seat, started up, then backed into the ditch.

The road was clear again. And a few seconds later, with Molensky jabbering thanks beside him, Bat sent his small two-seater darting forward towards Folkestone.

Smiler was perched in the dicky-seat. As they shot forward, the kid looked back to hoot insulting defiance. Then a bend hid the three black figures sprawling in the white road.

"Caw, gov'nor!" shrilled Smiler. "Didn't 'arf make them blokes feel giddy!"

"T'anks! T'anks!" groaned Molensky. "You save me, and you save my diamond. And I save your life before. We is what you call quits—quits!"

"A big diamond seems a troublesome thing to honk around in the vest-pocket!" grunted Bat, slowing down as they whirred into a well-lit street.

"But don't worry, Mole-skin. If there's no more toughs around, we'll have you aboard the boat in a brace of flicks."

But no more toughs with big cars cumbered the streets. And shortly afterwards Smiler smelt the salt tang of a wind from the sea.

They hummed down to the docks in the nick of time. All was confusion on the quay. Sailors and porters shouted.

As long boat-train had disgorged the last of its passengers. A warning boom came from the channel boat's siren.

"Buck yer fevvers, guv'nor!" yelled Smiler. "They're off!"

In fact, the ship, whose decks were thronged, from whose port-holes streamed floods of yellow light, was almost ready to cast off. Her engines rumbled. Once more the siren boomed.

But Bat gave a mighty shout.

Immediately those about to haul the gangway clear paused in their task, and that moment's respite gave Bat Barstow his chance. The car came to a standstill, the engine spluttered its way finally to silence, what time its big driver and his companions were fumbling for their passports.

"Hold on, messmates!" yelled Bat, as he satisfied the embarkation officers that his passport and that of his companions were in order. "Swing this auto into the hold!"

The sailors aboard jumped to it with a will. A crane cable began to fuss its way over the side of the ship. Another two minutes and Bat's car was safely aboard.

"Good!" chuckled Smiler. "The guv'nor's done it!"

"You're through, Moleskin!" laughed Bat, slapping the plump Russian on the back and making him wince.

"Yes!" cried the fellow. "T'anks to you an' your fony leetle mechanic! Now tell me your name, please, zat I may remember to whom—"

"Forget it!" laughed Bat, his eyes dancing behind his spectacles. "We quite enjoyed ourselves. A scrap's a good start to a sporting tour!"

"But, since you insist, I'm Jim Barstow, known as Bat. This lad here's Smiler."

The bearded little Russian nodded and bowed. He seemed in good spirits now, as well he might be.

But the plunging motion of the vessel seemed to bother him. Before the lights of Folkestone had dropped far astern, he excused himself and staggered off to a cabin.

"Exit our fat friend!" laughed Bat, little thinking how true his words were. "How're you feeling, Smiler?"

"Top'ole, guv'nor!" cried the Cockney lad gamely.

But he gripped the taffrail and hung on like grim death.

Thud-thud! went the engines. At a mighty smart clip the Channel steamer was thrusting her nose through racing seas.

It was a wild night. The wind shrieked and whistled from out of the darkness. Very soon all the decks were empty. The pitching and tossing made passengers seek cover.

"Come on, Smiler!" laughed Bat. "You and I seem the only good sailors aboard. But we'll barge along the deck a bit an' shelter behind that—"

"Hallo! What's up?"

By the light of an electric bulb, Bat saw that Smiler's face had turned a queer shade of green. And he had released the rail, to press both hands to his stomach.

"Caw, guv'nor!" he gasped faintly. "I do feel queer! No! 'Tain't the ship! I reckon I miss the Lunnon streets. Phew! I'm gettin' homesick!"

Bat hid a grin. He knew what was wrong with Smiler—a very different sickness to homesickness! But he greatly admired the lad's pluck in refusing to admit it.

"Right-ho, Smiler!" he said. "Toddle off and find a cabin—like Mr. Moleskin. Have a good doss down."

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I'll yank you out when we get near Boulogne."

With a deep groan, Smiler toddled off. The kid hoped he'd never see the sea again. All he wanted was good hard ground which didn't rock!

Hands to stomach, he reeled along the deck, to vanish through an open doorway.

"So I'm the last on deck," laughed Bat. "What-ho for the ocean wave! It certainly is blowing a bit. But I guess I'll stop above. It's too stuffy in the cabins."

Time passed. They were soon in mid-channel. And half a gale swept the dark seas. The swift vessel dipped and cutseyed like a ballet dancer.

But Bat was happy. He leaned over the rail. He watched the white-capped waves race past, saw the spouting spray sparkle red and green in the glare of the porthole lights.

"Just like goin' through the Bay on the way to Africa," he muttered. "It reminds me—"

That moment the ship rolled heavily. Bat saw the swirling waters rise to meet him. The floor of the deck rose in a slant behind.

Bat only laughed. He waited for the roll back to starboard that would set him straight again.

It was a long time coming. And of a sudden the huge man felt his ankles seized!

They were seized in a grip of steel. Powerful though he was, Bat had no time to kick free. And he was leaning far over the rail just as he was gripped. Came a strangled shout from Bat. But it was whipped from his lips by the shrieking gale.

A hoist, a violent heave, and Bat shot headlong into the howling void! Someone had stalked him, had pounced on the opportunity to throw him over.

Why, Bat didn't know. But, as he whizzed away over the railing, he got a fleeting glimpse of his foul assailant.

He saw a stranger, a lean, short man, with a fiendish grin on his dark, clean-shaven features.

Then the sea rose to meet Bat. He plunged in headlong. A roaring filled his ears as he drove down into icy, black depths!

CHAPTER 3.

Smiler Does His Bit!

"CRUMBS! That's better! It looks a bit flatter now. And, by gosh, I'm peckish—could do wiv a bite!"

As Smiler spoke, he jerked upright in the bunk of the tiny cabin to which he had retreated.

He looked out through the porthole, to catch a glimpse of calmer seas, to see yellow pin-pricks of light away at Boulogne Harbour.

"I guess that's Boolong!" muttered the kid. "Where we hops off this 'ere buckin' barge. Thank Mike she's steadier now! I'll hike back on deck, find th' guv'nor, an' try an' rout out a bit o' grub. Am I empty? Not 'arf!"

Promptly Smiler started to put his plans into execution. He drifted out of the cabin, rolled along the still slightly unsteady corridor, clambered up a companion-way, then shot out on to the deck.

The wind still blew. The deck, lit by bulbs widely-spaced in the roof, seemed as deserted as when Smiler had caved in.

"No one abaht!" he muttered. "Rotten lot o' landlubbers! Where the thump can the guv be? Surely 'e ain't been an'—"

"Allo! There's a guy along there wot's all rite on his pins. I'll ask him."

Adopting a rolling, nautical gait, Smiler set off. He had glimpsed a thin little man who was poking about as if looking for something. Smiler saw him squint through one deck-cabin window after the other.

"Hi, mister!" piped the lad, steadying himself against a pile of chairs. "Have you seen my guv'nor—a great, hefty gent, wiv a square jaw an' gold-rimmed gig-lamps?"

Round whipped the small man. Smiler saw a dark, clean-shaven fellow, as thin as a rake, but looking as tough and wiry as a steel hawser.

"By gosh!" gasped Smiler. "'Oo the Marble Arch are you? Why, it's—"

But the rat-faced, undersized man sprang like a panther. In one bound he was on Smiler, to grip the surprised kid by the throat.

"Leggo!" spluttered Smiler, vainly trying to hack his assailant's shins. "Wot's the game? I knows you, Moleskin, tho' you 'ave got rid o' your suit an' scraped 'yer beard off! I guess you're a crook, after all! An' I'll biff your napper—"

"Ugh! Gluck! Gluck!"

Smiler broke off in choking gurgles. For the meagre scoundrel—none other than Molensky himself—was squeezing the lad's windpipe till his eyes popped.

"Found you at last!" he hissed. "I 'ave search ze ship for you! And never again weel you see your beeg boss! Zat stupeed, soft-brained giant is in ze sea! Yes; he ees now food for ze fishes!"

Smiler was furious. He only half grasped what the ruffian meant, for his brains were churning round and round. The fat Molensky, whom he and Bat had saved from bandits, had become a thin Molensky who seemed a deadly enemy. What had become of Bat, the kid couldn't quite make out.

But Smiler kicked, spluttered, and struggled in vain. The bony Russian was as strong as a horse, and had got a stranglehold.

"Yes!" he snarled. "Your boss ees drowned. I 'cave him over! Easy! He no see me till too late. And now I 'cave you over, too!"

Doubtless the ruffian would have carried out his threat. But there came a tramping of boots, a siren bellow, then shouts. And a glance told Molensky they were about to run into Boulogne Harbour.

"Too late!" he spat. "I must take ze cub ashore. It will be easy to feeneesh him there. Now zen, feeneesh fight? Good! Zis way!"

Half strangled, Smiler yet put out all his strength in a desperate effort to break away. But a savage blow to the jaw jarred his brains, and all but stunned him.

He was only dimly conscious of what followed. He felt himself grabbed up, to be bodily carried off along the deck.

In the open part of the deck, where two or three cars were firmly lashed, the Russian acted quickly.

He dumped the almost senseless Smiler in shadow. Then he bound him hand and foot with cord, gagged him with his own check cap, and firmly secured it. Lastly he thrust the helpless lad into Bat's car, shoved him under the seat, and banged the door.

Molensky was only just in time. Even as he slammed the door of Bat's two-seater, sailors came pounding along the deck with ropes.

"The bounder!" gritted Smiler, recovering himself to find he was wedged under the seat and in utter darkness. "E must 'ave been kiddin' us all the time! He's an escapin' crook! And

he's done my guv'nor in! 'Eaved him over when he wasn't lookin'! By gee, Pll—Pll—"

But Smiler could do nothing for the present. He could not even shout for help to the men he could hear stamping all around.

Helpless, gagged, he racked his brains to try to understand what had happened. Why had fat Molensky shaved off his beard and become thin? Why had he turned on the pair who had saved him? Was the diamond story a faked yarn? What was going to happen next?

But Smiler couldn't solve the problems. And he couldn't think coolly. His beloved boss, the large-framed, large-hearted Bat, had been done in by this vile little traitor!

The thought of Bat dead made Smiler see red. But useless struggles were exhausting. All the kid could do was to lie still—await the first opportunity to turn the tables.

"Nothin'll bring the guv'nor back!" he gritted. "But I'll get this twistin' dago behind bars, or my name isn't Smiler!"

The steadiness of the Channel boat told that they were in Boulogne harbour and made fast. Smiler could hear chattering passengers stream past his prison.

He heard more. He suddenly heard Molensky declaring that he was Mr. Jim Barstow's secretary, and had orders to take the two-seater ashore! Some delay with Customs officials, but Molensky seemed to know how to fix that. The heavy bag he had with him was not even looked at.

"The cad!" gritted Smiler. "The lyin' boulder! If only I could spit this gag from my teeth!"

But Smiler couldn't. The next thing the lad knew was that the car, lifted on a crane cable, was being swung ashore. The sensation made him feel giddy. Followed a wait of five minutes or so, and then the crunch of footsteps.

All at once the little car creaked. Molensky was climbing in. He dumped himself and his bag in the driver's seat, started up, then slowly drove the car he had stolen down the Boulogne quay.

Twisting his head, Smiler could see the Russian's boots, his trousers. That was all. He was a prisoner, being carried off in his boss' car he knew not where!

Smiler didn't know where he was, but heard the Russian scoundrel chuckle something about soon reaching Paris. Then the extra speed of the car told the kid they were out of town and dashing along the high-road.

"Here's where I get bumped off," the shrewd lad told himself, "if I ain't slippy! By jingo, I've gotter get rid of these cords!"

The car hummed and purred along the moonlit road to Paris. But Smiler, under the driver's seat, was working frantically.

Sweat streamed off him like rain. He rubbed his wrists raw. But at last he managed to spit out the cap. A few seconds later he bit off a cry of triumph.

For the bonds had been hastily tied in the hurry, and the deck had been wrapped in darkness when Molensky did his foul work. Smiler got his hands free, then fell to work to release his ankles.

"Done it!" he gasped at length. "A bit stiff, but ready fer a showdown with Moleskin! Wot's the next item on the boulder's programme? Wot shall I start?"

"Shall I bite 'is ankle, then biff his jaw when he looks down to see what bit 'im, or—"

But Smiler was saved the trouble of evolving plans of campaign, for the car stopped that moment and Molensky sprang out.

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A moment to let the blackguard get clear, then Smiler peered out. He saw they had stopped at a wayside garage—saw the Russian haggling in the lighted interior.

"Good enuffsky!" gasped the lad. "The boulder don't know I'm free. While he buys acid drops an' spanners, I hooks it while the hookin's good!"

"Tain't no use scrappin'. Moleskin's got a gun. I guess he'd drop me pronto in this furrin' country—swear 'e took me for a thief. But he ain't goin' far—no fear! He's goin' abah't two mile; then he stops dead an' I sets cops on him."

Smiler was a bit hazy about French law. He had never before been out of England in his life. He thought all foreigners shot at sight.

But it was well he didn't stop to scrap. He didn't know a word of French. Molensky would have biffed him and spun some excuse for carting him on.

But Smiler queered that. Like a greased shadow he slipped out, turned on the drain-tap of the petrol-tank, then beat it for the shadow of some trees like a hunted cat.

Invisible, the kid watched, chuckling. He saw Molensky come out of the garage, saw he hadn't bought any petrol—watched him climb into the stolen two-seater.

A second later the Russian shot off. There was a black pool in the white dust where the car had been standing, and a

dark trail showed some distance down the moonlit road.

The pool and the trail were both petrol. The wily Smiler had turned the tap so it drained out full lick.

"S'long, Moleskin!" chuckled Smiler. "You won't git far wiv a empty petrol-tank, an' you ain't got no more. Here's findin' a cop to set on yer trail!"

Anxiously Smiler glanced round for a police-station. He saw none. He had forgotten things weren't the same as in England. There was quite a bit of trouble before him yet!

CHAPTER 4. Unmasked!

"PERLEECE! Perleece! Where the deuce are they?" yelled Smiler, and dashed into a village cafe not far from the garage.

Despite the lateness of the hour, the cafe was still open and fairly full.

"Nom d'un pipe!" cried the fat French proprietor, throwing up his podgy hands. "Qu'est que c'est. Que voulez vous, mon garcon?"

"Ere, none o' your lip!" cried Smiler. "Oo are yer a-calling nimes? Fink yer funny? Where's the perleece-station? Spit it aht, pronto!"

But the bewildered cafe-keeper couldn't

make head or tail of Smiler's wants. He yelled to his grinning audience to know what "oe garcon Anglais" was raving about.

"Perleece, fat-ead!" yelled Smiler. "There's a Roosian boulder dahn the road wot's 'opped it wiv my guv'nor's car; an' 'e pitched my guv overboard when he weren't lookin'!

"Look-slippy, can't yer? The cad won't get far wivout no petrol in 'is tank!"

By now the cafe was thoroughly roused. Interested customers crowded round the Cockney lad, jabbering in their own language.

"C'est drole!" said one. "Qu'est-ce qu'il dit, le petit?"

"Blow my dicky!" groaned Smiler. "Are all you guys off yer rockers? Wot the giddy goat are you jawin' abah?"

Disgusted, in despair, the boy whirled round to quit the cafe and find someone who could understand him.

But a young Frenchman, clad in a strange blue uniform, pushed through the crowd and confronted him.

"What ees eet zat you want, mon brave?" he queried, twirling his long, black moustache. "Ze perleece? Yes? I am gendarme—what you Eengleesh call perleece. You wish make an arrest? Oui? Non?"

Smiler spun back on his heel. "You knows English, do yer?" he cried thankfully. "Then get a move on, for the love o' Mike!"

And he repeated his story that the Russian villain was probably awaiting arrest not far off on the Paris road.

But Smiler jabbered too fast, and the cafe was soon in an uproar. Shoulders shrugged; hands waved; excited French voices screamed fifteen to the dozen.

Finally the young gendarme pounced on Smiler, grabbed him, and rushed him from the cafe to the gendarme-station in the middle of the village.

Smiler didn't know what was up. But he sensed that his captor was friendly, and went quietly.

More trouble in the French police-station. Four gendarmes questioned the now frantic Smiler in broken English well mixed with fluent French.

"T'under!" roared the gendarme chief at last. "I weel ring up ze central police-station at Boulogne. I weel demand to know from what sheep zis garcon terrible 'as made ze escape!"

Ting-ting! went the telephone-bell. The chief was ringing up Boulogne. The bewildered Smiler watched him hopefully.

Through at last, and the haughty chief barked a volley of questions into the instrument.

But his haughtiness vanished abruptly. Still gripping the receiver, he swung round on Smiler, amazement on his well-fed face.

"Zere ees an Eenglish monsieur who spik from Boulogne," he gasped, "from ze central gendarme station. He say he call up all village stations. He ask for news of a thin man, a small auto, and a boy Anglais. Ees zat you, mon garcon?"

"What?" yelled Smiler. "An English gent on the phone? Wot a slice o' luck! 'Oo the deuce can 'e be?" And the kid leapt forward to snatch the receiver from the outraged chief's hand.

"Ullo, 'ullo!" he bawled. "Who's that? Smiler speakin'. Wot? Blow me tite! 'Oo? Owt Well, I'm jiggered! The guv'nor hiss! Thank goodness!"

Smiler was nearly off his head with joy. For over the wire he distinctly

recognised his huge boss' voice. It was Bat Barstow speaking from Boulogne.

"I thort you were drowned, guv'!" yelled the kid.

"So did someone else, Smiler," came Bat's voice grimly. "But I contrived to swim around for a bit, and got picked up by a French fishing-smack! I was landed here about half an hour ago. I've been ringing up—"

"Come rite aht here, guv'nor!" howled Smiler. "Borrow a car pronto. You'll nab Moleskin in two shakes. I sent him off dahn th' road wiv his petrol-tank drainin' aht full lick!"

"Ah!" cried the Bat's voice. "So it was Moleskin who consigned me to the deep, after all! I had an idea it was."

"You've fixed him, Smiler? Good work! No, tell me the yarn later. Where are you now?"

"Where the dickens are we?" cried Smiler, spinning round on the gendarme chief.

"Pont-de-Briques," replied the official, catching the kid's meaning.

"Ponderbreeks, guv'!" bawled Smiler into the instrument. "Wot shall I do next?"

"Wait there!" roared Bat from Boulogne. "I know the place. I'll be out as fast as gasolene in a hot engine can churn machinery!"

In a very short time Bat and Smiler were roaring along the road to Paris, aboard a borrowed racing-car.

As they raced forward Smiler told his tale. He told how Molenusky had

grabbed him on the steamer, gagged and bound him, then run ashore in Bat's two-seater.

"I was jammed under the seat, guv'nor!" yelled the kid above the tearing, whistling wind. "But I got free, nipped aht, an' switched the petrol-tap on. Then I 'unted for perleece. But the blinkin' gemedarms seemed 'arf potty. It took me 'arf an hour to shoot my piece off."

"But," added the kid, "wot's Mole-skin's game, guv'nor? Why was 'e faked up to be fat, when he's really thin? Why did 'e ask us to help bash them stiff near Folkestone? 'Oo the jumpin' kangaroos was they?"

"All in good time, Smiler," shouted Bat. "We shall learn a lot when we've grabbed our bird. And by Jupiter," he ended in a bellow, "there he is!"

For a bend in the road revealed a stationary car—a small car—Bat's own two-seater. And beside it Molenusky was frantically tinkering with the "innards." Being no mechanic, the ruffian hadn't tumbled to what was wrong.

But he heard the big racer roaring down on him. He looked up, to see Smiler, and to see the huge man he thought at the bottom of the Channel.

"Peste!" he shrieked, jumping back. "Zee beeg man again! 'Ow come? And zat English cub!"

With marvellous skill Bat stopped the big car within a few yards of his own. Out he leapt, with Smiler pounding at his heels. The horrified Molenusky seemed paralysed with fear.

"Yes, it's me, Mole-skin!" roared Bat. "And I'm not offering you a lift this time, you miserable worm! But I'm going to take you back to England!"

At that Molenusky woke up. He started to run, giving vent to yelps of terror. But Bat and Smiler overhauled him fast.

Abruptly the scoundrel wheeled. Something winked in his hand in the brilliant moonlight.

Came a flash and a bang. Bat swerved. The Russian's bullet grazed his side, to tear a humming path through the huge check cap of Smiler close behind.

But there were no more shots. In one great bound Bat leapt on Molenusky, bore him to the ground, then jerked the wretch to his feet, and snatched his pistol.

"Chuck it, Molenusky!" he barked, shaking the wretch. "And come back to my car, which you stole. I fancy we shall discover the reason for your plump condition when we met you in England."

They did. In Bat's runabout was Molenusky's big bag, and in the bag were yards of cloth wound around numbers of jewel cases.

"You wore all that, did you, under your clothes?" gasped Bat. "A cute dodge. But your game's up now. I guessed you were a crook when I learnt it was you helped me over-board."

(Continued on page 28.)



A hoist, a violent heave, and Bat Barstow shot headlong into the howling void! (See Page 24.)

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A COOL RETORT!

"Here is a drink of water—pure, cold, delicious water," said the old lady to the tramp at the door. "What! You refuse it?" The tramp shook his head and sighed. "I have to, ma'am," he said at length. "You see, I've got an iron constitution, and water would rust it!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Jack Gillick, 16, Baltic Avenue, Antrim Road, Belfast, Ireland.

LACK OF SUPPLIES!

The conjurer's turn had not been going at all well, but he stuck doggedly to his task. "Now," he said, "if any lady or gentleman in the audience would oblige me with an egg I would proceed to perform an amazing trick." There was a momentary silence, then from the back of the hall came a voice: "If anybody 'ere 'ad an egg, guv'nor, you'd 'ave 'ad it long ago!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Lawrence Frechiani, 245, Ducane Road, Hammersmith, W. 12.

A STICKY TRICK!

A teacher told her class to bring something to demonstrate the word "immaterial." Next morning a bright youth brought a stick. "Well," asked the teacher, "how does that demonstrate the use of the word 'immaterial'?" "I'll show you, miss," said the lad. "Take hold of one end, then the other. That's it. Now leave go one end." "Which end?" asked the teacher. "Well, it's immaterial, miss," said the scholar, "there's treacle on both ends!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to James W. Atkinson, 3, Cemetery Road, Gateshead-on-Tyne.

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AS I announced in a previous Chat, I have secured a series of complete stories by Sidney Drew dealing with those famous characters, Gan Waga & Co. No. 1, entitled, "Pulling Gan Waga's Leg!" will appear in next week's GEM. Mind you read it. You will be doing me a good turn, too, if you spread this news amongst your friends, for there are thousands of boys and girls interested in Ferrers Lord and the merry men aboard his yacht, the Lord of the Deep.

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Gem E., 1926.....

Bat Barstow's Sporting Tour.

(Continued from page 20.)

Vainly the Russian fought. Bat held him. And soon the police car from Boulogne arrived. Molensky was turned over to the gendarmes, and Bat and Smiler followed in the recovered two-seater, having borrowed petrol.

At Boulogne Molensky entered a cell. Bat sent off a cable to Folkestone, asking the English police to come over by the next boat.

Three hours later the English police arrived. They went straight to the Boulogne gendarme station, where Bat and Smiler also awaited them.

Then Bat and Smiler got the shock of their lives. For there entered the three men they had blotted on the Folkestone Road, headed by the red-faced man with a scarred nose.

"What's this mean?" shouted Bat, starting up. "I wired for police."

"And we are police," granted the red-face. "Who the blue blazes are you? Why, you're the big stiff who knocked us endways outside Folkestone, when we were lying up for that jewel robber!"

"It would appear," murmured Bat,

"that there is some mistake. But, I can assure you, we did not knowingly assist a bandit and lay you gents out. In proof, come and see Molensky, the gent who tipped me overboard, who would have got away but for this lad here, Smiler."

Puzzled, the English plain-clothes policemen followed Bat and Smiler to the Russian's cell.

"The deuce! You have got him, then!" shouted red-face.

"Exactly!" murmured Bat. "Meet Mr. Molensky. The jewels he pinched are in the gendarmie office."

"Molensky nothing!" cried red-face. "That's Popoffovitch! He's a Pole, and a noted bandit. We'd been warned he'd left London in a racer, so we were real surprised to see him in a two-seater. What's it all mean?"

"Mean?" piped Smiler, nimbly-witted. "Why, it means that that ere bloke broke down. My boss tinkered up his car, an' he must ha' spotted what a hefty useful pard my boss 'ud make."

"So the bounder framed a trap, showed a chain rigged across the road, garnied abait gunmen, said he'd saved our lives. He said 'e was bein' unted by bandits for a diamond, and that a red-faced bully was awaitin' him at

Folkestone—meanin' you, plainly, inspector."

"None o' your sauce, kid!" barked the policeman.

Bat gasped.

"You've hit it, Smiler! The Russian, or Polish bounder rigged the chain up himself—wheel chains—and shot at nothing. We were nicely had. But Moloskovitch is had now."

He was. And the three policemen made arrangements to take him back to England as swiftly as possible.

Bat and Smiler returned to England next morning. They would be wanted to give evidence. So the sporting tour was abandoned.

"I don't think we'll visit France again for a bit, Smiler," said Bat, as the white cliffs of England hove into view. "We'll have a little jaunt round England some day instead."

"Thank 'Mike, giv' nor!" burst out Smiler. "I've ad-enough of them gendarme blokes, an' I've had my bloom-in' cap split!"

THE END

(Look out for the first of a series of thrilling adventure yarns by Sidney Drew next week, entitled: "PULLING GAN WAGA'S LEG!" You will laugh loud and long over these amusing stories.)

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