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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

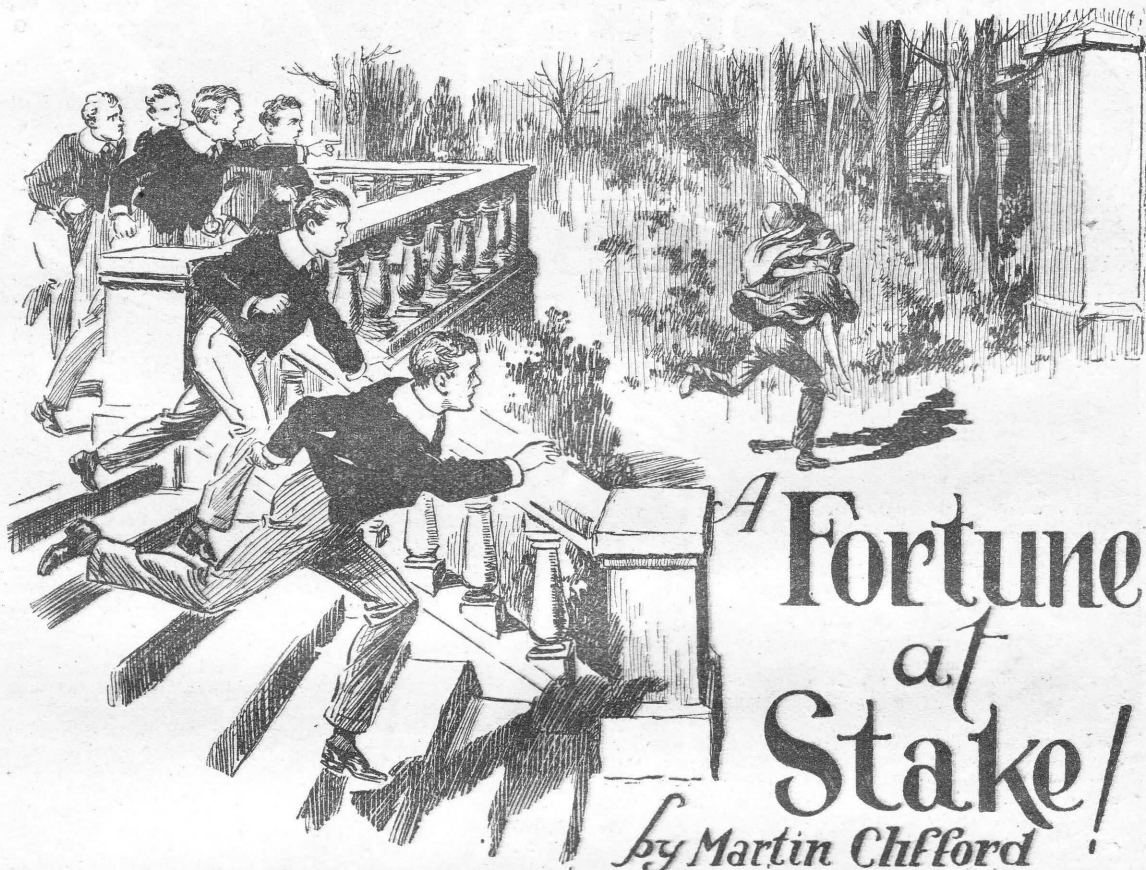
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SIX LIVES IN THE BALANCE!

*(A dramatic incident from the grand long
school story of Tom Merry & Co. in this issue.)*

A THRILLING AND DRAMATIC COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE OF—



A Fortune at Stake!

By Martin Chifford

Kidnapped! Helpless prisoners in the hands of an utterly unscrupulous gang of crooks, there seems no hope for Ernest Levison and his sister Doris. But both they and their captors reckon without Ralph Reckness Cardew—the slacker and dandy of the Fourth at St. Jim's, who "wakes up" with a vengeance!

CHAPTER 1.

Figgins is Upset!

"IT'S rotten!"

It was Figgins, of the New House at St. Jim's, who suddenly gave vent to his feelings with that remark.

George Figgins spoke quite vehemently. Whatever it was that struck Figgy as being rotten, he evidently considered it as being the last word in rottenness.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn, Figgins' two chums, glanced up from their prep to stare at him.

"Eh?" said Kerr.

"What's that?" inquired David Llewellyn Wynn.

"It's rotten!" repeated Figgins, more violently than ever.

"Putrid, in fact! Beastly! A blessed shame! A giddy disgrace! A rotten, putrid—"

"Steady your hosses!" grinned Fatty Wynn, laying down his pen and surveying Figgins with interest. "What are you talking about?"

A faint pinkness suffused the face of the leader of the New House Fourth.

"I was thinking of—of Spalding Hall," confessed Figgy. Fatty Wynn chuckled, and winked at Kerr.

Kerr grinned, and winked at Fatty Wynn.

They understood now the cause of their chum's angry remarks and furrowed brow; and also his sudden pinkness!

Spalding Hall was a school for girls that had been opened some time ago near Wayland. Ethel Cleveland, the pretty and popular cousin of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, had become a pupil there. Cousin Ethel was a great chum of many of the St. Jim's juniors; they all liked her, and she liked them. But Figgins had a warmer admiration for Ethel than even Arthur Augustus and the chums of the School House; and Ethel, for her part, liked Figgins perhaps a little better than any of the other St. Jim's fellows!

Figgins had been beside himself with joy when Ethel had arrived at Spalding Hall. But a staggering blow had been delivered from which even now, a week later, the juniors had not yet recovered—least of all Figgins. By

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the stern edict of Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of St. Jim's, Spalding Hall had been placed out of bounds!

The reason for this ghastly state of affairs—as Figgins considered it—was what the Head had described as "a vulgar brawl" on the part of some of the juniors outside the very gates of Spalding Hall. Miss Finch, the headmistress, had come to know of it, and had forthwith forbidden St. Jim's boys to visit her school any more.

And Figgins felt that life was scarcely worth living.

"Hard luck," said Kerr sympathetically.

"Beastly," agreed Fatty Wynn. "But I say, Figgy, if you don't buck up and start your blessed prep, you'll be in the soup with Lathom to-morrow."

"Blow Lathom!" growled Figgins.

"He'll blow you, anyway," grinned Fatty Wynn. "There's the rub—as old Shakespeare says!"

Grunt from Figgins! He was feeling far too fed up for prep at that moment.

"I wonder if a round-robin to the Head might get him to change his mind about the chaps not going to Spalding?" said Figgins, with sudden brightness.

Kerr shook his head.

"That's no good! It's not the Head. It's Miss Finch. She won't let the chaps go to Spalding, and the Head has to back her up. If she changed her mind, the Head would let the chaps go there all right. No, it's Miss Finch who's the one to get at."

"Well, what about sending her a round-robin?" exclaimed Figgins.

"Rats!" grunted Fatty Wynn, bending over his books again. "Wouldn't do any good! The harm's done; you asses ought not to have kicked up that shindy outside the gates of her school, and—"

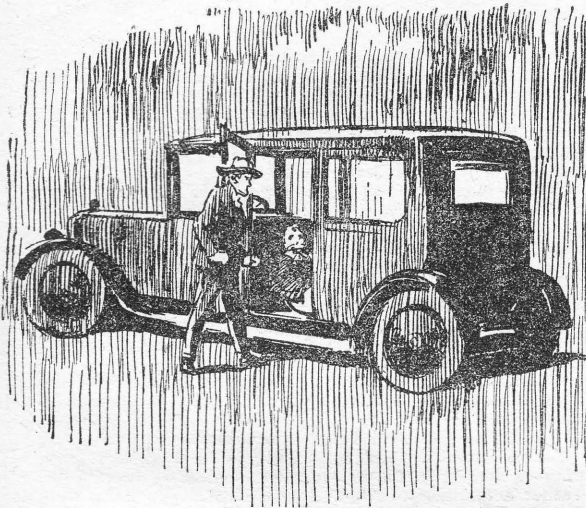
"We were only scragging Mellish," cut in Figgins gloomily. "If Miss Finch knew Mellish, she'd know it was a good job we did scrag him! Mellish ought to be scragged once a day at least."

"Certainly; but not outside Spalding Hall!" chuckled Kerr.

"Then you don't think a round-robin—"

"No!" said Kerr decidedly. "The harm's done now, and

—TOM MERRY & CO., & THEIR GIRL CHUMS OF SPALDING HALL!



it can't be undone. The only thing you can hope is that after a while time will heal the giddy wound, as the poet says!"

"Perhaps a personal deputation—" began Figgins desperately, not to be convinced.

Again Kerr shook his head.

"I don't think she'd even see you! She's a determined old lady, you know. Of course, there might have been a hope if—"

He broke off, and a faint frown appeared on his face.

"Well?" demanded Figgins eagerly. "There might be a hope if what?"

"I was thinking," said Kerr slowly, "that a brother of one of the Spalding girls would have been the chap to make the peace. Miss Finch said that brothers could visit their sisters on Sundays. A brother could have seen her, then, and perhaps succeeded in persuading her to give the fellows another chance. But—well, Levison, you know—"

Kerr broke off again. At mention of Levison's name even Fatty Wynn looked gloomy.

Ernest Levison of the Fourth had been a School House man; but even with that disadvantage, from the point of view of Figgins & Co., he had been as popular with the New House fellows as with his own chums in the School House.

Levison had a sister, Doris Levison—a pretty, high-spirited girl, who, like Ethel Cleveland, was now a pupil at Spalding Hall, and was very popular with the St. Jim's juniors. Kerr had been thinking that Levison, as her brother, might have been the means of making peace with Miss Finch. But that was now impossible!

For Ernest Levison had disappeared from St. Jim's.

He had been gone nearly a week now. His disappearance had caused such a stir as St. Jim's had not known for many a day. Without even saying good-bye to his particular chums, Cardew and Clive of the School House, Levison had "bunked"—as Racke of the Shell put it—one dark evening, and a pencilled letter had arrived for Dr. Holmes, written by Levison, saying that he was tired of the school and would never return.

That was all that St. Jim's knew of the bewildering, utterly unexpected disappearance of one of the most popular fellows in the School House!

Figgins & Co. had been almost as troubled by Levison's strange departure from the school as had Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. of the School House, who had been really distressed over the affair. But as the days had passed, it was natural that the first keen sense of loss on the part of the St. Jim's juniors should have become a little dulled. By now the fellows realised that it was no good worrying—that they must simply make the best of a bad job.

After all, life at St. Jim's had to go on, even without Ernest Levison. And the fellows who had liked the missing schoolboy could only hope that after a while they would forget their sense of loss, that feeling that something was missing from St. Jim's that could never quite be replaced.

"Levison would have been the chap," agreed Fatty Wynn slowly. "Being a brother of Doris Levison, he could have seen Miss Finch all right, and might have got her to change her mind about not letting the chaps go to Spalding."

"But poor old Levison's not here any longer," grunted

Figgins. "Queer, wasn't it, the way he scooted? I'd have thought he was one of the last chaps to bolt. He always seemed cheery enough; but, according to that letter of his to the Head, he was utterly sick of St. Jim's!"

"Yes, it was rum, Levison's clearing out," agreed Kerr, with a frown.

"But the fact remains that he did run away," said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins rose to his feet and took down his books, and settled down at the table opposite his fat chum, to begin his neglected prep. For the time being the question of Spalding Hall was relegated to the background. But after a time Kerr glanced up.

"I wonder what Doris Levison thinks about her brother running away from St. Jim's?" he said thoughtfully.

"She doesn't know yet," said Figgins. "Tom Merry told me so. You know that Levison's pater came here and took away young Frank Levison, of the Third, because the kid was so frightfully cut up about his major? They're giving the kid a holiday in Switzerland, to take his mind off it. He won't be back at St. Jim's for a few weeks. Well, Tom Merry saw Mr. Levison, and he told Tom Merry that they were keeping it from Doris. They hope that old Levison may turn up even yet; and, if so, it would have been a pity for Doris to have been worried about it."

"Good idea," nodded Fatty Wynn. "She'd be off her head with anxiety."

"She'll have to know soon," said Kerr.

"I s'pose so," agreed Figgins. "But not yet, anyway—not till Levison writes home to his people, and says where he is. That's queer, you know. Apparently Levison hasn't even dropped his people a line to tell 'em what his plans are!"

"Can't understand the chap," muttered Fatty Wynn. "Levison, of all people! You'd almost think the poor chap had gone off his rocker. He's run right off the rails, anyway."

Talk ended for a while. But at last Figgins finished his prep—the other two had already done so—and the leader of the New House trio drew a pencil and paper towards him.

"I've got to fix up the team for to-morrow, you chaps," said Figgins. "There's the match on against the School House."

Next day was Wednesday and a half-holiday. Important matches took place, as a rule, on Saturdays, but a "friendly" between School House and New House had been fixed for the following afternoon.

Silence reigned in Study No. 4 as George Figgins, with thoughtful brow, drew up his list.

"Blow!" said Figgins suddenly, and a far-away look came into his face.

"What's up now?" inquired David Llewellyn Wynn.

"I was just thinking," said Figgins dimly, "that if it hadn't been for the blessed mess-up about Spalding Hall, Cousin Ethel—and Doris Levison, of course—would have been able to come over and watch the footer match to-morrow. But as it is, they can't!"

His chums did not reply. But once again the Falstaff of the New House winked gravely at the Scottish junior. And George Francis Kerr winked equally gravely at David Llewellyn Wynn!

CHAPTER 2.

Cardew's Theory!

"WHAT about Cardew?"

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, asked that question soon after dinner on the following afternoon.

Tom Merry was seated at the table in Study No. 10 of the Shell passage in the School House. There was a reflective frown on his good-looking face. A list of names on a sheet of foolscap lay on the table before him, and one of those names had been crossed out. It was that crossed out name that was giving Tom Merry food for thought.

His two study-mates, Monty Lowther and Harry Manners, were also in the study, and they, too, were looking thoughtful.

Clearly, some problem of considerable importance was engaging the attention of the Terrible Three.

At mention of Cardew's name both Manners and Lowther glanced across at Tom Merry rather quickly.

"Cardew?" echoed Manners.

His voice was very doubtful.

"Cardew!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Well, you know what Cardew's like."

"Yes," agreed Tom Merry slowly. "But—" He seemed to hesitate. "You see, in the circus—"

"In the circus, you think Cardew might be willing to play in this match this afternoon?" cut in Manners.

Tom nodded.

As a rule, certainly, Tom Merry would not have dreamed of asking Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth to play in a footer match. But there were circumstances now, as Tom had suggested, which might induce Cardew to play.

That Cardew could justify his place in the team against the New House eleven that afternoon there was no doubt. That was not the trouble. The trouble was that Cardew had the reputation of being a slacker. Despite his athletic prowess—which was considerable—Cardew could be a shining light on the footer field when he chose. The slacker and dandy of the Fourth was not a regular member of the School House junior team for the simple reason that he generally declined to play.

And yet—

"You see," said Tom Merry quietly, "he might be willing to play this afternoon for old Levison's sake."

One of the results of the disappearance from St. Jim's of Ernest Levison had been that Tom Merry found his forward line robbed of one of its best men.

He had filled the gap by giving Clifton Dane, the Canadian junior, a place in the team that was to meet Figgins' eleven. But now, on the very day of the match, Clifton Dane had been unlucky enough to damage his ankle. The School House eleven was therefore a man short. The crossed-out name of Dane had to be replaced with another, and the choice of that other name was rather worrying Tom Merry.

"If only we had poor old Levison!" muttered Manners.

At mention of Levison's name faces had gone grave and rather unhappy in Study No. 10.

"Well, we haven't," said Tom Merry, with rather unusual shortness.

His tone revealed the fact that he had by no means got over the fact of Levison's running away from St. Jim's.

"I think I'll put it to Cardew, anyway," went on Tom, jumping to his feet. "Maybe he'll be glad to play, in the circus."

Tom left the study and hurried down to the Fourth Form passage. There was not very much time, with the match due to start in less than an hour.

The voice of Ralph Reckness Cardew bade him enter, in reply to his knock on the door of Study No. 9, and the captain of the Shell opened the door and stepped into the study.

Cardew was standing by the window, alone in the room. He had been staring out into the quad, where the wintry sunlight was flooding the grey old buildings with pale gold. He turned his head as Tom Merry entered.

"Hallo!" said Cardew.

His face seemed to be a trifle paler than usual, but he nodded to Tom cheerily enough. Though Clive, the other fellow who had shared Study No. 9 with Ernest Levison, was badly cut up over the disappearance of their chum, and showed the fact in his face and in his very walk, Cardew seemed just the same, unless that slight paleness was a sign that he felt the loss of Levison far more deeply than appeared on the surface.

Tom Merry knew that Cardew was never the fellow to wear his heart on his sleeve, at the worst of times.

"An' what can I do for you, old bean?" drawled Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"I wanted to see you about the match this afternoon," said Tom Merry. "Dane's crooked. I want somebody else to fill Levison's place—"

Tom broke off. The moment he had spoken, he felt he could have kicked himself for a tactless ass. For Cardew had seemed to wince for the fraction of a second at mention of Levison's name—proof enough that his cool serenity of countenance was but a mask that hid from St. Jim's his true feelings regarding the strange departure of Ernest Levison from the old school.

"Will you play?" asked Tom quickly.

Cardew hesitated a moment. Then he grinned, and shook his head.

"Sorry, dear man," he drawled. "I have an important engagement this afternoon."

"Oh!"

"Yes!" nodded Cardew. "An important engagement with my bike, as a matter of fact. I've promised to take it for a spin this afternoon."

In ordinary circumstances, Tom Merry might have retorted rather warmly to Cardew's bland refusal to play for his House, preferring, as he admitted, to go for a lonely cycle ride. But at present Cardew was a specially favoured person, for the sake of Ernest Levison. No one would have cared to fall out with either Cardew or Clive while they

were still suffering so keenly from the loss of the third occupant of Study No. 9.

"You won't play?" said Tom.

Cardew shook his head, and smiled.

"Very well." Tom turned to the door and opened it. Then, to his surprise, he felt a hand laid on his arm. He glanced round quickly, and he was surprised at the expression on Cardew's face.

"Sorry to let you down," said Cardew, in rather a low voice, and with unusual frankness. "And thanks for the offer, all the same. I—I can guess why you asked me to play. For poor old Levison's sake, eh?"

For a moment Tom felt taken aback. It was so unlike Cardew to speak in this way, especially to him. In the past, Cardew and Tom Merry had never succeeded in hitting things off very well. Tom's rather blunt, utterly straightforward nature had frequently found itself at cross-purposes with the clever, cynical, wayward ways of Ralph Reckness Cardew—sometimes with explosive results!

"Well," said Tom, a trifle awkwardly, "I did think of that, as a matter of fact. I thought you might rather like to fill Levison's place for him, you know."

"Thanks," said Cardew quietly. "In some ways I should like to play. But I have a lot of thinkin' to do this afternoon—hard thinkin'!"

"Thinking?" echoed Tom, in bewilderment.

"Yes," nodded Cardew. "Thinkin' is a ghastly bore, of course, but I mean to try. In fact, I've been thinkin' rather a lot lately. About Levison! Do you mind shuttin' the door again for a minute?"

Tom closed the door, with surprise on his face. He wondered what was coming next. Cardew turned to the window, and stood with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, staring out fixedly into the quad.

"You believe Levison ran away from St. Jim's?" he asked slowly, still staring out of the window.

Tom frowned.

"Of course! I know he did! Everybody knows it—"

"Everybody thinks it, you mean!" cut in Cardew sharply.

"I don't! I swear old Ernest was one of the last chaps at St. Jim's to do such a thing!"

"But—"

"My dear man," went on Cardew, in level tones, still gazing steadily into the quad, his face turned from Tom Merry, "there is more in Levison's disappearance than you or I dream of!"

He swung round, and faced Tom Merry with gleaming eyes. His face had gone strangely white. Suddenly he recovered his composure. Like a mask, his face again assumed its smiling nonchalance.

"Yes, dear man, there is a great deal more in Levison's little vanishin' trick than meets the eye, if you ask me!" He grinned for a moment. "You remember I was licked by the Head the other day for goin' over to Spalding Hall, in spite of the order against doin' that?"

Tom nodded, wondering what that had to do with it.

"I happened to find out," went on Cardew, with a drawl, "that old Levison went over to Spalding on the evenin' of his disappearin' act—in spite of the order against us naughty little St. Jim's boys goin' over there! He went to see his sister, Doris. Never mind why—that's not important. But when I learnt he had gone over there, the very night of his disappearin' act, it rather set me wonderin'. And the next night I blew over to Spalding myself to investigate. I was caught, and got a floggin' for it!"

Again Cardew grinned.

"It was worth a floggin'! You see, I found out one or two interestin' things at Spalding Hall that night."

Tom Merry was really interested now.

"What did you find out?" he asked quickly.

"Levison was refused admission at the gates of Spalding Hall by the porter," continued Cardew coolly. "So he shinned over the wall from the road, and got into the kitchen-gardens. From there, he left no more tracks. It was his tracks I had found, you see. Well, I know Levison never saw Doris, after all. But I also found out that his sister was in her study doin' her prep that evenin'—and he knew where her study was!"

"Well?" muttered Tom.

"Therefore," went on Cardew, with gleaming eyes, "he had every chance of seein' her if he wanted to—and he went to Spalding Hall with every intention of seein' her, I know. Yet he went away without doin' so. Therefore, somethin' happened between his enterin' the grounds and his leavin' them!"

Cardew's voice was quivering faintly with excitement again.

"It's clear as daylight, isn't it? Somethin' happened at Spaldin'—somethin' queer an' strange—somethin' that made him forget all about wantin' to see his sister, and that prevented him from comin' back here to St. Jim's!"

Cardew's eyes were alight. For some moments there was a tense silence in Study No. 9. Then Tom spoke,



As Ralph Reckness Cardew dropped between the mad dog and Doris Levison, the snarling animal sprang. The next moment Cardew, almost knocked clean off his feet by the force of the impact, clutched the mad brute's throat! (See Chapter 4.)

"But that letter," he said slowly, "that letter that Levison wrote to the Head! Levison said he was tired of St. Jim's—that was why he had run away—"

"That letter," broke in Cardew slowly, "satisfied the Head and it satisfied St. Jim's; but it didn't satisfy me!"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"Why, the blessed letter must have been a blind, to hide the real reason for his doin' a bunk! I'm sure of it! Somethin' happened that made it impossible for him to come back here. He didn't vanish like that of his own accord I'll swear! And the secret—the secret of it all must lie at Spalding Hall!"

There was grim conviction in Cardew's tones. But Tom Merry was not convinced. In face of that letter, saying that he had run away deliberately, Tom Merry could not believe that Levison's disappearance had anything more in it than appeared on the surface.

"You don't agree with me?" inquired Cardew lightly.

"No, frankly," said Tom. "You see—" He broke off with a startled exclamation as his eyes fell on the clock on the mantelpiece. "My hat, look at the time! And the match is at half-past two! I must buzz along. I'll get Kerruish to play in Levison's place, if you're certain that you won't, Cardew?"

"I am certain, old top!" said Cardew. "I'm goin' out on my bike this afternoon to try an' puzzle out the riddle of old Levison! Sorry, an' all that!"

The door closed behind the captain of the Shell. For a moment a grim smile flickered across Cardew's pale, handsome face. He knew that Tom Merry was utterly unconvinced that there was anything deeper in Levison's disappearance than there appeared to be.

Cardew realised that his own theory was vague enough. And yet some sixth sense seemed to tell him that he was right—that behind the strange departure of Ernest Levison from St. Jim's there were amazing facts as yet unknown!

CHAPTER 3.

The Prisoner of the Vaults!

ERNEST LEVISON, the missing schoolboy, sat beneath a flickering gas-jet, and stared listlessly across his narrow prison at the opposite wall.

For Cardew was right! Levison had by no means vanished from St. Jim's of his own accord!

A prisoner in the hands of three ruthless scoundrels! A prisoner for nearly a week, in a tiny, disused cellar deep beneath the vaults of Spalding Hall—his sister's school! His captors were men who had planned to kidnap his sister, he knew. He had discovered some of their secrets, and so they had made him a prisoner, forcing him to write to Dr. Holmes declaring that he had run away from St. Jim's.

Levison's face was pale, his eyes unnaturally bright. The passing days in that dank cellar had left their mark upon him.

He was not bound. Escape was hopeless, he knew, and so he had given his promise not to attempt it; in return for which assurance his captors had removed his bonds.

He glanced at his watch. It was nearly half-past two.
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"Wednesday!" muttered Levison thickly. "The chaps will be just about starting footer now!"

A picture of the green playing-fields of St. Jim's rose in his mind. How far away the old school seemed!

It was beginning to dawn upon Levison that he would not see those playing-fields or any of his friends again for a long, long time. He knew that the kidnappers' object was to keep his sister a prisoner on a lonely Mediterranean island for many months—until it was too late for her to lay claim to a fortune that was hers could she claim it within a certain time. When they released her the next heir would have so disposed of the money that it would be impossible for Doris Levison to recover it, even could she prove that she had been deliberately prevented from making her claim.

It was a daring scheme, but there was a fortune at stake; and Levison, knowing all he did, was to be kept a prisoner with his sister for the long period of her captivity!

He shuddered—not for himself; it was of Doris that he was thinking. She would come to no harm, he knew; but the prospect of at least a year of captivity in the hands of the kidnappers, when Doris should have been leading a care-free, happy life at Spalding Hall, filled Levison with horror.

But even though he knew all he did, he was powerless to help her!

Footsteps outside the cellar door caused him to turn his head.

He heard the rusty bolts drawn back, and the door opened, admitting that seemed to be a tall woman, with a hard face and coldly gleaming eyes—Miss Strickland, the new mistress at Spalding Hall. But Levison knew that it was a man in disguise—one of the gang!

"Here is your dinner," said the harsh voice of the bogus schoolmistress. The man set down a bundle of food and a jug of water on the packing-case, which, with the chair Levison was seated on, made up the total furniture of his prison.

Levison's haggard face fixed itself upon that of the disguised scoundrel.

"How much longer?" muttered the junior hoarsely. "I shall go mad, cooped up down here, never seeing the daylight—"

He broke off, and buried his face in his hands.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"The whole job ought to have been finished by now!" he said savagely. "But your sister is ill—"

"Ill?" cried Levison swiftly, glancing up with a new fear in his eyes.

"It's nothing!" growled the man. "Only a confounded chill, or something. But they're keeping her indoors because of it, and we can't collar her. Keep in a few days—"

He grinned and turned towards the door. Then he vanished again, and Levison heard the bolts sliding harshly in their sockets.

He was left alone once more, in the ghastly solitude that was beginning to prey upon his mind.

Again he buried his face in his hands. How much longer—how much longer?

Ralph Reckness Cardew had a very thoughtful frown on his face as he cycled leisurely along a lane near Wayland.

Levison occupied all his thoughts.

Round and round the problem of his missing chum Cardew's brain worked tirelessly. The slacker of the Fourth felt convinced that if only he laboured over the riddle long enough some clue to the truth would strike him.

If only Spalding Hall were not out of bounds!

"That's where I might find a clue—at Spalding!" he told himself, with conviction. "But I daren't risk goin' over there again, not even for old Levison's sake! After bein' flogged for it once, I should get expelled the second time. An' to get expelled from the blessed Alma Mater just now wouldn't help old Levison much!"

Cardew dismounted from his machine at the foot of a short hill, and pushed up the slope.

A big black barn stood close to the roadside at the top of the hill. It was a place known to Cardew of old.

Cardew's reckless, wayward nature sometimes found amusement in consorting with Racke & Co., the black sheep of the School House. On more than one occasion Cardew had visited the black barn with Racke & Co. for the purpose of a quiet smoking party, and perhaps a little game of nap, or some other dingy pastime that could safely be indulged in in the loft of the old barn.

"I rather fancy a little whiff might help the good old grey matter!" Cardew muttered, as he came alongside the barn. "I'll try!"

He pushed open the gate that adjoined the barn, and

wheeled his cycle through. A few minutes later, with his cycle safely hidden behind the barn, Cardew was reclining comfortably on some bundles of hay in the loft, with a cigarette smouldering between his lips.

Whether Cardew really enjoyed smoking, only he could have said! Probably he didn't—any more than did Racke & Co., of the Shell. But it made Cardew feel rather a "blade" to indulge in a cigarette, despite the fact that he knew perfectly well that he was ruining his "wind" by so doing.

A small door opened from the loft above the road. It was used for loading hay on to carts below. It was standing open now, giving Cardew a good view of the road.

Cardew had not been there long before he gave a sudden exclamation. A girlish figure had come into sight on the road. Even in the distance it had seemed faintly familiar, but as it drew nearer Cardew recognised the girl without a doubt.

It was Doris Levison, the sister of the missing junior!

CHAPTER 4.

In Deadly Peril!

DORIS LEVISON, walking briskly over the brow of the hill, gave a sudden jump as she heard her name called.

She halted, and stared round in bewilderment. There was no one to be seen. Then there was a chuckle from above her head, and she looked up swiftly, to find herself meeting the gaze of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Good-afternoon!" grinned Cardew, raising his cap, as he leaned out from the hay-loft door. "Hope I didn't startle you! But I couldn't let you go by without passin' the time of day, don't you know—although I believe you Spalding girls aren't supposed to be seen talkin' to us bad boys from St. Jim's!"

Cardew was speaking very brightly and cheerily. He did not wish to appear in any way unusual, since Doris knew nothing of her brother's disappearance, and the secret had to be kept from her as yet.

Doris Levison's eyes sparkled brightly, and her cheeks were glowing from her brisk walking. She was a very pretty girl, without doubt, Cardew told himself.

In some ways, Doris did not quite approve of Cardew. In the past, she remembered, there had been times when her brother had had trouble with Ralph Reckness Cardew, in keeping that wayward youth from straying into shady paths! But even so, Doris could not help but like the good-looking, pleasant-mannered Fourth-Former. And in any case he was her brother's chum.

"No, we aren't supposed to talk, are we?" she said, rather unhappily. "Isn't it a shame? But I don't suppose it will do much harm if we do."

"No one to see, anyway, is there?" drawled Cardew.

"No," admitted Doris doubtfully. "But is that the point?"

"Seems to me to be the most important point," said Cardew gravely.

"How is Ernest?" asked Doris, changing the subject.

"Ernest? Oh, he's all right, you know," said Cardew, without the flicker of an eyelid.

"Is he playing football this afternoon?" she asked.

"There is a match on this afternoon," answered Cardew ambiguously. "How's Spalding, and Cousin Ethel?"

"Splendid, thanks! I've had an awfully bad cold, and haven't been out for nearly a week, though. This afternoon is my first time out!"

"That's hard luck!" exclaimed Cardew. "Then you ought not to stand about, gettin' cold again! Keep walkin'!"

"I think I had better!" agreed Doris. "But, I say, what are you doing up there?"

"Slackin'!" grinned Cardew. "It's rather cosy, you see. Hay an' stuff." He glanced up and down the road, doubtfully. There was no one in sight, and it was very unlikely that anyone from either St. Jim's or Spalding would come that way, and see them breaking the rule against the pupils of the two schools seeing one another. "I say, I'll stroll up the road with you!"

"Do you think you ought to?" exclaimed Doris quickly. "You know the rule about—"

"That rule's all rot!" said Cardew lightly. "May I?"

Doris hesitated. Miss Finch had been very strict in her order that her pupils were to have nothing to do with the St. Jim's boys until further notice. But there seemed no harm in Cardew's walking with her a little way. And besides, there was something else on her mind that was secretly rather troubling her; and Cardew's company would be a comfort.

"All right!" she said suddenly. "It would be nice to have someone with me—there's a mad dog about somewhere, they told me in the village! One of the farmer's dogs—it went mad this morning. They've been after it with guns, but it got away, and it hadn't been found by two o'clock this afternoon, I know."

Cardew whistled.

"Gad! A mad bow-wow, eh?"

Cardew looked a trifle startled. If there was a mad dog about, then Doris Levison certainly should not be out alone, he told himself.

He was surprised that she seemed fairly unconcerned about it. But perhaps, thought Cardew, she did not realise the danger—did not know that a bite from a dog with rabies was almost certain to mean terrible consequences.

"I'll stroll along with you as far as Wayland, then," said Cardew. "Hang on a sec, and I'll be down!"

He was about to turn away from the opening overlooking the road when something in the distance caught his eye. His gaze riveted itself fixedly.

Doris Levison, seeing something odd in his expression, stared up the road, too.

A dog was coming towards them, at a brisk, slouching trot.

"Gad!" muttered Cardew. "But it can't be—"

There was something queer about the animal, though—he felt sure of that by the way its head swung from side to side as it ran, gazing first to one side of the road, then to the other. As it drew nearer, Cardew saw that its mouth was hanging open. Then he started. There were flecks of foam dripping from the creature's jaws.

It was an ugly-looking black mongrel. Suddenly it caught sight of Doris, and halted. Even though it was still many yards away, Cardew could hear the animal's teeth click together queerly at sight of the girl in the road.

"Oh!" cried Doris sharply. "What a strange-looking dog!"

A low, snarling sound swelled up in the dog's throat. Its mouth opened, the lips drew back, showing the foam-flecked teeth, sharp and white. Its bloodshot eyes were flaming like coals. It was then that Cardew realised that the animal was mad.

This was the very dog of which Doris had been speaking a few moments before! The mad dog!

Cardew felt his heart go cold!

Doris gave a swift, startled cry, and moved instinctively to place her back to the wall of the barn. Whether she realised the terrible truth, Cardew did not know. All he knew was that Doris was down there the maddened brute facing her, crouching as if to spring—and he felt rooted to the floor of the loft, unable to stir a finger, or even to cry out, with a ghastly horror numbing every limb.

A weird, mad snarl broke from the frothing lips of the crouching mongrel. The hair was bristling stiff along its spine, and there was madness staring from its eyes. Doris screamed in terror—and the next moment the animal sprang, hurling itself through the air for the helpless girl's throat.

In a flash the numbness fell from Cardew like a cloak. He sprang fearlessly out from the high loft, dropping on to the road between the girl and the springing dog. By a miracle, he did not even stumble to his knees, but landed cleanly on his feet, his face to the oncoming brute.

With quivering lips drawn back from the lathered gums, the brute seemed to try to check itself in mid-air as it saw Cardew between itself and its intended victim. Its eyes blazed redly; but it had already launched itself for its spring, and it could not check itself.

The next moment Cardew, knocked clean off his feet by the force of the impact, was rolling in the road, his fingers locked on the mad brute's throat.

CHAPTER 5.

Lifting the Ban!

WRITHING, and kicking, and twisting, all its strength concentrated on fighting free, the dog struggled with mad fury to escape from those throttling hands that held it by the neck

And Cardew, breathless, and panting, had but one thought in all the world—to hang on for dear life, and for Doris' life, too.

The foam-flecked jaws snapped within inches of his face. His arms were tiring, but his fingers were still locked like a steel clamp on the animal's windpipe.

The bloodshot eyes glared into his own. Cardew shuddered and tightened his grip. He saw a film pass across those staring eyeballs.

He was on his back now in the road, with the great body lying across him, writhing still. But gradually the convulsions grew less. The choked sounds from the creature's throat died away. The light faded from the red eyes, and suddenly the whole body was limp in his grasp.

But still Cardew hung on, not daring to let go until he knew that the animal was dead.

And at last he rose slowly, wearily, and stood staring down at the inanimate body in the road.

He became aware that Doris was at his side.

"Oh!" There was a sob in the girl's voice. "How did you do it? I thought you were going to be killed—"

"Not to-day," said Cardew; and laughed shakily.

"You—you saved me," whispered Doris hoarsely. Cardew glanced at her, and saw that her face was as white as paper—as white as his own, could he have seen it. "Oh, I can never thank you—never—"

"Oh, rats!" said Cardew; and smiled faintly.

He had been badly shaken, and he felt that he was still trembling in every limb. He had looked death in the face a moment before, and he had come through the ordeal with a strange feeling of the unreality of it all. But the huddled shape of the dead dog in the road was real enough.

The hoot of a motor-car sounded behind them. A car was coming up the hill, driven by a chauffeur. There was a quick gasp from Doris Levison.

"Miss Finch!"

She recognised the car as belonging to the headmistress of Spalding Hall.

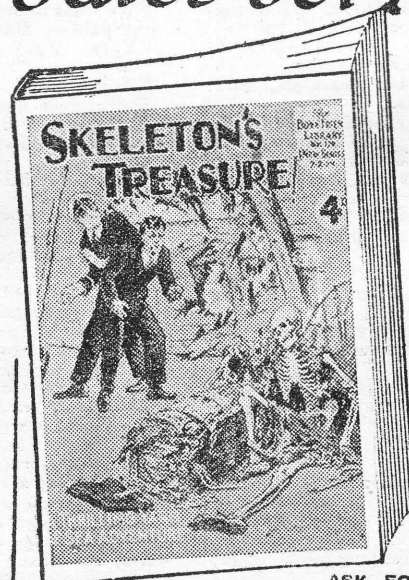
Evidently Miss Finch, within the car, had recognised Doris, too, and spoken to the chauffeur. For the car slowed down and halted opposite Doris and Cardew. A grim-faced, little old lady let down the window and looked out at them severely.

"Doris," exclaimed Miss Finch, in indignant surprise, "I am shocked! You know perfectly well that I have forbidden all the girls to have anything to do with the St. Jim's boys—"

She broke off, and her eyes gleamed in a warlike way as she recognised Cardew.

(Continued on next page.)

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"Why," she went on sternly, "it is the very boy whom I found on my premises the other day!"

Cardew had raised his cap, but he stood silent now, saying nothing. The headmistress of Spalding Hall glared at him. Then her sharp eyes fell on the body of the dog at his feet. She gave a shiver.

"Oh dear, that poor dog! It has been run over by a motor-car, I suppose?"

Doris stepped quickly up to the window of the car. "Miss Finch!" Her voice was not quite steady. "You don't understand. I— We—we hadn't met on purpose. And the dog—it was a mad dog. It would have killed me—I'm certain! But—but Cardew jumped down out of the loft there, and—and got it by the throat, and—and killed it. He saved me—"

The unnerved girl's voice broke off suddenly. The next moment Doris was sobbing with the reaction from her fright, and Miss Finch, stepping swiftly from the car, had an arm round her, and was comforting her.

A very great change had come over Miss Finch's face. When next she glanced at Cardew all its sternness had gone. She was smiling at him quite tenderly. She held out her hand, and Cardew, usually so cool, found himself going red as he took it.

"Thank you, Cardew!" said Miss Finch simply. She had remembered his name. "You are a—a hero!"

"Oh, no!" muttered Cardew awkwardly. "I—I—"

"Oh, but you are," she insisted, "a hero!" Her eyes were quite misty. She was very fond of Doris Levison, and the thought of the girl's recent danger had caused her heart to soften—not only to Cardew, but to all St. Jim's.

Cardew recovered his composure with an effort. "Perhaps I had better be going," he said steadily. "I am sorry we were going against the rules by talking, you know."

"That order," said Miss Finch, nodding her head with determination, "is rescinded. After this I shall be proud for the St. Jim's boys to come to Spalding Hall as much as they like. I shall write to your headmaster to that effect at once. And now you must come back with me to the school, Cardew, and have tea with myself and Doris."

"Gad!" breathed Cardew softly. His eyes were shining. Two minutes later Ralph Reckness Cardew found himself, still rather amazed, seated in the car with the headmistress of Spalding, and the sister of the missing schoolboy. His cycle had been put on top of the car, and they had started on what was very like a triumphal journey for Ralph Reckness Cardew to Spalding Hall. One thing was very certain.

Miss Finch's edict was no more.

CHAPTER 6. Great News!

SEEN the board?" George Figgins of the New House asked that question with tremendous excitement in his voice.

It was the following morning. Figgins had rushed in to Dame Taggles' little shop under the elms in the quad, and collared Fatty Wynn by the shoulders, fairly bursting with his news, whatever it was.

Fatty Wynn had been ensconced very comfortably by the counter, putting away jam-tarts at a truly amazing rate. He was in the act of demolishing his tenth when Figgy arrived, and there was a sudden gurgling and choking sound from David Llewellyn. Figgy had grasped him excitedly just as that tenth tart was going to join its predecessors, and Figgy had caused it to stick half-way.

"Grooooooh!" Fatty Wynn went purple in the face. "Groooh! Yow! Oh, you fathead, Figgy! Ow! Biff me on the back! I'm choking!"

Biff!

Figgy obliged with a will, and there was another yell from Fatty Wynn.

"Yaroooooop! You—you—"

"Well, you asked me to biff you on the back!" grinned Figgins. "But listen—"

"Didn't ask you to smash my blessed spine for me!" growled Fatty Wynn, glaring.

He picked up another tart and took a huge bite out of it.

"Seen the board?" chortled Figgins.

"Mmmmm!" mumbled Fatty Wynn. "Nunno!"

"About Spalding!" Figgins declared joyfully. "It's just up!"

"What's that about Spaldin', deah boy?"

The aristocratic figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had appeared in the tuckshop doorway. Blake & Co. of the Fourth had come in for a cup of hot cocoa—one of Dame Taggles' specialities. Blake, Herries, Digby and the Hon.

Arthur Augustus had just been in time to hear Figgins' remark, and they were interested at once.

"What about Spalding, Figgy?" exclaimed Jack Blake quickly.

A moment later Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell entered the little shop, and they, too, were in time to hear the mention of Spalding. Like Blake & Co. they at once pricked up their ears, so to speak.

"Hallo, hallo!" sang out Monty Lowther. "What's all this about Spalding?"

Figgins glanced round the party of School House juniors, with a grin.

"Listen, you School House wasters!" he exclaimed. "I've just seen the school board outside Big Hall, and the Head's stuck up a notice! About Spalding Hall!"

"Well?" urged Blake.

"Buck up and tell us, you ass," growled Herries.

"Get it off your chest, old hoss," suggested Tom Merry. Figgins chuckled.

"Spalding isn't out of bounds any more!" he announced. His eyes were very bright.

There was an amazed silence for a moment in the tuckshop. Even Fatty Wynn forgot the important business of his thirteenth tart to stare at Figgins.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first to break the silence. "You weally mean to say, Figgy—"

"Miss Finch has relented?" burst out Manners.

"We can go to Spalding Hall again?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Figgins nodded.

"That's it! And what's more, she's giving a dance, on Friday night, and she's invited twenty St. Jim's fellows to go to it! The notice says that chaps who want to go must apply to the Head!" He chuckled gleefully. "I was the first to apply!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. stared at one another, with joyful faces.

"Hurray!" yelled Monty Lowther excitedly. "Hip, pip!"

"Gweat Scott, how wippin', deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"I'm off to apply!" grinned Blake, and he turned and bolted for the door.

In a moment there was a wild rush to follow him. All the juniors wanted to get their names in quick, for fear of being left out! There was a regular stampeade across the quad to the School House.

As yet, no one had had time to wonder why Miss Finch had taken back her edict against the St. Jim's juniors. The important thing was, that it had been taken back.

Dr. Holmes was just entering his study, with rustling gown, as Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. swarmed up the passage. He turned with surprise, and the juniors slowed to a walk hastily. The Head stared at them in some astonishment, wondering, perhaps, the cause of their excited faces.

"Well, my boys?"

"We want to go to the dance, sir," said Blake breathlessly.

"At Spalding Hall, you know—"

"Yaas! Pway put my name down, sir—"

"And mine!"

"And mine!"

There were heavy, hurrying footsteps from the end of the passage, and Fatty Wynn, his mouth smeared with jam, rolled into sight and puffed up, joining the eager group.

"About the dance at Spalding, sir!" he gasped. "I want to go, sir—"

"My name, please, sir, too—Herries—"

The Head raised his hand for silence. There was a smile on his kind old face.

"One at a time, please, boys! If you will come into my study, I will put down your names in turn. Of course, only twenty boys have been invited, and I shall have to send those who get their names in first. But kindly understand that no boy will go, however early he applies, if I have any complaints regarding his Form work, or his general behaviour, between now and Friday."

The Head tried to look really stern as he said that, but his eyes were still twinkling. The juniors all tried to look as though butter would not melt in their mouths.

Dr. Holmes rustled into his study and sat down at his desk, drawing a sheet of paper towards him.

"Let me see—one boy has already asked—ah! It was Figgins! Now, one at a time, please! Tom Merry—Lowther—Blake—"

And the Head began carefully to jot down the names of the swarm of juniors. Other fellows had arrived on the scene now, all anxious to be in time with their applications.

Kerr, of the New House, with Dick Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, were among the first. Talbot of the Shell and Grundy and Kangaroo followed the New House party.

Then a squeaky, excited voice announced the arrival of Baggy Trimble.

"Oh, sir, I'm not too late, please, sir?" gasped Baggy. "Miss Finch would be frightfully disappointed if I wasn't at her dance, sir, really, sir! I'm a jolly good dancer, too, and—"

"Shut up, you fat porpoise!" whispered Monty Lowther. "Miss Finch won't want you, lumbering about like a blessed elephant, treading on people's toes!"

"Oh, really, Lowther!"

you will be glad to hear that so far there is room for all. In fact, there are still three places to be claimed."

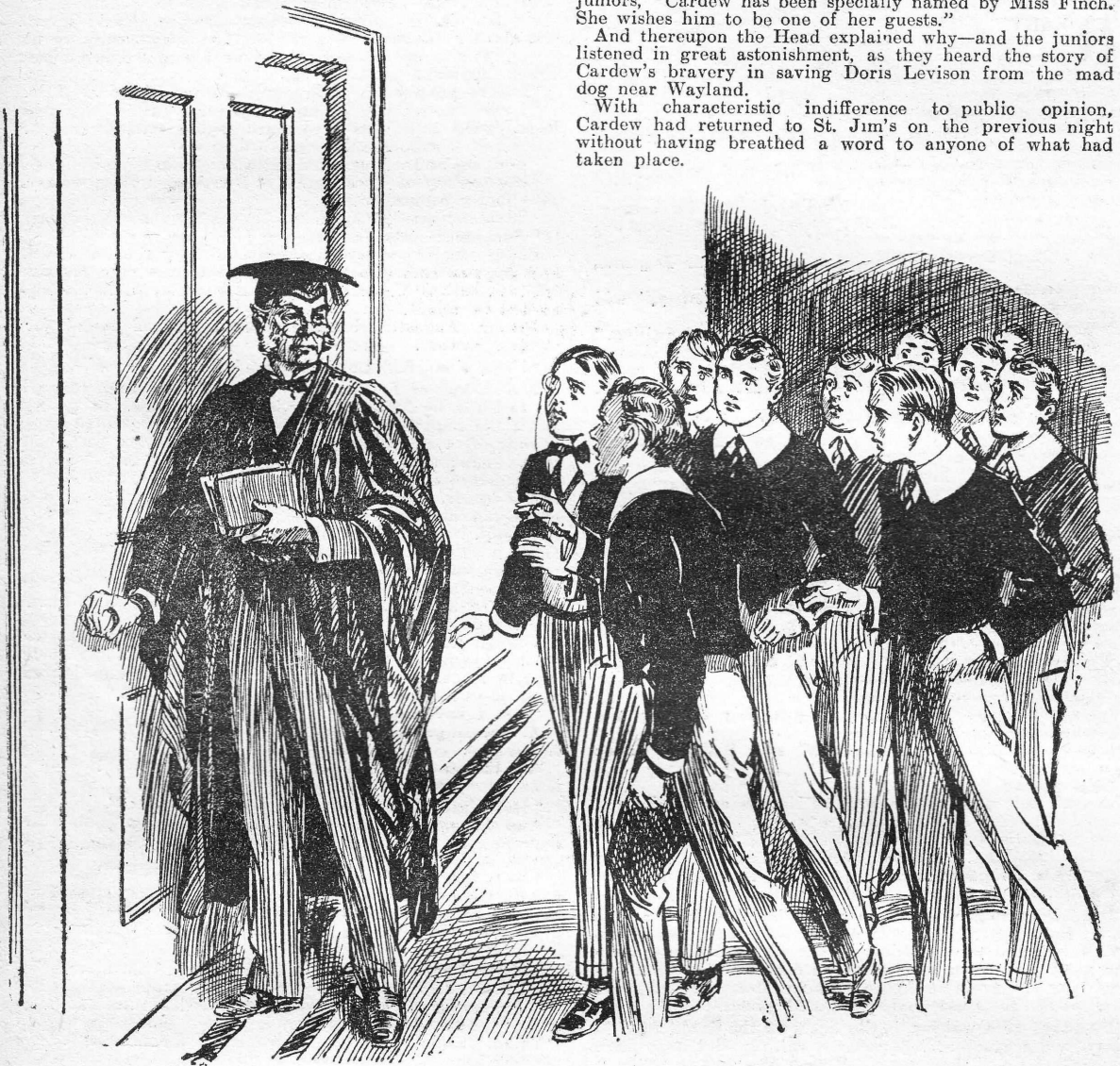
There was a murmur of delight. The anxiety faded from Baggy Trimble's fat face.

"Oh, good!"

"Ah!" said the Head suddenly, half to himself. "I must put down Cardew's name, of course, although he has not applied. You see, boys" he added, glancing at the juniors, "Cardew has been specially named by Miss Finch. She wishes him to be one of her guests."

And thereupon the Head explained why—and the juniors listened in great astonishment, as they heard the story of Cardew's bravery in saving Doris Levison from the mad dog near Wayland.

With characteristic indifference to public opinion, Cardew had returned to St. Jim's on the previous night without having breathed a word to anyone of what had taken place.



Dr. Holmes was just entering his study as Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. swarmed up the passage. The Head stared at them in surprise. "Well, my boys?" "We want to go to the dance, sir," said Blake breathlessly. "At Spalding Hall, you know—" "Yaas! Pway put my name down, sir—" "And mine!" (See Chapter 6.)

"You must take your turn, Trimble," said the Head. "I fancy you are in time. But the list is nearly complete, I am afraid."

"Oh, I say sir, that's rotten! Miss Finch would be frightfully cut up if I wasn't there, sir, I know! Perhaps somebody wouldn't mind standing out for me? What about you, Herries?"

"I don't think!" grinned Herries

"You, then, Talbot?"

"Bow-wow!" answered Talbot, sotto voce.

"Oh, really, you know! Gussy, old man, you wouldn't mind letting me go in your place as a special favour to Miss Finch and the girls?"

Arthur Augustus glared at Baggy Trimble in speechless indignation. But for the presence of Dr. Holmes, Baggy would probably have received a "feahful thwashin'" there and then!

The Head glanced up.

"Have I all the names?"

"Me, sir—Trimble!" panted Baggy eagerly.

"I have your name already, Trimble. No more? Then

"Good old Cardew!" breathed Kangaroo, when the Head had finished. "I say, sir, that was a jolly fine thing for him to do!"

"I agree with you, Noble," said the Head. He smiled. "And so, evidently, does Miss Finch! She is most lavish in her praise of him in her letter. It is entirely owing to Cardew's splendid behaviour that Miss Finch has thought fit to rescind her order forbidding St. Jim's boys to visit Spalding Hall. You have to thank Cardew for that."

And after second lesson that morning the juniors went in search of Cardew to show their appreciation. They found him strolling under the elms with Clive, and they collared him in a body and lifted him shoulder-high and marched him in triumph round the quad.

Cardew took their enthusiasm very coolly.

St. Jim's was delighted with him for having been the cause of Miss Finch's new decision. But to Cardew it was only important because he could now go to Spalding Hall in search of a clue to the disappearance of Ernest Levison.

What he hoped to find he could not have said. But he was still convinced that at Spalding, if anywhere, some clue could be found to the riddle of the vanished junior.

CHAPTER 7.

At Spalding Hall!

READY?"

Tom Merry put his head in at the door of Study No. 6 and asked that question.

It was Friday evening, the night of the Spalding dance. Tom Merry was dressed in his very best Etons, and looking very smart indeed.

"I'm ready," grunted Blake. "But that jabberwock over there—"

He pointed to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and groaned.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake—"

The swell of St. Jim's was standing before the looking-glass, busy with his tie. Half a dozen other gorgeous ties lay scattered on the floor at his feet. None of them had quite satisfied the very difficult tastes of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I have only to finish tyin' this tie, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus graciously.

"Well, buck up!" grinned Tom. "The cars are waiting."

"Back up, Gussy, for goodness' sake!" growled Herries wearily. "We've been waiting for you now for pretty well half an hour while you mucked around with your blessed ties!"

"Only twenty minutes, Hewwies," corrected the swell of St. Jim's calmly. "I weally cannot go ovah to Spaldin' to-night without havin' my tie wight!"

Blake glanced at his watch.

"Gussy," he said grimly, "I'll give you thirty seconds longer. Then we're going—and you're coming with us!"

"Bai Jove! I uttahly wefuse to be hurwied."

"You can refuse till you are black in the face," grinned Blake, "but you're coming in thirty seconds. Just half a minute for you. So get a blessed move on!"

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and, discarding as unsatisfactory the tie with which he had been busy, he selected another with extreme care from the box by his elbow.

Blake watched him in grim silence. Suddenly he put his watch back and jumped to his feet.

"Time's up! Coming, Gussy?"

"My hat! No! I have not yet pwopahly tied my tie, you boundahs!"

"You can finish that in the car," said Blake. "Collar him, you chaps!"

"Yawoooooop!"

Arthur Augustus gave a howl as Herries and Digby and Blake, with Tom Merry lending a willing hand, seized the swell of St. Jim's and bore him, struggling, to the door.

"You wottahs! Wescue, Tom Mewwy! Oh! Yow! Leggo, you fwightful cads!" roared the indignant swell of St. Jim's.

But his protests were all in vain. Helpless in the grip of his three chums, the noble Arthur Augustus, with his tie still untied and waving wildly in the wind, was borne from the study and down the stairs and out into the quad, followed by the grinning figure of Tom Merry, bearing the swell of St. Jim's coat and topper and gloves.

Five cars were waiting in the quad for the Spalding Hall party, and a group of fellows were waiting with impatience for Blake & Co. There was a yell when they did arrive.

"Here they come!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's wrong, Gussy?" sang out Kit Wildrake. "Don't you want to come? I say, Blake, it's rotten making Gussy come if he doesn't want to!"

"I do want to come!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "But—lut—"

"Then you've nothing to grumble at," drawled Cardew. "You seem to be comin'!"

The door of one of the cars was standing open, and Blake & Co. rushed their prisoner across towards it. The swell of St. Jim's was pitched in bodily and collapsed in a heap on the floor. Blake, Digby, and Herries piled in after him.

"You wottahs! Bai Jove! Wefuse me and I will administah a feahful thwashin' to all of you!" choked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathlessly.

"Wait till after the dance, anyway," grinned Blake. "Right away, guard!"

The grinning driver jumped into the seat, and, with Blake & Co. holding down their furious chum, the Co. drove out of the gates on its way to Spalding, with the other four cars following behind.

But by the time they turned in at the gates of Spalding Hall even Arthur Augustus had forgotten his ire. His tie

was tied now—more or less—and the sight of the lights streaming across the old quadrangle, and the group of girlish figures in evening cloaks on the lighted veranda, caused all the juniors, including the swell of St. Jim's, to feel a thrill of pleasure at the prospect of the evening before them.

That it was going to be a cheery evening no one doubted.

Miss Finch herself welcomed the juniors, and Ethel Cleveland and Doris Levison introduced them to a number of their friends. Figgins stuck very close to Cousin Ethel, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy frowned majestically as he saw that fact, and sailed up to claim the first dance. But Ethel, laughing, shook her head.

"I have promised it to Figgins!" she exclaimed brightly.

"I am sowwy," said Arthur Augustus a little stiffly, and he adjusted his monocle to glare at the grinning Figgys. "Pewwaps I can have the suppah dance—"

"I—I am afraid you can't have that, either," said Ethel. "You—you're just too late! You see, I've promised Figgins the supper dance!"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Figgay—"

But at that moment the band started up for the first dance, and Figgins bore Ethel away, to the strains of a popular fox-trot, leaving the swell of St. Jim's to control his feelings as best he might.

Arthur Augustus, breathing hard, glanced round for another partner.

"I'll twy and find Dowis Levison," he told himself.

The absence of Levison from the party had been covered up tactfully by Miss Finch, who had succeeded in giving Doris the impression that her brother was prevented from coming by a slight illness. Miss Finch, for her part, had grave doubts as to the advisability of keeping Doris so long in ignorance of her brother's disappearance from St. Jim's; but since Mr. Levison wished it, she could do no more than carry out his desires in the matter. Levison's father, naturally, was more hopeful than was Miss Finch that Ernest Levison would turn up again before long; before that happened he was anxious that Doris should know nothing.

All the St. Jim's party knew this, and one and all were careful to let no hint of anything unusual come to their girl chum's ears.

Though Levison's absence was something of a cloud over their enjoyment, the St. Jim's fellows were doing their best to forget, and Doris would never have dreamed from their faces that anything was amiss at St. Jim's.

"Can I have this dance, Dowis?"

Arthur Augustus had caught sight of her at last, and he hurried up.

"Awfully sorry!" exclaimed Doris. "I've just promised it to Tom Merry!"

"Hard luck, Gussy!" grinned Tom. "So-long!"

And the captain of the Shell and Doris Levison joined the dancers.

"Oh deah!"

The tall figure of Norah Grant, the captain of Spalding, caught the eye of the swell of St. Jim's, and he crossed to her and bowed gracefully. Norah Grant was a very pretty girl, a couple of years older than Arthur Augustus, but he did not mind that.

"Might I have the pleasuah, Miss Gwant?" murmured the swell of St. Jim's.

"I'm sorry! I've just promised this dance to Talbot!" smiled the captain of Spalding.

Talbot and Norah Grant vanished among the other dancing couples.

"Bothah!"

Very disconsolate, Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass and stared round in search of a partner. All the girls in view seemed to be dancing, however.

Cousin Ethel passed gracefully by with Figgins. Figgins was by no means an expert dancer; the long-legged leader of the New House felt more at home on the footer field than on the floor of a ball-room! But although he was looking rather hot and bothered, and stumbling over his feet every now and then, and keeping time with anything but the music, Cousin Ethel did not look as though she minded. In fact, she was smiling very cheerfully at something that Figgins was saying.

"Bothah Figgins!"

And with that muttered remark Arthur Augustus selected a chair and sat down, rather gloomy, and wondering what on earth Ethel could see in Figgins to appear so pleased with his company.

"Not dancin'?"

It was the voice of Cardew. The dandy of the Fourth had strolled up to Arthur Augustus' chair, a slight smile on his handsome face.

"No, deah boy!" snapped Arthur Augustus.

"Neither am I," said Cardew lazily. He glanced out of the doorway on to the terrace. It was an extraordinarily warm evening for the time of year, and one or two of the

St. Jim's fellows were sitting out there with their partners. "Seen Doris yet?" added Cardew in a low voice.

"Yaas!"
 "She suspects nothin'?"
 "No," said Arthur Augustus, his face clouding—not with his own troubles this time! "Poor gal! It's wotten, old Levison not bein' heah!"

"Yes," said Cardew quietly.
 He turned and strolled out on to the terrace. There was a thoughtful frown on his face in the dim light.

He was at Spalding Hall, where he had told himself so often that he might find the clue he sought, something to put him on the track of the truth regarding the disappearance of his chum. But now that he was here he scarcely knew what to do—where to begin his search.

The music ended, and a number of couples came out on to the terrace, talking and laughing.

"Penny for your thoughts, Cardew, old scout!" grinned Baggy Trimble, rolling up at the side of a fair-haired Spaldingite. Baggy was very pleased to be seen claiming acquaintance with a good-looking fellow like Cardew. "You looked as if you were in a blessed brown study just now, old chap!"

Cardew smiled politely. Had he and Baggy been alone, Baggy would have received a thick ear for addressing the dandy of the Fourth as "old chap." But that was impossible now!

"I was just thinkin' how rippin'ly you dance, Trimble!" said Cardew gravely. "Like a fairy, don't you know!"

Cardew strolled away, and Baggy's fair companion smiled; she had detected the irony in Cardew's words even if Baggy hadn't.

Cardew vanished into the shadows at the far end of the terrace. He glanced round swiftly and saw that he was alone. His desertion would not be noticed, he told himself.

He hurried down the steps into the dark quadrangle.
 Ralph Reckness Cardew was wasting no time in starting his hunt!

CHAPTER 8.

Cardew on the Trail!

"HALLO, hallo! This looks interestin'!"
 The strains of a waltz came faintly to the ears of Cardew as he halted before a dark, vaulted opening in a lonely corner of the quad.

Cardew glanced round. The lights of the ball-room were streaming out on to the terrace on the other side of the quadrangle, and he could see the gay crowd of dancers passing and repassing the tall windows. But the quad was deserted, but for himself.

"Wonder where this leads to?" muttered Cardew. He scarcely knew what he hoped to find in his explorations. He was leaving that to chance! Something might turn up, he felt. On that other occasion when he had come to Spalding Hall he had found Levison's tracks; perhaps he might find them again, and with better results.

"Here goes, anyway," Cardew murmured, and stepped into the dark opening.

His footsteps echoed hollowly. It did not take him long to realise that he was in the school Cloisters.

Most of the Spalding Hall buildings were Elizabethan; but the part that Cardew had found, the oldest part, was far more ancient than the rest—a relic of the days when a mediæval castle had stood on the spot.

The slacker of the Fourth took from his pocket a small electric torch. No one knew that Cardew had brought it with him that evening, and it would have surprised his schoolfellows a good deal had they known that he was taking such an unusual object to a dance! But Cardew had come prepared for the job he had set himself.

The light from the torch lit up the smooth, dark stone of walls and floor and vaulted ceiling. He moved on slowly, peering ahead, with the circle of light piercing the gloom before him.

Before long a low doorway on his left caught his attention. He pushed open the heavy oak door curiously, and a flight of stone steps leading down into a well of darkness met his gaze.

"This must be the entrance to the old vaults that Ethel once spoke of," muttered Cardew. "I wonder—"

He broke off, and stood staring down uncertainly into the utter darkness that swallowed up the winding stairway of stone.

Then, with firm step, Ralph Reckness Cardew stepped through the doorway, drew the door to after him and began to descend into the darkness.

Cold, damp air struck his face. The light of the torch showed him that the stairs were not utterly unused, however. The marks of recent feet on the stone stairs were plain to be seen in the dust.

"Someone's been here a lot," Cardew told himself.

It flashed into his mind for a moment that perhaps Ernest Levison, to avoid being caught on the school premises, might have taken this dark stairway and slipped and fallen senseless, with a broken limb that made it impossible for him to return to the upper regions. And down here his cries might well go unheard for days.

It was a grim thought, and Cardew shuddered. He hurried his steps a little till he found himself at the foot of the stairs at last, with a low, vaulted corridor running on into the gloom, with dark arches and doorways opening from it on either side. The place seemed like a maze.

(Continued on next page.)

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Cardew stood flashing his torch around. A rat scuttled away in the blackness, and the sudden sound of it caused a tug at the Fourth Former's nerves.

It was weird and uncanny, down there in the old vaults of Spalding!

Slowly, with eager face, Ralph Reckness Cardew moved forward, peering into the wavering shadows thrown by the light of the torch.

And high above his head cheerful music filled the ball-room, and the St. Jim's juniors and the girls of Spalding Hall swayed happily to the haunting rhythm of a waltz!

No one had missed Cardew as yet. His absence had passed unnoticed in the noise and movement of the dancing.

As Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. and Figgins and all the others laughed and danced, they little dreamed that underneath their very feet, far down, Cardew was stealing through the shadows of the silent vaults in search of some possible trace of his missing chum!

"I guess he's safe enough now!"

The three men of the kidnapping gang—the two Americans and the bogus schoolmistress—stood staring down at the inert form of Ernest Levison, in the dim light of the little cellar that had served as a prison for the St. Jim's junior for so many weary days.

Levison's eyes were closed, and he was breathing heavily. The powerful drug that had been administered to him in his food, without his knowledge, had acted, and he lay deep in insensibility.

"Now for the girl!" grinned one of the Americans, with a gleam of expectant triumph in his eyes. "It'll be easy enough to collar her, and no one'll get wise to the fact she's gone for a spell, I reckon—not with this dance going on."

"But we can't afford to make any mistakes," growled the other sharply.

"There won't be any mistakes!" grinned the bogus schoolmistress. "This kid's gonna sleep for hours yet. With him lying ready in the car, all we have to do is to chuck the girl into the car, too, and drive off!"

"We'll be at the yacht in a couple of hours, too," nodded the first speaker. He turned to the bogus schoolmistress. "Don't forget your part, Crane. If there's a hitch, you've gotta get in the way of the chase, remember. Mustn't let us be caught with the girl!"

Crane—alias Miss Strickland—nodded.

"I'll see to that!" he grinned. "But there won't be any chase, unless one of you makes a mess of things. Anyway, if I don't get suspected, I'm staying on at the school for a week or two longer, remember, before I give notice, and leave quietly. So if you want to get into touch with me, it'll still be Miss Strickland, of Spalding Hall!"

He chuckled.

"Good!" grinned one of the Americans. "Well, come on, we've gotta get this kid into the car."

Levison, still breathing with unnatural heaviness, was lifted and carried from the cellar.

Cautiously the three scoundrels and their prisoner made their way up out of the vaults. By a back way they reached a small door in the wall dividing the school premises from the road, and Crane unlocked the door. A car was waiting on the grass by the roadside, and into it Levison was hastily lifted and deposited on the floor.

"You stay here, Bennett," commanded Crane. "Have the engine running."

"Sure," nodded the man named Bennett.

Crane and the second American turned and hurried back into the school grounds.

Had they been a few seconds earlier they might have glimpsed a shadowy figure vanishing from the quad into the dark opening of the Cloisters that led to the vaults.

For Ralph Reckness Cardew had gone down into the old vaults of Spalding just too late to find his chum!

CHAPTER 9.

Kidnapped!

"ANYONE seen Cardew?"

Tom Merry asked that question at the finish of a dance.

"No," said Figgins. "Why?"

"I was only wondering," said Tom. "He seems to have made himself scarce all of a sudden."

"Yaas," chimed in Arthur Augustus, coming up with Cousin Ethel at his side. "Now you mention it, Tom Mewwy, deah boy, Cardew seems to have vanished. I wondah where he is?"

"Blow Cardew, anyway!" said Figgins cheerfully. "What about getting out on to the terrace? It's nice and cool out there."

Tom Merry nodded; and he and Doris Levison, with

whom he had just been dancing, turned and strolled out on to the shadowy terrace, in company with Arthur Augustus and George Figgins and Cousin Ethel.

"It's funny, isn't it?" said Doris suddenly. "The way Cardew has vanished, I mean."

Doris was secretly a little disappointed. She had been looking forward to a dance with Cardew.

"Oh, he'll turn up!" said Tom.

They stood leaning over the balustrade, watching the moon sailing in the clear night sky. It was with a pang that Tom Merry remembered the dark shadow that hung over Doris' brother. Tom had always liked Levison; and he liked Doris, too; and the knowledge that before long she must learn that her brother had run away from St. Jim's so mysteriously caused his face to cloud.

The band struck up again in the ball-room, and Figgins took Cousin Ethel in to dance. Arthur Augustus moved off to claim a dance with another Spaldingite, and Tom Merry and Doris were left alone.

"I don't think I'll dance this one," said Doris. "I'd like to stay out here."

She was wondering if Cardew might put in an appearance, in which case she felt she would like to be free to dance with him. Ever since Cardew's bravery by the old barn, Doris had found herself thinking quite a lot of Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth!

"Right-ho!" agreed Tom Merry cheerfully. "But it's a bit cold for you, isn't it?"

"Perhaps it is," the girl nodded. "I left a shawl on one of the chairs in the ball-room—a green one. I wonder if you would mind getting it for me?"

"Rather!" said Tom.

He turned and re-entered the ball-room through the open french windows.

It was some little time before he succeeded in finding the right shawl. But at last he hurried out on to the terrace again, with the green shawl over his arm.

He halted, puzzled.

There was no sign of Doris now. She was no longer standing where Tom had left her.

There was a step beside him. Monty Lowther had come out on to the terrace. Monty was not dancing at the moment, and he had come out for a "breather," as he put it.

"Hallo, hallo!" sang out Monty cheerily. "What are you looking round for so blessed seriously?"

Tom laughed.

"I was looking for Doris. She asked me to get her shawl. She was here just a minute ago. But she seems to have vanished—"

He broke off suddenly, a startled look on his face.

Whether it was imagination he could not have said; but he thought he had heard a faint cry from the far end of the terrace.

The sound of the band, playing a lively dance tune, and the soft swish of feet over the ball-room floor, had all but drowned the queer, stifled cry he imagined he had heard.

"What's up?" asked Monty Lowther, staring at Tom curiously.

"Didn't you hear something—a cry?" muttered Tom, staring into the darkness of the far end of the terrace.

"Rats!" grinned Monty. "You're dreaming! It was a blessed owl, perhaps—"

But the next moment Monty Lowther's face had gone startled, too.

There was no doubt about it this time! A shrill cry had rung out in the silence of the night, loud above the sounds from the ball-room—a cry that was cut off abruptly, as if by a stifling hand.

"Great Scott!" panted Tom. "What the dickens—"

He broke into a swift run along the terrace, towards the distant steps. A tall figure loomed up before him as he reached them, and Tom recognised "Miss Strickland."

"What's up?" cried Tom. "I heard a cry—"

"Nonsense!"

The eyes staring down into his own were gleaming with a queer light. Miss Strickland stood so that she barred the junior's path.

"But I'm certain of it!" cried Tom hoarsely. "And Doris has vanished—Doris Levison!"

"You must be dreaming," said Miss Strickland sharply. "I saw Doris going into the ball-room a few moments ago!"

"But that's impossible! I—"

"Don't be absurd! I have just seen her, I tell you, going into the ball-room!"

Monty Lowther hurried up, breathless. He gripped Tom's arm and flung out a pointing hand.

"Look! There's someone there!"

Tom followed the direction of his chum's pointing finger. He caught his breath.

A shadowy shape was hurrying along towards the

headmistress' garden. A moment later it passed within range of a light streaming diffusely out from one of the windows of the kitchen quarters, and Tom saw that it was a man, running, and carrying a struggling figure in his arms.

Doris Levison!

It was Doris, he felt sure. He had just time to make out the fact that the girl's head was enveloped in a rug that evidently effectually silenced her.

With a hoarse shout, Tom sprang for the steps. But the tall figure of Miss Strickland moved sharply, barring his way again.

"Where are you going?"

The harsh voice rang out sharply. She gripped the junior's arm, holding him—and something in the tightness of those steely fingers caused a rush of strange suspicion to fill Tom Merry's mind.

"Let me go!"

Miss Strickland did not let go. Her eyes were gleaming in a queer way; she was breathing fast. Tom tried to fling her hand off his arm. He felt certain now that the woman—as he still believed the other to be—was deliberately trying to detain him. She was in league with Doris' captor!

It was no time to stand on ceremony, despite her sex! Tom thrust her aside—and with a cry, Miss Strickland staggered back, losing her balance. She went stumbling backwards down the steps, and fell into the quad. Tom sprang down, with Monty Lowther at his side.

He meant to dart past the woman, and rush in pursuit of the shadowy figure he had seen making for the garden. But at the foot of the steps an amazing sight caused him to halt, despite himself.

For "Miss Strickland's" wig had gone flying as she

fell—and as she staggered to her feet it was the face of a man that glared into Tom Merry's.

"A man!"

The words broke from Tom's lips in wild amazement. With a savage snarl the bogus schoolmistress gripped Tom by the shoulder. The junior's fist flashed out—he knew how to deal with a man! His iron-hard fist crashed on to the scoundrel's jaw, sending him reeling.

Shouts from the terrace told him that help was at hand. A dance had just finished, and some of the St. Jim's juniors and their partners had emerged on to the terrace just in time to witness the amazing scene by the steps.

But Tom had no time to wait for reinforcements! It was of Doris Levison that he was thinking now!

He broke into a run, racing in pursuit of the man who had escaped, with the struggling girl in his arms. Across Miss Finch's lawn he sped, and was just in time to catch a glimpse of his quarry vanishing through a door in the wall.

Tom raced to the door, over lawns and flower-beds, and dragged it open. A moment later he was in the road.

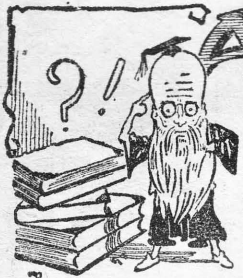
A big closed car standing on the grass a little way to the right was humming noisily as its engine was speeded up by someone at the controls. Tom Merry grasped the situation in a flash, and hurled himself for the running-board. He heard one of the car's doors slam.

It was moving forward as he came abreast of it. A glaring face at the window stared out at him vindictively. Tom sprang on to the running-board, wondering desperately if he could hope to stop the car even yet.


He glimpsed the figure of Doris Levison, enveloped still in a thick rug that muffled any cries she might have made. And then another figure, lying inert on the floor of the

(Continued on next page.)

ASK THE ORACLE!



There are some encyclopædias which cost over a pound a volume, boys. But you can have any knotty questions of yours answered for nix, by our walking Know-it-All!



grey and reddish hairs. The bird-eating spider catches small birds such as finches in its great web and makes a meal of them.

Q. What are snuffers?

A. An old-fashioned kind of scissors with a box arrangement for snipping off a lamp or candle wick for the purpose of putting out the flame.

Q. What is the difference between a canter and a cantor?

A. A canter is a term used in connection with horse-riding, and meaning an easy gallop. It is supposed to be short for Canterbury gallop, meaning the easy pace taken by the Canterbury pilgrims. A cantor, however, is a precentor, or one who leads the singing of a choir or congregation.

Q. Who was Pooh Bah?

A. I regret, Freddy Dale, that in your general knowledge paper you put that he was the Emperor of China. Alas! you were somewhat off the rails. Pooh Bah is one of the principal characters in the famous comic opera by Gilbert and Sullivan called "The Mikado." In the court of the Mikado of Japan, according to the opera, he holds every sort of office from Lord High Chancellor to Chief Bottle-Washer. So the name Pooh Bah has come to be applied to anyone who does a variety of jobs.

Q. What two cities does the famous book by Charles Dickens, entitled: "A Tale of Two Cities," deal with?
A. London and Paris.

Q. What is a taffrail?

A. Of course, I will pardon you for asking "a naughty question," Percy Egbaston, of Cricklewick Ferry. Although it is rather more than thirty years since I ventured to Margate by boat, I remember perfectly well that a taffrail is the particular rail round the stern, or blunt end, of a vessel. I once fell over one through placing one of my pedal extremities on a strip of orange-peel carelessly cast upon the deck by some inconsiderate tripper.

(Now then, crams, what about it? Surely some of you can catch our wise old Oracle napping. Have a shot at it, anyway.)

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Q. What are the Elgin Marbles?

A. To answer your question, "Classical," let me first recall to your mind the building of the Parthenon, built 500 years before the birth of Christ, when Greece was supreme in art and civilisation. The whole building was erected of white marble, and Phidias, the greatest sculptor of all time, embellished it with wonderful carved figures of men and horses. When the Parthenon was in ruins, Lord Elgin brought many of these wonderful marbles to England, and they were exhibited in the British Museum and became known as the Elgin Marbles. More than a hundred years ago, Canova, the great Venetian sculptor, came to England to see these, the most glorious examples of Grecian art in the world. As he gazed upon these art masterpieces of ancient days, Canova is said to have remarked that after seeing them he felt his own work had been a failure.

Q. What note of music tells us to make haste?

A. B♯ (be sharp).

Q. What is a bete noire?

A. Tommy Bell, of York, has sent in this question. It appears that his Uncle Dick was playing billiards with his father at home one evening when Tommy's father, after losing the third game, exclaimed: "Pon my word, Dick, you're my bete noire!" And now Tommy wants to know if a bete noire is a billiards expert. Hardly, sonny. The literal translation from the French is "black beast," and it means an abomination. Your father used the term in the popular way. He meant

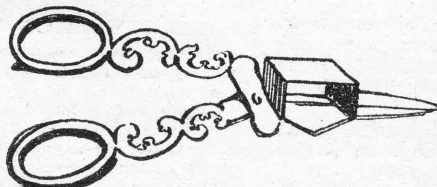
that Uncle Dick was the one fellow he never had any luck against at billiards and was unable to overcome. And by the way, "bete" is pronounced "bait" (as in fishing) and "noir" as "nwar."

Q. What is meant by the nautical expression "shooting the sun"?

A. Determining the position of a ship by measuring the altitude of the sun with the instrument known as a sextant. At night-time the position is obtained by a sight of certain stars.

Q. Where do the largest spiders live?

A. Among the largest to be found, Jack Bates, of Birkenhead, are those of tropical South America, and more particularly, Equatorial Brazil! You say that your uncle, who is an explorer, wrote home that he had seen a "bird-eating spider," and that you think it would be more remarkable if he had seen a spider eating a bird. Well, this is exactly what is done by a certain group of monster spiders half a foot in expanse. A brute of this species is like a figment out of a nightmare. The legs are often six or seven inches in length, and the entire body and legs are covered with coarse



Old-fashioned candle-snuffers our great-grandmothers used.

car, brought a cry of startled amazement from the lips of the captain of the Shell.

"Levison!"

The missing schoolboy!

Tom Merry could scarcely believe his eyes. For a moment he forgot his purpose, as he stared down with incredulous gaze at the white face of Ernest Levison of the Fourth.

The car was off the grass, gathering speed with every moment as it turned up the road. Tom gathered his wits together and struck fiercely at the man at the driving-wheel.

The car swerved, and he heard a shout from the man in the back seat. Again Tom hit out, his fist landing on the ear of the man at the controls, and again the car swerved madly. But then a stunning blow in the face sent Tom Merry reeling from the running-board. He fell back, with a cry, into the bushes at the edge of the road—and the car shot away at a mad speed.

Dazed and panting, Tom staggered to his feet. He was unhurt, but for scratches and bruises.

His mind was filled with a confusion of whirling thoughts.

"Levison!"

How had Ernest Levison come to be in the car? It was a mystery that Tom could not fathom.

He passed a hand across his face. His cheek was bleeding. He stared up the road, and saw the red rear-light of the car vanish round the distant bend.

CHAPTER 10. To the Rescue!

"LEVISON!" muttered Tom Merry dazedly. "It was Levison!"

Running feet came racing across to him from the door in the wall. Someone grasped his arm.

"Where are they? What's happened?"

It was the voice of Talbot of the Shell, hoarse with excitement.

Tom pointed a shaking hand up the road.

"They've got away!" he said bitterly. "They've got away in a car. I couldn't stop them! And—and they've got Levison—"

"Levison?" echoed Talbot wonderingly. "But they can't have! Not Levison—"

"I tell you, I saw him! They've got him in their car! And Doris—both of them!"

"G'wreat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"What the dickens are we to do?" cried Blake.

Half a dozen or more of the St. Jim's juniors were surrounding Tom Merry now.

"Looks as if it's too late to do anything!" grunted Digby miserably. "They've got clean away!"

"What about that scoundrel—Miss Strickland, as he called himself?" demanded Tom swiftly. "It was a man! You saw?"

"Yes!" said Talbot grimly. "It was a man, right enough! He's vanished! We tried to catch him, but he gave us the slip in the dark."

"He was one of the gang, sure enough!" said Tom Merry. "One of the gang that's kidnapped Doris and old Levison! I—I can't understand—"

He passed a hand across his eyes dazedly. It had all happened so suddenly that he could scarcely fit things together as yet. And the amazing fact of Levison's presence in the kidnappers' car had staggered him utterly.

"We must telephone to the police," cut in Manners. "Come on—no good standing here in the road!"

The St. Jim's juniors turned and hurried back through the door in the wall, Tom Merry with them.

On the terrace, the rest of the juniors were waiting excitedly with Miss Finch and the Spalding girls, some of whom were thoroughly frightened. At sight of the blood on Tom Merry's face, Miss Finch gave a sharp cry.

"It's all right," said Tom hastily. "Only a scratch, from getting mixed up with some bushes."

"What's happened?" breathed the little headmistress.

Her face was pale and set.

Tom Merry told her. She gave a faint cry of horror.

"And they've taken Doris!"

"You mustn't worry," said Tom, as reassuringly as he could. "Talbot has gone to phone to the police. Maybe they will catch them very soon—"

A sudden running figure came into view across the quad. As it appeared in the lights streaming out on to the terrace from the now deserted ball-room, Tom Merry gave a quick exclamation.

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"Cardew!"

Cardew came running towards the excited group. His own face was white and eager. He halted breathlessly, staring at the faces of the St. Jim's juniors, and at the pale Spalding girls standing in frightened groups.

That something was badly wrong Cardew realised in a flash.

"What is it?" he panted hoarsely.

Swiftly Tom Merry explained.

The slacker of the Fourth stood staring at him dumbly, as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

"Levison was in the car that they took Doris away in?" he breathed. His face was haggard. "Good heavens! Then—then I must have been just too late!"

"What do you mean, Cardew?" exclaimed Miss Finch, in bewilderment.

Cardew turned to her.



Cousin Ethel shook her head, with a laugh, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said brightly. "Pewwaps I can have the suppah dance—" before she said, "I've promised Figgins the supper da—"

"I felt all along that when Levison vanished from St. Jim's it was not because he had run away from the school," he said in a low voice. "And somehow I felt, too, that it was here, at Spalding, that the secret of his disappearance lay. To-night I went to hunt around. I got down into the vaults."

"So that's where you've been all this time?" muttered Figgins, with sudden understanding in his face.

"Yes; in the vaults," repeated Cardew. "And sure enough I found what I had been looking for—a clue to the truth of old Ernest's disappearance from St. Jim's."

He took from his pocket a scrap of paper and thrust it eagerly into Tom Merry's hand. His eyes were gleaming oddly.

"Read that!" cried Cardew. "Just read that! Don't you worry, Miss Finch! We'll catch the scoundrels yet, and get Doris and her brother free! I found that note in a cellar under the vaults. A little ball of paper. The scoundrels never knew that Levison had written it and dropped it there before they took him away to-night! When

I found it I never guessed how recently they had been there with him, either. But it tells us where they're taking him and Doris. We can follow them."

"Bai Jove!" The excited voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy broke the tense silence that followed Cardew's eager words. "Cardew, deah boy, you've saved the situation, bai Jove!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled Jack Blake excitedly. "Hurrah for Cardew!"

"What does Levison's letter say?" cried Clive.

Clive had been like a fellow in a dream. Joy at the knowledge that his lost chum had not run away from St. Jim's after all had been struggling with the fresh anxiety of knowing the truth—that Ernest Levison and his sister were in the hands of kidnapers. But now Sidney Clive seemed to wake, as it were, from his dream. He clutched eagerly at Tom Merry's shoulder as he tried to read

The juniors and the Spalding girls stared at one another in amazement and consternation.

"An island in the Mediterranean!" gasped Blake. "Oh, crumbs! If they once get out of England—"

Talbot hurried out on to the terrace. "I've phoned the Wayland police," he said quietly. "They are going to do what they can. An inspector is coming straight along here for particulars."

"They'll never catch them!" muttered Tom Merry. Cardew touched his arm, drawing him away from the others.

"There's no time to waste!" muttered Cardew. There was a queer, strained note in his voice. "We can't wait for the police! Some of us must go after the scoundrels. We'll bag one of those cars in the quad there that are waiting to take us back to St. Jim's after the dance. Goodness knows where the drivers are; but I can drive! Are you game?"

For a moment Tom Merry hesitated. It was a daring scheme of Cardew's. But the thought of Doris Levison and her brother in the hands of the unscrupulous scoundrels who had so daringly carried them off from under the very noses of their friends, decided him.

"Yes, I'm game!" answered Tom coolly. "Who else goes?"

"Manners and Lowther, if you like," answered Cardew. "And Clive, of course. And one other—"

"Figgins," said Tom, and Cardew nodded.

No one noticed at the moment as the selected four joined Tom Merry and Cardew and slipped away into the quad-rangle.

Cardew jumped into the driving-seat of one of the big hired cars that had brought the juniors from St. Jim's. It held six easily. Cardew pressed the self-starter, and the engines roared to life.

"Grayport," muttered Cardew. "Fifty miles! We'll do it in less than two hours!" He let in the clutch, and the big car glided forward. "Lots less than two hours!" he added, with a grim smile.

A minute later and the six juniors had swept out from the gates of Spalding and were roaring up the Wayland road.

The car shot forward in answer to Cardew's foot on the accelerator. Forty miles an hour—forty-five—fifty! The wind shrieked past.

Figgins gave a short laugh.

"St. Jim's to the rescue!" he muttered, grim-faced.

Tom Merry, seated beside Cardew in the front seat, glanced back over his shoulder and nodded with gleaming eyes.

"That's it, Figgy!" he cried. "My hat, yes!" And under his breath Tom Merry repeated it—"St. Jim's to the rescue!"

CHAPTER 11.

A Race Against Time!

UP the long, straight road to Spalding village the car swept at breathless speed.

Cardew, at the steering-wheel, had his eyes glued to the road ahead. His face was set, his hands steady on the wheel. Tom Merry, watching the slacker of the Fourth, realised that Ralph Reckness Cardew was a fine driver.

And not only did Cardew know how to get the very most out of the big car; an iron determination had gripped him to be in time to save his chum and Doris Levison—to overtake the kidnapers before it was too late!

For if once the scoundrels got away from England with their captives it might be impossible to rescue them, even with all the forces of Scotland Yard at work.

Through Spalding village they roared, and turned along the road to Wayland. After what seemed to Tom Merry less than a minute they were speeding through Wayland.

Tom Merry leaned across to Cardew.

"What about the police?" muttered Tom. "Hadn't we better pick up a police-inspector—take him with us?"

But Cardew shook his head.

"No," he said tersely; "no time to waste! We can get police help at Grayport, if necessary."

A minute later they had left Wayland behind them, and Cardew swung the big car into the Grayport road.

There was no sign of any other car on the road ahead of them, although they could see far over the moorland, where the road wound like a ribbon under the moon. Those minutes that had passed between the escape of the kidnapers and their own mad race from the gates of Spalding Hall had been enough to let the car ahead put many miles between pursuers and pursued.

Once on the open moorland, where the road ran straight for many a mile towards the distant rim of hills, Cardew



ailed up to claim the first dance. "I have promised it to Figgins!" said Tom. "I'm afraid you can't have that, either," said Ethel. "You are well!" "Bai Jove!" (See Chapter 7.)

the scrawled writing on the scrap of paper that Cardew had found in the vaults.

"Listen!" said Tom. And he read aloud the fragmentary message on the crumpled paper:

"I am writing this in the faint hope that it may be found one day—and that my captors will not know that I have left it here. I am a prisoner in this cellar in the hands of kidnapers, who are plotting to kidnap my sister Doris. I know too much, so they mean to carry me off with her. We shall be taken by steam-yacht from a place called Northanger Cove, near Grayport, to an island in the Mediterranean—I don't know its name—where we are to be kept for a long while. This is because of some money—"

The message ended abruptly there. It occurred to Tom Merry that perhaps Levison had been interrupted at that point; and had never had an opportunity of finishing it.

"My only hat!" breathed Manners.

trod hard on the accelerator, and their previous speed became but a crawl by comparison! Fifty—sixty miles an hour, and still the needle of the speedometer crept higher.

"I—I say, Cardew," muttered Clive, "it won't help much if we crash!"

"Trust me," said Cardew laconically, and a flickering smile passed across his set face.

"We ought to catch the beggars up pretty soon at this rate!" exclaimed Manners.

"They may be driving just as fast!" muttered Figgins.

The moon was high now, bright as silver in a cloudless sky. The white moonlight bathed the moor, showing up the road ahead almost with the light of day.

There was silence in the big car as it raced on.

Each of the juniors was busy with his own thoughts. The amazing knowledge that Levison had not run away from St. Jim's, after all, as had been thought, but had been a prisoner in the vaults of Spalding, caused a good deal of readjusting of ideas in the minds of Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins and Clive. Only Cardew had ever even dreamed that there had been the faintest possibility that Levison's disappearance from St. Jim's had not been the simple case of a junior "bunking" that it had appeared to be.

And Doris' danger—that, too, gave the St. Jim's fellows much to think about. Their faces were grim with purpose. They were ahead of the police; they were the first line of attack, so to speak, against the scoundrels who had their friends in their power! It was no time for idle talking, but for action! And so no one spoke as the speeding car swept on through the night towards distant Grayport.

Mile after mile—through dark villages, over open heaths and wind-swept moorland, down through dark, wooded valleys, where the glaring headlights of the car raked the blackness of the silent trees. Through a little country town, where a fat policeman sprang out into the road before them and tried to stop them in their breathless race, only to leap frantically back again as Cardew smiled grimly and kept straight on.

Figgins, glancing back, grinned faintly.

"He's got our number down," said Figgins.

"That'll mean a fine," said Cardew coolly. "But perhaps they'll let us off when we explain."

He shrugged. The slacker of the Fourth was certainly not going to worry about a fine for speeding, under the circumstances.

They left the lighted town behind them and raced out into the open country beyond. They were up in the hills now, with more than half their journey done. Great bare ridges of chalkland ran to the horizon on either side of the road. Soon they might get a glimpse of the distant sea, nearly twenty miles away yet.

Still there was no sign of their quarry.

"They're travelling as fast as we are!" muttered Cardew.

"But I'll bet they're going no faster!" grinned Figgins.

"If they've averaged more miles per giddy hour than us, they're magicians, that's all!"

"We can't be far behind them," agreed Tom Merry.

They were dropping fast now, down long, winding stretches of hill-road, that caused even Tom Merry to catch his breath now and then, as Cardew took the corners at daring speed. But Cardew knew what he was about. Never once did he take an unnecessary risk, despite the speed. None realised better than he that were they to crash now the game was up as far as rescuing Doris and her brother was concerned.

"There's the sea!"

Monty Lowther pointed ahead. Between the round backs of two hills a glitter of silver could be seen, where the moonlight glistened on the far-off waves. The tang of the sea was in the air now—the juniors could smell it.

Away ahead of them the lights of Grayport could be seen glittering through the cold, clear air.

"Northanger Cove!" muttered Tom. "I wonder where that is? Near Grayport—that's all Levison's scribble told us."

"The police will tell us all right!" cut in Manners. "I vote we go straight to the police station at Grayport." Cardew nodded.

Again a straight stretch of road enabled Cardew to "step on the juice," as Figgins put it. At more than sixty miles an hour they flew down the straight, slowing up abruptly with a grinding of brakes as they reached the next corner. Again a straight stretch met their eyes, and from Clive there broke an excited shout.

"Look—look!"

Far ahead, the twinkling red light of a car could be seen.

"May not be them," said Manners doubtfully.

"I'll bet it is!" breathed Figgins.

Tom glanced at his watch. It was getting on for eleven o'clock. They had been on the road only an hour, and

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already they were nearing Grayport! Cardew's driving had certainly not wasted many precious minutes!

The car ahead vanished suddenly down a road to the left. Cardew, uncertain whether or not to follow, drew up at the fork, and peered out at the signpost standing there. He gave a quick exclamation:

"Northanger Cove!"

The left-hand arm of the signpost bore the name of the cove they were seeking, while the other road led into Grayport.

"Well," rapped out Cardew, "what's it to be—Northanger Cove or the Grayport police?"

Tom Merry glanced at his companions. They were all athletes, and good fighting men. His eyes rested on Figgins' broad shoulders—he had deliberately chosen Figgins for the daring rescue-party because of those hefty shoulders! The sight of them now made up Tom's mind in a moment.

"Blow the police!" he exclaimed. "No time to waste getting hold of the police! There are six of us, and we can all scrap!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Manners.

"Right!" grinned Cardew, and he swung the car into the road leading to Northanger Cove.

CHAPTER 12.

On the Cliff Edge!

"W^ERE catching them up!"

There was a thrill of excitement in Monty Lowther's voice as he spoke.

They had sped for a mile or more down the narrow lane, and now the car ahead was in view again, nearer.

"Is it their car?" cried Clive eagerly.

Tom Merry, staring ahead, did not answer. He still could not be sure that this was the car he had seen in the road outside Spalding Hall. But in his heart, he felt sure that it was indeed their quarry. The fact that the car in front had taken the lonely road to Northanger Cove seemed almost conclusive proof. Surely, at this time of night, it was unlikely that anyone else would be going to a lonely cove on the coast—and at such a speed as the car ahead was travelling?

But Cardew was driving faster still, and as the minutes passed, they crept nearer and nearer to the lurching rushing shape in front. At last they were so close that Tom could make out the number-plate, and his teeth clicked together and his eyes gleamed.

"It's their car, right enough!" he rapped out.

All the six juniors were staring ahead, with set faces. The knowledge that they were on the heels of the scoundrels who had Doris and Ernest Levison in their clutches had set their hearts thudding faster. Though they had pluck galore, all of them, and were ready for a desperate fight if it came to that, it was a startlingly grim situation for six juniors of St. Jim's!

"What happens now?" breathed Manners.

"I'll try and cut ahead of 'em," answered Cardew, in his coolest tones. "Then, if I stop this bus across the road in front of 'em, they've got to stop!"

"That's the idea!" muttered Tom.

It was a daring plan, but all the juniors knew that they could trust Cardew's steel nerves to pull it off if he had the chance. And round the next bend the road ran out over the high cliffs and grew wider. Cardew gave a mutter of satisfaction.

"I think I can slip in front now!" he said calmly. "Stand by for trouble!"

He pressed his foot down hard on the accelerator.

The car shot ahead, and the gap between the two lessened rapidly. There would be just room to pass, Cardew realised—just room! And only just!

But the men in the front car clearly guessed the manoeuvre that Cardew had in mind. For it must have been clear to them long ago that this was a deliberate pursuit—though they could never have guessed for a moment that it was but six schoolboys who had been trailing them so daringly. The car in front swerved across the road, hugging the slope on the left. If Cardew was to pass, he had to take the outer half of the road, with a sheer drop of two hundred feet to the rocks below within a few feet of his racing wheels!

At that mad speed, as the two cars flew along the straight cliff-road, it would be a nerve-racking ordeal, to creep by on the cliff edge. A low wooden rail ran alongside the road for the safety of pedestrians. That it would withstand the impact of a hurtling car, none of the juniors imagined for a moment.

Cardew hesitated, and glanced questioningly for a moment at Tom Merry.

"It's for old Levison's sake!" muttered Clive shakily

"Risk it!" growled Figgins, and Tom Merry nodded.

Cardew swung out towards the cliff edge.

They were almost level with the other car now. Inch by inch, the bonnet of the juniors' car was creeping up past the rear mudguard of the one ahead. Tom glanced to the right, and caught his breath for a moment as he saw how close to the brink they were flying—and saw in the moonlight the jagged wave-lashed rocks far below.

He shuddered, and turned his eyes away.

It did not do to let his thoughts dwell on what would happen if Cardew lost his nerve—if a tyre should burst, or the car should skid. A two hundred feet drop! Down on to the rocks, where the waves were thundering—and that would be the finish of everything.

The cars were level, and Cardew gave a gasp as he saw that after another half-mile the road swung sharply round in a right-angle bend. Unless they could get in front before they reached that bend—

Figgins, staring out of the window at the car beside them, gave a sudden excited shout.

A white face had stared out at him for a moment, before it had been dragged back into the darkness. It was the face of Doris Levison!

"Can we do it?" muttered Tom.

Cardew did not answer. The bend ahead seemed to be rushing towards them. Out of the corner of his eye he could see that the other car was dropping back—the driver had lost his nerve! The man at the wheel had not the courage to risk the ghastly smash that might have resulted at the bend had he stuck to his position. Though he had the inside berth, the two cars might both have gone over the edge, locked together, had Cardew swerved inwards. The man's nerve had gone for the moment—and as he jammed on his brakes, Cardew gave a shout of triumph.

The juniors' car seemed to shoot ahead as the other slackened in speed.

"Hurrah!" panted Lowther. But his lips were white.

Tom Merry's eyes, like Cardew's, were glued on the bend—dangerously near now. The dandy of the Fourth stamped on the brake pedal, and, with a slowing-up so abrupt that the four juniors behind were flung forward, the big car swung round within a foot of the brink.

"Oh, well done, Cardew!" breathed Tom Merry. For the moment he felt that his heart had ceased to beat, and there were beads of perspiration on his brow. Tom had realised the danger more than the others, since, in front as he was, he had known the nearness of that fatal bend.

Figgins was staring out through the little window at the back.

"Here they come!" he cried.

"This is where we stop 'em!" answered Cardew grimly.

He was slowing up now, meaning to swing the big car round full across the road, to bar the way of the kidnappers. But even as he turned the wheel, a sudden sharp report rang out from behind them.

A revolver-shot! And the next moment the car lurched as, with a tremendous report echoing that of the bullet, one of the rear tyres exploded. It had been hit full by the shot aimed at it by one of the scoundrels in the other car—and Cardew gave a gasp as he felt the big machine go skidding helplessly towards the cliff edge, utterly out of control.

Tom Merry's blood went cold.

That this was the finish, he never doubted in those nightmare moments. It seemed to him that they were already reeling over the brink, to hurtle down to destruction and death on the pitiless rocks two hundred feet below.

There was a violent jolt and a crash.

The back of the car had broken the low rail like match-wood, the rear wheel had gone over, and the rocky brink had crashed up against the under-carriage. There was a breathless cry from Monty Lowther. Tom had shut his eyes, but he opened them again, almost stupidly—to realise that the car had stopped, caught on a jagged rim of rock with one rear wheel hanging over space.

The next moment the other car went speeding by them, a mocking face watching from the window as it rushed on and vanished round the next bend!

CHAPTER 13.

A Friend in Need!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW swung open a door and scrambled out.

The others followed, white-faced and shaken and almost staggering.

"Narrow shave—what?" drawled Cardew.

"My hat! Yes!" gasped Figgins. "A bit too narrow for my liking!"

"I thought we were—were over then," said Clive, and laughed. It was a laugh that held not an atom of mirth in it.

Cardew stared down the road.

"We've got to follow!" he snapped. "On foot! We can't be far from the cove—"

He broke into a run, with Tom Merry and Figgins at his side, Manners and Monty Lowther and Clive at their heels.

Action was welcome. It helped to turn their minds from the horror of that skid towards the brink—moments that none of the six would forget to his dying day.

The road was dropping steeply seawards. The juniors turned the corner, round a jutting hump of rock, and a deep gash in the cliffs came into sight ahead of them, with the road vanishing into it.

"Northanger Cove!" cried Tom Merry. "My hat—look!"

Rocking in the swell of the waves in the shadow of the cliffs, a steam-yacht could be seen. The water evidently went deep very suddenly, for the vessel to be so close inshore. A trail of steam drifting from its funnel showed that the yacht was all ready to get under way.

"Gad!" breathed Cardew. "Everything's nice an' ready for the scoundrels!"

They quickened their pace a fraction, spurred on by the sight of that sinister vessel riding the waves in the dark cove beneath those towering cliffs.

"We can catch 'em yet!" cried Tom, pounding down the hill a yard or so ahead of the rest.

But even as he spoke, the dark shape of a motor-launch shot out from under the cliffs towards the waiting vessel.

(Continued on next page.)



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"Too late!" panted Clive hoarsely. "There they go!"

Instinctively the juniors halted, staring down over the cliff at that lean shape darting through the waves. Without doubt, Doris and Levison were on board that speeding launch, being carried out to the yacht with all speed.

Clearly the launch had been waiting by the shore for the arrival of the kidnappers. With a fortune at stake, the gang of scoundrels were sparing no pains to make sure of getting their captives safely out of the country!

"Too late!" repeated Clive, and there was misery in his voice.

And then a step on the road caused him to turn his head swiftly. A dark figure had loomed up, and the glow of a cigarette shone redly in the shadow of the hillside. The next moment the lean figure of a young man in a yachting cap stepped into the moonlight, his eyes fixed curiously on the juniors.

"What's up?" inquired the stranger laconically.

The white-faced youngsters must have presented an incongruous spectacle, there, on the lonely cliff road! Tom Merry was not surprised by the curious look on the face of the new arrival!

The junior stepped forward quickly, with gleaming eyes. He liked the look of this lean-faced young man. And the yachting cap caused a thrill of new hope to come to Tom Merry. If this man had a yacht ready to hand, and would help them—

Swiftly, in terse, breathless sentences, the captain of the Shell explained. As he listened, the young man's eyes widened with astonishment. Then a gleam came into them—a dancing gleam of reckless adventure.

"I'm your man!" The young fellow in the yachting cap rapped out the words even before Tom had finished. "I've got a motor-launch down there"—he flung out a pointing hand towards the cove. "We'll try a round against these kidnapping villains! Come on!"

With the stranger in their midst, the six juniors broke into a run again, down towards the shore.

New hope had come to them. In the nick of time, their luck had brought them just the ally they needed!

"My name's Hilton!" their companion cried breathlessly, as he sped along between Tom Merry and Figgins. "You say you're from St. Jim's? Some pals of mine went to St. Jim's—before your time, of course."

He broke off. It was no time for talk!

Out on to the shingly beach the party raced stumblingly. The young man named Hilton led them along a natural jetty of flat rock, to where a big launch was moored, rising and falling gently on the swell. He leapt in, and the six juniors scrambled in after him. The mooring rope was cast off, and in a few moments there was a hum of engines. Hilton sprang to the helm, and the launch curved out from the rocks with swiftly increasing speed.

Smack! The racing craft hit a wave full, and the spray shot high into the air. The smell of the sea water filled the juniors' nostrils. Spray stung their cheeks. They would have enjoyed that night trip on the water had they had time even to think of it! But Doris Levison and her brother occupied all their thoughts.

Tom Merry stared ahead.

The great jutting promontory on the right of the cove almost hid the steam yacht from their view at present. Only

the bows of it could be seen. The kidnappers' launch had already vanished beyond the point.

"They won't have seen us yet, anyway," Tom muttered.

They were still in the shadow of the cliffs. Then suddenly they shot out into the moonlight where the water sparkled like silver. Long rolling waves were sweeping into the cove, causing the launch to rear and dive like a live thing. The swish of the sea and the slap of the waves filled the air.

Out past the point they sped, leaving a foaming wake behind them. Hilton pushed the helm hard over, and round they came in a sweeping curve towards the yacht.

"She's moving!" panted Manners.

It was true enough. Slowly, the dark vessel was slipping through the water, heading for the open sea.

"Great Scott!" granted Hilton savagely. "They're under way! They've got their launch aboard infernally quick!"

There was grudging admiration in his voice. Without a doubt the scoundrels were carrying their scheme through with startling efficiency.

"We can catch 'em though, can't we?" cried Cardew.

Hilton nodded without speaking.

The launch swept on over the moonlit waves, drawing swiftly nearer to the slowly-moving yacht. A running figure on the after-deck could be seen for a moment vanishing for'ard.

"They've spotted us!" growled Monty Lowther.

The steam yacht, though no doubt a fast enough vessel when fully under way, had not the acceleration of a smaller craft. With Hilton's launch racing after it, the distance between the two vessels was diminishing rapidly.

There was no sign of anyone on board now, but for the man at the wheel on the little bridge amidships. Tom Merry saw him glance round at them, and fancied he heard a faint shout.

Hilton was getting every ounce of speed out of the launch, and they were overhauling the yacht with amazing rapidity. The young man swerved his little vessel aside from the churning wake of the larger craft, and then, as they drew alongside, with only a dozen or so yards of water between, he sent out a ringing hail.

"Ahoy! Stop, there! We want a word with you!"

There was no reply from those on the yacht. It was picking up speed now. The shadow of the next towering headland swallowed both it and the launch the next moment as they passed close beneath the farther wing of the cove.

Hilton frowned, and turned a questioning glance to the St. Jim's fellows.

"What shall we do?" he muttered. "Are you chaps game to try and board her?" His eyes were gleaming as he spoke. Hilton was a young man after the juniors' own heart. "She's still going slow enough for us to hitch on alongside. It'll mean a fight—"

His words snapped off before the juniors could answer.

A spurt of flame from the deck of the yacht had cut the darkness. A moment later a bullet sang over their heads, causing all to duck instinctively.

"The hounds!"

Another shot rang out in the gloom, splintering the woodwork of the launch's bows. Hilton made a hopeless gesture.

"Confound the luck! We can't argue with firearms!"

(Continued on next page.)

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Without standing on ceremony, Tom Merry sent Miss Strickland staggering back and sprang down the steps. Next moment an amazing sight caused him to halt despite himself. For "Miss Strickland's" wig had parted company with her head, and it was the face of a man that glared at the juniors! (See Chapter 9.)

He swung the launch away, dropping back as he cut off the engines. The yacht drew rapidly ahead.

"Never mind!" cried Clive desperately. "We'll make a fight for it yet."

"Not on your life!" said Hilton bluntly.

It was not cowardice on his part, but the feeling that he was responsible for the lives of the six youngsters with him. He would not risk harm coming to them, however they might feel about the danger.

There was a sudden shout from Manners.

"Great Scott! Where's Cardew?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew had vanished.

The launch was dropping rapidly behind now, riding the waves with silent engines in the black shadow of the great cliff. Of Cardew there was no sign.

So intent had all been on watching the yacht that no one had noticed Cardew. And Cardew had gone.

Tom Merry caught his breath.

"My hat!" breathed the captain of the Shell hoarsely. "Don't you see? Cardew went overboard, when we were close to the yacht. He means to swim to her and get aboard!"

"He must be crazy!" cried Hilton. "But, by Jove, he's got some grit!"

He let in the clutch, and again the screw thrashed the water.

"We'll follow 'em at a safe distance," muttered the young man grimly. "If we hang on their tail, maybe we'll get a chance to queer their pitch yet."

Tom Merry stared ahead. They were still in the black shadow of the towering cliffs.

Of Cardew there was no sign. What had happened to him?

CHAPTER 14.

A Call for Help!

"O W! Grooooh!"
Ralph Reckness Cardew rose to the surface, gasping and spluttering.

When Cardew had gone overboard, it had not been on a sudden, wild impulse. Coolly and deliberately

the dandy of the Fourth had dived unnoticed from the stern, and after he had recovered somewhat from the first shock of the numbingly cold water had struck out towards the slowly-steaming yacht.

He had only a few yards to cover, and the launch had been sufficiently in front of the yacht for him to hope to get alongside before it steamed away from him.

He had scarcely heard the two shots, but he had realised that the launch had sheered away from the yacht and dropped behind.

Fighting through the waves with powerful strokes, Cardew shot through the water like the powerful swimmer he was. He had shed his coat and kicked off his shoes before leaving the launch, and so strongly was he swimming that the rest of his clothes scarcely hampered him.

He had seen that a rope ladder was hanging over the side of the yacht amidships—the ladder, doubtless, by which Doris Levison had been forced to mount on board, and Levison, too.

With a final spurt Cardew shot up to the side of the yacht as it slid past. He was just in time to catch hold of the swaying end of the ladder. For a minute or more he hung on, regaining his breath, being borne along in the water, half in and half out of it. Then he hauled himself up, hand-over-hand.

Cautiously, the dripping junior raised his head over the level of the deck. He could see the man at the wheel, but no one else was in sight. Swiftly Cardew slipped through the rails on to the deck.

"Well, here we are, any old how," Cardew told himself coolly, crouching in the shadow of the long saloon. "But, what's to be done now?"

Sudden footsteps hurrying along the deck caused Cardew to crouch lower, scarcely breathing. A man passed within a yard of him, and hurried by the little companion-way on to the bridge.

"It's all right, skipper," said a harsh voice. "The launch is giving up as a bad job. That shot or two scared 'em off all right."

"I don't like it much, though," came the muttered answer. "We know there's the destroyer cruising round

by the Melstock Light. If those fellows in the launch think of getting a wireless call out to stop us—"

"Nonsense!" broke in the first man. "There's no wireless station near enough for them to do that in time. We shall be safe on the high seas before long—"

The speaker broke off with a chuckle. A moment or so later he descended from the bridge and vanished aft, again passing within a few feet of the St. Jim's junior crouched in the shadows.

Cardew rose noiselessly to his feet and peered around.

It was a fair-sized vessel, broad and seaworthy, rather particularly fast, he judged. The crew's quarters were forward, separated from the rest of the yacht by a tiny well-deck. Lewison and Doris, he felt sure, would be imprisoned somewhere aft.

Silent as a cat in his stocking feet, Cardew crept along in shadow of the saloon. A porthole in the wall was on a level with his eyes. He paused, peering in.

A dim light from a single electric lamp lit up the interior of the saloon. And at what he saw within Cardew caught his breath.

Two figures were lying bound on the floor—Doris and Ernest Levison! Cords fastened their wrists and ankles.

They had evidently been hastily deposited there in the hurry of getting away from Northanger Cove. Later, doubtlessly, they would be confined to some cabin below until they were safe out of British waters.

Cardew's eyes gleamed, and his face lit up. In another moment he had slipped to the door of the saloon, and to his relief he found it unlocked. He opened it noiselessly and stepped inside, closing the door behind him.

There was a breathless cry from Doris Levison. She was staring at the dripping figure of Cardew as though she had seen a ghost. Her brother, too, seemed scarcely able to believe his eyes. He lifted himself on one elbow, and his mouth opened dumbly.

"Hush!"

Cardew laid a finger on his lips and stepped swiftly across to the bound figures. A faint, curious smile was on his face. He took a clasp-knife from his pocket and stooped over Doris, sawing through her bonds swiftly and coolly.

"Cardew!" gasped Levison hoarsely. "How in Heaven's name—"

"Quiet, old hoss!" murmured Cardew. "Yes, it's little me! Never mind how I got here—it's a long story!"

The severed cords dropped from Doris' wrists; her ankles were already free. She rose painfully, and Cardew turned quickly to Ernest Levison. In another few moments Levison, too, was free.

Levison had recovered from the stupefying effects of the drug when in the car in the race from Spalding Hall. His face was pale and haggard—he looked weak and ill. But there was a new fire burning in his eyes now as he gripped Cardew's hand.

Cardew glanced swiftly out through one of the ports.

His heart sank. They were too far from the shore now for the three of them to jump overboard and swim for it. Cardew could have done it; but Levison was obviously far too weak from his ordeal to stand a dog's chance of getting safe to the land, and Cardew was not certain of Doris, either.

"What can we do?" whispered Doris faintly.

"We must swim for it," muttered Levison. "It's the only way!"

Cardew shook his head.

"No," he said. "I'm not goin' to see either of you drowned, after all the trouble we've taken to do our famous rescuin' act!" He grinned, more to reassure the others than anything else.

For even now their plight seemed almost as hopeless as ever! They were in the lions' den with a vengeance. And at any moment their captors might find them.

Then suddenly Cardew's face lit up.

"Gad! I've got a scheme!"

He gripped Levison's arm.

"This giddy boat is fitted with wireless—I saw the aerial! If we can get to the wireless cabin, we can send out a merry old S.O.S. to a destroyer that's hangin' around somewhere; I heard one of these birds say it was near by!"

Doris gave a gleeful exclamation. Her spirits had come back with a rush.

"I know where the wireless cabin is!" she breathed. "It's underneath the bridge; I saw it when I came aboard, before they tied me up and put me in here with Ernest!"

"Good!" grinned Cardew. "If the wireless chapie is at home, he's going to get the surprise of his life!"

Softly he opened the door and stepped out on to the deck. There was no sign of anyone about. The scoundrels were somewhere below, evidently, believing their prisoners to be perfectly safe trussed up in the saloon.

"Come on!" breathed Cardew.

He turned and stole forward, followed by Doris and Ernest Levison.

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The yacht was rolling a little in the heavy swell. The cliffs of Northanger Cove had dropped well behind now, and of the launch there was no sign. Cardew wondered what his chums and their new ally were doing; he could neither see nor hear the little vessel, following at a distance in the gloomy shadows of the great cliffs.

Like three shadows, Cardew and Levison and the slim figure of the girl stole towards the bridge. They could see the head of the man at the wheel—the captain of the yacht, as Cardew believed him to be. Evidently the captain would not trust the wheel to a member of the crew, for they were in difficult waters, where dangerous rocks abounded.

The throb of the engines and the heavy splashing of the waves must have drowned any sound the three made as they passed the bridge. Doris gripped Cardew's wrist and pointed to a small door a little farther on. Cardew nodded.

"So this is the wireless cabin!" he told himself grimly.

He slid along to the lighted port and peered through. The figure of the wireless operator met his eyes, seated at the table within, with earphones to his head.

"That's fine!" thought Cardew. "He won't hear us comin' with those on his ears!"

He swung open the door and stepped in swiftly. Doris and Ernest Levison followed, the latter closing the door behind them.

The wireless operator glanced round, and his jaw dropped in amazement. He was an ugly-looking youth with little eyes set close together, but of a fairly powerful build.

Instinctively he made a movement to snatch the earphones from his head. But before he could do so Cardew jumped forward and his fist flashed out.

There was a thud. Cardew had aimed well, and his fist caught the wireless operator clean on the point of the jaw. The man rolled from his chair and lay huddled on the floor of the tiny cabin, breathing heavily.

"So much for you!" muttered Cardew. "Lock that door, Levison!"

Levison obeyed, shooting the bolts of both doors—there was one on either side of the cabin. Cardew was already stooping over the senseless figure, removing the earphones.

"Truss him up," muttered Cardew, "and stick something in his mouth! He may come round at any minute."

"Right," nodded Levison.

Cardew fixed the earphones quickly on his own head and slipped into the wireless operator's chair.

Cardew knew a good deal about wireless, although he was too lazy to take much interest in it as a rule. Swiftly he glanced over the apparatus. It was by no means a powerful one, but it would be efficient enough for his purpose if the destroyer were as near as the captain of the yacht had seemed to think.

His hand went out to the big switch on the wall, and he changed over from receiving to transmission.

A moment later the deep spluttering buzz of the wireless apparatus sending out its message into the ether filled the little cabin.

In Morse code Cardew coolly tapped out his message:

"Help! Destroyer wanted. Prisoners aboard steam-yacht sailing west from Northanger Cove."

Zzzzzzz! Zzzzz! Zzzzz! Zzzzzzzzzzz!

The slacker of the Fourth tapped on steadily as the startling message was flung far and wide through the night!

CHAPTER 15.

Bravo, Cardew!

PHEEP!

There was a sudden, shrill whistle in the cabin, causing Doris Levison to jump and give a startled cry.

The whistle of the speaking-tube by Cardew's head had blown. After a moment's hesitation Cardew removed it and spoke in the mouthpiece huskily.

"Hallo!"

"Who the dickens are you talking to, Joe?" came a voice.

It was the captain on the bridge. He had heard the sound of transmission and been puzzled by it.

"Asking for a report of weather past the Channel Islands," said Cardew coolly, disguising his voice.

"Well, don't use up all the blessed juice in the ship!" grunted the voice. "We've been lying up, remember!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Cardew, even in that dangerous moment, had the coolness to wink gravely at Levison as he replaced the whistle in the mouthpiece of the speaking-tube. It had been a narrow shave again; had not Cardew happened luckily to strike on a voice something like that of the senseless operator, the captain's suspicions would have been aroused in a moment.

Zzz! Zzzzz! Zzzzzzzzz!

The electric light in the cabin dimmed again as the wireless apparatus took the current.



"Look out!" There was a shout from Levison as Ralph Reckness Cardew dragged over the switch of the wireless apparatus and began to tap out his message again. A great gap appeared in the door of the cabin. Then another panel crashed in, and a furious, glaring face was revealed. It was Bennett, the stocky American! (See Chapter 15.)

"Destroyer wanted! Prisoners on steam-yacht——"
 Again the message was far-flung over the moonlit sea.
 Then Cardew switched over, and listened. Would there be an answer to his call?
 His hand moved the dials; but at no wave-length could he pick up a reply to his message. The ether was crammed with the talk of ships; some loud, some faint, disjointed messages came in from all sides. But no reply to his own message! Again Cardew switched over to transmission.

Zzzzz! Zzzzz! Zzz! Zzzzz!
 A shrill whistle from the speaking-tube rang through the cabin. Cardew, with a glance at Levison, turned to the mouthpiece.

"Chuck it!" growled the captain's angry voice. "Hang the weather! You'll have the boss up in a minute, for dimming the lights down below! Chuck it!"

Cardew did not reply. He replaced the whistle in the mouthpiece, and with a rueful shrug of the shoulders, switched over again.

It certainly would not do to have "the boss" up to see why the wireless operator was using up the electric current! He listened eagerly, but no reply came from the destroyer. He turned to the speaking-tube.

"There's a ship coming up from the Bay of Biscay, sir," he said huskily into the tube. "She was saying something about fog—didn't catch most of it, though. Can I ask her?"

"Yes—you'd better, I s'pose!" growled the voice from the bridge grudgingly.

Zzzzz! Zzzzz!
 Once more the light in the little cabin dimmed. Clearly

the yacht had been lying-up for some time, and was short of electricity.

"Destroyer wanted! Prisoners——"
 Stamping feet along the deck caused Doris to turn her head sharply.

"Here he comes!" growled a voice from the speaking-tube angrily—Cardew had not replaced the whistle. "I told you so!"

Zzzzz! Zzz! Zzzzz!
 There was a bang on the wireless-room door.
 "What's all the conversation about, in there?" roared an angry voice. "Sending messages to auntie, or what? We can't see to eat down below!"

A face appeared at the porthole, staring in—a fleshy, unpleasant face with dark, gleaming eyes. Suddenly the eyes widened, and the mouth opened in wondering amazement.

"Caught!" groaned Levison.

They heard a shout, and the face vanished. Someone was racing along the deck.

"They aren't where we left them——"
 The words came faintly to the ears of Levison and Doris, above the spluttering of the wireless, as Cardew worked desperately at the key.

Now that they were discovered, he meant to send the despairing message for help out to the last possible moment!

There was a crashing blow on the door. It shook, but held. Another blow, and then another—and a white, staring face appeared at the porthole.

"They're trying to break in!" cried Doris sobbingly.

Grim-faced, Ralph Reckness Cardew tapped out his desperate message again.

Levison wrenched a heavy wooden shelf from the wall of the cabin, scattering books and papers over the floor. It would make a useful weapon!

Crash!

"They've got an axe," muttered Levison thickly.

But the door was thick and strong, and even under the blows of the axe it stood firm even yet. It was built to withstand heavy seas, and the man with the axe would need to labour hard before he succeeded in smashing it down.

Crash, crash, crash!

A splintered slit appeared in the door. Levison tightened his grip on the board in his hands.

And still the spluttering message leapt out into the ether, as Cardew worked away coolly at the table!

"They'll cut the aerial. I expect," he remarked calmly.

"I'll just try for an answer——"

He dragged over the switch.

"Look out!" cried Levison.

A great gap had appeared in the door. Then another panel crashed in, and a furious, glaring face was revealed. It was Bennett, the stocky American!

He came scrambling in through the smashed door, cursing as he did so. Levison lifted the board and aimed a stunning blow at the man's head.

There was a choking gasp from the American, and then he pitched forward and lay motionless at Levison's feet.

"That's the first!" cried Levison, and an almost hysterical laugh broke from him. "Who's next?"

There were shouts and trampling feet outside.

"He's knocked out Bennett!" snarled a voice.

The yacht rolled with sudden violence, causing Levison to stagger. To save himself, he dropped his weapon involuntarily, and clung to the bulkhead for support. And at that moment another man came scrambling through into the cabin.

"Hands up!"

The scoundrel had a snub-nosed automatic in his hand, covering them. Doris Levison gave a little cry.

"Hands up!" repeated the man savagely. "You're beat—the game's up!"

There was no help for it. Slowly, Doris and Levison raised their arms above their heads.

"You, too!"

The man snarled out the words to Cardew.

"Anythin' to oblige!" drawled Ralph Reckness Cardew, rising slowly from his chair and taking the headphones from his ears. He raised his arms and smiled. There was a mocking gleam in his eyes.

"Anythin' to oblige!" he repeated laconically. "But I am afraid you are just a little too late!"

The man's face changed.

"What do you mean?" he cried hoarsely.

"There's a jolly little destroyer about a couple of miles down the coast," grinned Cardew. "And she's coming this way at about twenty-five knots, or more. The Navy to the rescue!"

He laughed softly.

"I shouldn't use that gun, if I were you," he said, and calmly lowered his hands. "You don't want murder tacked on to the list of your misdoings, do you? You'd better make up your minds to the fact that you're dished, diddled, and done!"

CHAPTER 16.

Back to St. Jim's!

LOOK!"

The excited cry broke from the lips of Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell flung out a pointing hand.

"She's stopping!" shouted Figgins.

That the yacht ahead was slowing in speed was certain enough.

"What's in the wind?" muttered Clive.

The launch had been following the yacht at a cautious distance ever since those two revolver-shots had caused Hilton to drop behind out of range. That the men on board were desperate and utterly unscrupulous, the young man realised, and he was not taking any risks with the lives of the youngsters with him. Though the revolver-shots had probably been fired merely as a warning, Hilton was not chancing any accidents, despite the juniors' own eagerness to ignore the warning bullets.

What had happened to Cardew? That had been the big question in the minds of Tom Merry & Co.

They felt confident that he had succeeded in getting aboard the yacht—otherwise they would have been bound to see him swimming in the water, for they had circled round in search of him. But his fate aboard the kid-

nappers' vessel was a mystery. To those on board the launch it seemed almost certain that Cardew must have fallen into the scoundrels' hands almost at once.

"Yes, she's stopping all right!" exclaimed Hilton.

"Queer! I wonder——"

"What's that?" broke in Monty Lowther sharply. "Look

over there!"

A group of lights sliding out of the darkness ahead, from round a distant headland, had caught his eyes. A/d stared over the tumbling waves towards those rapidly-approaching lights.

"A ship!" said Manners eagerly. "It's a ship! My hat, she's moving!"

"I'll say she is!" nodded Hilton. "By Jove, there's only one kind of ship that I know that can shift at that speed!" A sudden, eager grin lit up his face. "I'll swear it's a destroyer!"

"A destroyer?" echoed Tom Merry. "Then——"

"If we can get in touch with her, she'll settle those beggars!" Hilton cried excitedly. "She's turning this way! Looks as if she's seen the yacht—but how could she know——"

He left the question unfinished. Something else had caught the attention of the party in the launch.

A dark shape had swung out over the side of the steam yacht.

"They're lowering a boat!" shouted Figgins. "I say, what the thump——"

"Almost looks as if they're afraid the destroyer is after 'em!" frowned Hilton, in bewilderment. "And they're trying to slip away to shore, to get clear——"

He shifted the helm, turning the launch in the direction of the boat that was now cutting out from the side of the yacht. It was a motor-launch, and in the moonlight half a dozen figures could be seen in it.

The destroyer was coming up like the true greyhound of the seas that she was, her knife-edge bows cutting through the waves with dancing ease, flinging high a great V-shaped wall of foam and spray. That she was turning towards the steam-yacht was obvious.

"She's slowing-down, too!" panted Clive eagerly. "She must know there's something wrong!"

"Looks like it!" nodded Hilton, with gleaming eyes. "And it's up to us to see that those fellows in the launch there don't get safe away to shore!"

The launch from the yacht was cutting in towards the shelter of the cliffs. But the rocks there made a landing impossible for them at that stretch of coast—not till they had won their way back to Northanger Cove would they be able to land. Hilton brought his leaping craft round in a half-circle, and they rushed over to intercept the other launch at a speed of nearer thirty knots than twenty.

The scoundrels' little vessel moved fast, too, however. Those on board it saw Hilton speeding towards them, and they turned in nearer to the cliffs to escape being cut off.

The next moment a splintering crash came over the water to the ears of Tom Merry & Co. The other launch seemed to leap half out of the water, then heeled over and fell back into the water on its side. Dark figures were flung into the sea, and in a time so short that the juniors felt like rubbing their eyes, the launch vanished under the waves.

"Great Scott!" breathed Tom. "They've sunk!"

"Hit a rock!" nodded Hilton tersely, with a grim smile flickering at the corners of his lips. "They don't know this bit of coast so well as I do, or they'd never have turned in under the cliffs like that!"

The six swimming figures were lost to sight. But the juniors glimpsed them a few moments later, as they drew nearer the spot, swimming for the wave-lashed rocks.

Hilton, who knew the position of the sunken rocks, where danger lay, kept his little craft to the lee of them. A minute later Tom Merry and Figgins were hauling aboard two drenched, dispirited figures—one of them a man whom Tom Merry recognised as the tall American he had seen at Spalding Hall.

Four of the scoundrels reached the rocks, and scrambled up out of the water to safety. But escape from the rocks was impossible, with the towering cliffs rising sheer behind. Their only means of leaving their refuge was by water.

"I think we'll let 'em stay there a while, to cool their ardour!" chuckled Hilton. "We'll tell the Grayport Police where to collect 'em—they can't get away, and they won't come to any harm there. They're as safe as if they were already in prison!"

"Where they'll soon be, anyway!" grinned Tom Merry.

The American and the other drenched scoundrel in the launch scowled, but said nothing. The odds were too great for them to dare to attempt to overcome their rescuers. They even made no resistance when Tom Merry

& Co. fastened their wrists together as a precautionary measure.

Then Hilton turned the launch back towards the yacht.

By the time they reached it the destroyer had manoeuvred alongside, and a young naval officer was on board the yacht, with a handful of bluejackets, listening to Cardew's amazing story.

And when the St. Jim's juniors heard Cardew's story they, as one man, broke into a rousing cheer for the slacker of the Fourth!

Levison was like a new man, and Doris was as happy as though she had never passed through an ordeal that would have broken the nerve of most people.

And when the two Levisons, brother and sister, gripped the hands of their chums from St. Jim's, in turn, there was something in their eyes that conveyed far more to Tom Merry & Co. than mere words could have done.

It soon became clear that it had been the leaders of the gang who had made good their escape in the launch—or tried to—leaving the captain of the yacht and the crew to face the music when the destroyer came up. But their attempt had been in vain! And there was no doubt but that all the gang, including the captain and crew of the yacht, would suffer dearly for their rascally schemes!

"And there's four of 'em stranded on the rocks under the cliffs there," grinned Tom Merry to the young officer of the destroyer. "They're a bit chilly, I expect, but all right otherwise!"

"We'll soon have 'em off those rocks," grinned the officer. "I'll send a boat across for 'em, and we'll give 'em a free trip into Grayport aboard their own yacht."

"TWO FORMS AT WAR!"

Rivalry between Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell, and Jack Blake of the Fourth has always existed, but until now it has always been good-natured rivalry. Now, however, this rivalry blazes out afresh between the Shell and Fourth Forms with real bitterness and antagonism.

Something has happened.

Something

But you'll discover for yourselves just how the trouble starts and of the amazing, unprecedented events that follow swiftly on this break between the two Forms when you read

"TWO FORMS AT WAR!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Next Week's Tip-top Yarn of St. Jim's!

ORDER YOUR COPY EARLY!

The heroes of the hour did not forget young Mr. Hilton. Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners, Cardew and Levison and Clive and George Figgins, all clubbed together and presented him with an engraved cigarette-case, as a memento of the splendid help he had rendered them. And no doubt he valued equally as much the silver matchbox that accompanied it, from Doris Levison.

Not till her danger was over had Doris understood the true reason that she had been kidnapped. When she learnt of the fortune that was at stake it was an utter surprise to her.

But that fortune, in due time, would now be hers. And Levison admitted to Tom Merry & Co. and his chums that the money his sister was to inherit, which would be placed in trust for her by her father, had come at a time when money was not too plentiful for the Levisons. Mr. Levison had had business losses which had left him anything but a rich man.

Nothing was said about Cardew exceeding the speed limit. In fact, everything was all right now, and that fact was reflected in the faces of Ernest and Doris Levison, and all their friends at St. Jim's and Spalding Hall, on the occa-



sion of the second dance that Miss Finch gave—a dance, this time, in honour of the juniors who had rescued Doris from her terrible danger. And of those heroes, everyone admitted that Ralph Reckness Cardew was the "star performer," as Monty Lowther put it.

But Cardew would have none of it. He flatly declined to accept any more of the credit than his companions on that exciting night.

According to the slacker of the Fourth, who for once had belied that title, it had not been a case of Cardew to the rescue, but St. Jim's to the rescue.

And even if his friends insisted, despite his protests, in giving Ralph Reckness Cardew an extra cheer or two, no one was going to argue with him at such a time.

"Anyway," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, at supper-time during the second dance at Spalding Hall—and on this occasion there were forty or more guests from St. Jim's instead of twenty—"anyway, deah boys—I mean, ladies and gentlemen—I ppose we all sing 'For they are jolly good fellows'—meanin', of course, fellows and gals, dear old Levison and Dowis, and the six giddy hewoes who went to their rescue!"

And the St. Jim's fellows and the girls of Spalding Hall all joined in with a will!

THE END.

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That night the St. Jim's party and Doris Levison slept in Hilton's little house on top of the cliffs, where the young man's mother made them all welcome, and listened to her son's story with wondering amazement and admiration, too, for all concerned.

A telegram was sent to St. Jim's, but until then none of the little party had had time to wonder what St. Jim's was thinking.

"Hope we don't get into a row for missin' call-over!" Cardew drawled laconically, just before they turned in, to sleep the sleep of dog-tired adventurers.

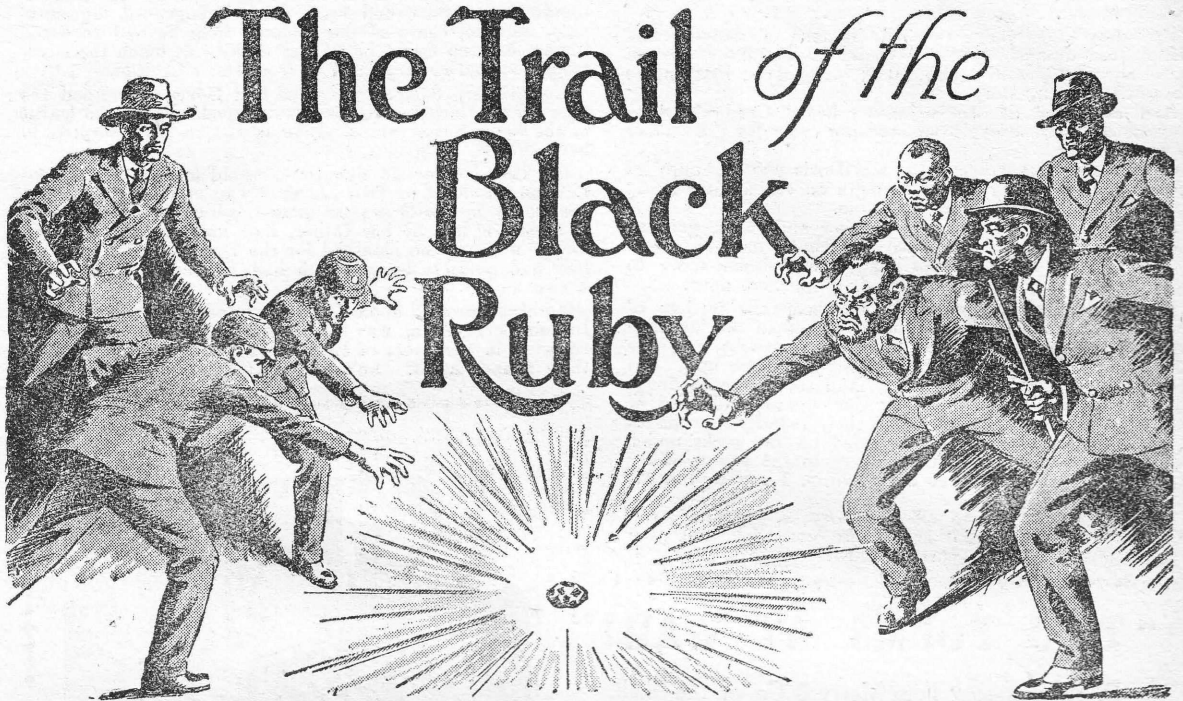
"More likely they'll have the red carpet out for us, and the Wayland band, when they know we're bringing old Levison back with us!" chuckled Clive happily.

"And it'll be a good bit of news for Miss Finch and the Spalding girls!" exclaimed Figgins. "My hat! Won't Ethel be bucked when she knows!"

Clive was more or less right. Though there was no actual red carpet, St. Jim's gave the rescuers a rousing welcome next day when they arrived back, having travelled by train from Grayport. The rooks in the old elms were roused to an excited cawing by the echoing cheers that rang out, again and again, in welcome to Ernest Levison and the daring party who had set out on their reckless attempt at rescuing him, and succeeded so amazingly. And later that day came news of the arrest of the pseudo Miss Strickland.

ADVENTURES IN THE EAST!

Straight from the green fields of England to Egypt, with its motley crowd of Asiatics, its burning sun, and its mysteries! What a change for Bob and Syd, our adventurous pals, who are still hard on the trail of a fortune!



A STIRRING AND DRAMATIC NEW SERIAL STORY OF ADVENTURE, FEATURING BOB AND SYD, TWO PLUCKY SCHOOLBOYS.

By PERCY A. CLARKE.

The Positions Reversed!

ARMED crooks ahead of him, hungry sharks behind him! Bob was in a fix, and there was not much to choose from either danger. Bully Mahon still stood in the native boat, brandishing a heavy oar over his head.

"Go on!" he snapped. "Get going! Snap out of it, you cub, or I'll brain you!"

Bob hesitated as he trod water. He peered over his shoulder, and the water seemed alive with sharks. He counted at least four of those sinister fins cleaving the water towards him.

"White boy one big fool!" grinned Ah Wong. "Big fish eatee him chop-chop, all same water side."

Karl Sweetman was grinning, but otherwise was not concerned. He leant idly against the side of the boat calmly smoking a fragrant cigarette, unmoved by the boy's terrible peril.

Twisty Baker seemed the most troubled of the gang. The leering grin on his face changed to a scowl. Apparently he didn't like the prospect, hardened rogue though he was.

"Crown him, Bully!" he rasped. "Them man-eaters'll get him, anyway. Put him outer his misery before they get a chance to touch him. Go on!"

Bully Mahon swung the heavy sweep viciously.

Bob gasped. Danger all round him! The sharks were coming on at express speed. They lashed the water to white, curdling foam. Twisty Baker was right. It certainly looked as if Bob was due to make shark feed.

But Bob wasn't anxious either to be stunned and eaten, or just eaten. At least, he meant to fight for it. He had to act quickly—think quickly. The four crooks were gathered on one side of the native boat, leering at him. Bully Mahon made that heavy sweep hum in the air as he swung it.

And Bob dived. He raised himself half out of the water, then went under. The water roared and gurgled in his ears. Down—down he went. The water was muddy, thick, and hid him from view.

The crooks in the boat frowned, staring at the bubbles Bob left behind him.

"The kid's got plenty of grit!" growled Twisty Baker. "I'll say that much!"

"He'll need all he's got I think," observed Sweetman. "Those sharks will be nibbling at him inside two minutes."

But he was wrong! Whilst four crooks gazed down into

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the muddy water where the bubbles had been, Bob rose to the surface of the water on the other side of the boat. He filled his lungs with fresh air. As he did so he glimpsed more sharks, and realising that quick action was necessary if he wished to remain alive, he reached up, grabbed the gunwale of the native boat and hauled himself aboard. He came over and dropped into the bottom of the boat with a flop.

As one man, the four crooks spun round. But Bob was as quick as lightning. He saw a revolver lying on a thwart of the boat and seized it.

"Put 'em up!" he snarled.

He had the drop of the crooks, and they knew it! Without a murmur they reached for the sky.

Bob motioned them towards the stumpy mast.

"Go on!" he ordered "Get together there, amidships. You, too!"

That last was to the native boatman. The half-naked fellow trembled violently. His eyes goggled fear. He jabbered away in his mother tongue, but Bob didn't understand a word of it. Maybe the native didn't understand what Bob said, but actions speak louder than words, especially when a loaded revolver is brandished about.

Bob stood by the uncouth tiller, his gun trained on the little group of crooks.

"Sorry to disappoint you," he said, grinning. "Instead of feeding those sharks I'm going to fleece you—another kind of shark!"

No word from the crooks. Ah Wong was gazing over the side of the boat. He seemed interested in the course the boat was taking.

With no one at the tiller the boat was drifting at the mercy of the strong tide. The morning breeze began to swing up, filling the heavy mat sail. The massive boom swung outwards, and the boat forged ahead.

But Bob was too busy to notice things like that.

"You, Sweetman," he snapped, "or whoever has it, put that Black Ruby on that thwart. Quickly, now, or I'll shoot! You were showing me no mercy when I was in the water, and I'll show you none! Put that Ruby on that thwart!"

Sweetman snarled. Bully Mahon and Twisty Baker fidgeted uneasily. For one thing their arms were aching abominably, holding their hands over their heads. They glanced at Sweetman. It was obvious who had the rare gem!

Ah Wong was still interested in the course of the boat.

He muttered something to Sweetman, and a cruel grin came on the boss crook's suave face. He spoke to Bob.

"You seem very sure that we have it," he said slowly.

"Very sure," retorted Bob. "Who else wants it?"

"Professor Svenskhem," said Sweetman, "You haven't forgotten him, have you?"

That was a puzzler for Bob. He was not sure whether to think the Swede was just an accident or really in "co" with the crooks. But he feigned anger to hide his bewilderment.

"I haven't got time to stand here arguing!" he rasped. "You do as you're told, or I'll shoot and make short work of the lot of you! If you haven't got the Ruby why were you so eager to get ashore ahead of us? Besides, Steve Barrett saw that treacherous Chink grab it."

Sweetman dropped one hand to stroke his moustache, but Bob snapped at him.

"Keep your hands up!" he hissed. "I'm not standing for any tricks!"

"But be reasonable, my friend," argued Sweetman calmly. "How can I get the Ruby from my pocket if I keep my hands over my head?"

"You have got it, then?" put in Bob.

"You think I have," grinned Sweetman. "Yet just now you said Ah Wong had it."

"Gosh! You think you're smart at back chat!" sneered Bob. "But I mean to have that Ruby. I'll take you one at a time. And I'll start with you, Sweetman. You lay that Ruby on the thwart before I count ten or I shoot!"

"But suppose I haven't got it?"

"Then you'll be unlucky enough to get shot, and I'll have to start all over again with one of the others. That's all. Are you ready? I'm going to count. One—two—three—"

Sweetman scowled and fidgeted. Bob meant business, and he saw no way of escape. Bob was counting slowly, deliberately, giving him plenty of time. Yet the crucial moment was drawing nearer—nearer

Bob held his revolver pointed straight at Sweetman's head, and he was counting.

"Four—five—six—"

The breeze freshened and blew strongly. The big mat sail filled and forced the boat through the water, faster and faster. The clumsy craft heeled over, and Ah Wong was still gazing at the water, thinking thoughts that he kept to himself.

And Bob went on counting.

"Seven—eight—nine—"

Sweetman's face was white and clammy with perspiration. Crook that he was, he couldn't stand that strain. He held other men's lives cheaply, but he valued his own.

He dropped his hand, inserted his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and placed the Black Ruby on the thwart, wrapped in cotton-wool. The breeze blew the cotton-wool. A strand of it was wafted over the gunwale, and Bob could see a glimpse of the gleaming facets of the Black Ruby.

His pulses pounded with excitement. Keeping a sharp eye on the crooks, with his gun held ready for treachery, he stepped forward, his free hand outstretched to grasp the all-important jewel.

Ah Wong's face broke into a broad grin. Bob was puzzled, but that jewel lured him on towards the thwart.

And suddenly, with a grating jar, the boat buried its nose in a sandbank! The crazy craft lurched. Bob stumbled sideways. The great mat sail swung round. The heavy boom raked the decks, caught Bob on the shoulder and toppled him over—swept him across the deck and over the gunwale into the water!

The revolver went off, the bullet sailing up towards the sun. Then, as Bob hit the gunwale, the weapon flew from his hand. Head first he went into the water, on the edge of the bank.

Down, down he sank, like a stone. The water closed above his head, gurgling horribly. But Bob was an expert swimmer.

He came up again like a rocket and broke surface. Spluttering, he cleared his lungs of water and drew in the welcome fresh air.

But he didn't stay there long. The native boat was canted over alarmingly. The crooks leant over the gunwale, leering at him. Karl Sweetman was scowling.

"You meddler! I'll teach you to mind your own business!"

Crack!

The revolver spoke, and the bullet splashed water in Bob's face.

Danger again—danger all round—up to the neck in danger!

Bob dived. He just had to do something. Deeply he dived, hoping and praying that there were no sharks about. And under the water he swam away from the native boat, along the sandbank. Then up to the surface again.

Crack! Crack!

Sweetman was still firing. The bullets whipped the surface of the water round Bob's head, and down he went again and along in the green depths.

When he broke surface again he was out of range. He glanced back. He saw the native boatman wading on the bank, shoving his clumsy craft off into deep water.

Sweetman still stood in the waist, watching him, the smoking revolver in his hand.

"Checkmate!" growled Bob to himself. "And I nearly got the Ruby. Now the positions are reversed, and they have the drop on me. I wasn't quick enough. But I'll know better next time. I'll just hit first and grab the Ruby afterwards."

Then he realised that he was barely half a mile from the shore, so he settled down to a strong trudgeon stroke, keeping a sharp look out for sharks.

There were natives on the shore, some pacing to and fro idly, some just squatting in the sun, with all the lazy indolence of the East. They took no notice of Bob. From their attitude one would have thought that white fellows, fully dressed, swimming ashore from nowhere in particular happened every day.

But by the time Bob was wading through the shallows he saw Syd and Steve racing down the shingle towards him. They had come ashore in the pilot's boat.

"No good!" cried Syd. "He hasn't got it!"

"How d'you know?" rasped Steve. "Give the chap a chance to get ashore."

"But look at his face! Would he be scowling like that if he had it? You haven't got it, have you, Bob?"

Bob came up to them, scowling darkly.

"No. That sandbank ruined everything. I was just going to grab it and—"

Briefly he explained what had happened.

"By George!" exclaimed Steve. "That's real tough cheese! But you're alive, Bob. That's the main thing. Dingoes, what with the sharks in the water and the sharks on that boat, it's a wonder you won clear at all. Jumping wallabies, I like your pluck, and I'm plumb glad to see you safe and sound, and that's a fact. As for the Ruby—well, boys, I guess we can have another shot at that! We're getting experience, anyway. Now, come along. No time to waste. Those crooks can't get away from here till early to-morrow morning, when the P. & O. boat leaves. See? So we've got to duck for cover before they get ashore and trail us. The next surprise has got to come from our side."

"Then you've got another plan?" queried Bob.

"Like Lucifer I have!" grinned Steve. "Come on!"

He led the way. The pals were close on his heels, as he plunged into the evil-smelling labyrinth of the native quarter.

Cold Steel!

STEVE seemed to know his way about. He led the boys in and out of the alleys, plunged beneath noisome arches, heedless of the motley Asiatic throng that swarmed in the narrow, dirty streets.

Syd and Bob were interested at once in their new surroundings. They had often wanted to witness just such scenes as these, but they had never guessed that they would visit an Eastern city under such circumstances.

Steve led the way, shouldering a path through the crowds of natives, snapping out a word of Arabic on one side, cursing in Swahili to a big negro who bumped into him. THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 1,096.

INTRODUCTION.

Trailed across the back blocks of Australia, across two continents by a gang of cunning crooks, Steve Barrett, in possession of a wonderful precious stone—a Black Ruby—eventually reaches England. With the aid of this Black Ruby, Steve has hopes of making his fortune, for the ruby is the key to a claim of land in Queensland rich in precious stones. The crooks, however, succeed in gaining possession of the Black Ruby and make good their escape. Steve enlists the services of Bob Crompton and Syd Dyson, two plucky, athletic fellows, with whom he sets off in a wild dash south on the trail of the Black Ruby. Eventually the chums regain the precious stone and board a fast boat bound for Alexandria. Luck is against them, however, for Sweetman and his gang also get aboard, sneak the precious stone again, and hide themselves in the ship. The boat is swinging to anchor outside Alexandria, when Syd's cute eye discerns the crooks making their getaway in a native boat. Ripping off his jacket, Bob leaps overboard, and is forging ahead in the wake of the native craft, when the water behind him is suddenly lashed into foam and the wedge-like fin of a shark comes cleaving towards him!

(Now read on.)

He came to a native hut and rapped on the rough wooden door. After a wait of some five minutes, punctuated by Steve banging on the door and shouting in Arabic, the bolts were shot back, and slowly the door opened. An old Arab poked his head out and squinted at them.

"Peace be upon this house!" said Steve. "What about it, Mustapha, you old rat? How's things?"

That Arab looked about old enough to be grandfather to Methuselah and about as decrepit. He was bent double. His hair was grey, his skin was wrinkled over his bones. But he recognised Steve, and his age-lined face twisted into a grin.

"Effendi," he said, "you are welcome to my poor hovel."

"Then ask us inside, you old rogue!" said Steve genially.

"I want to talk where jackals can't hear. Get me?"

Apparently Mustapha understood, for he stood aside to allow Steve and the pals to enter, then closed the door and bolted it securely. The outside of that hut was dirty and disreputable, and the inside was not much better. The floor was merely trodden earth. The one and only window was barely two feet square. A sort of couch ran the length of one wall, covered with rugs and cloths. A hubble-bubble smoking-pipe stood on the floor. And for the rest, there was little else except gloom and grime. The place smelt unwholesome, but Steve seemed to notice nothing out of the ordinary, so the pals made no remark.

Old Mustapha reclined on the couch, seized one of the mouthpieces of the hubble-bubble, and commenced to smoke. Steve sat on the couch beside him and took another mouthpiece. He did not like that method of smoking, but it was necessary to win the old Arab's confidence.

The water in the glass container bubbled audibly, and great clouds of acrid smoke intensified the murk of the grimy hut. The two pals sat on the couch, uneasily, waiting.

For some time there was a silence. The old Arab was quite patient. Then Steve started talking rapidly, in Arabic. What he said was so much Greek to Syd and Bob, but the Arab answered back, until, with a little laugh of satisfaction Steve rose to his feet.

"You boys have got to stay here a bit," he announced. "Shan't be long."

"What's the idea?" they wanted to know.

"I'll tell you," said Steve. "I reckon things out this way. Karl Sweetman and his gang will have to stay here in Alexandria until they can get aboard the P. & O. boat early to-morrow morning. They won't know what we will do next, so in all probability they won't walk the fashionable thoroughfares of this city. They'll lay low somewhere. Sweetman knows his way all over the world, and I'll bet Ah Wong has a place or two here. He's got pals in every place where there's a Chinaman."

"So I guess they'll hide somewhere round these parts—in the native quarter. And my plan is to find out where they're hiding and jump them for that Ruby. It's our best chance. And I'm going out. I've got to. You boys would be no use, seeing that you don't know the lingo. For one thing, I cabled Sir Charles Crompton from Marseilles to send more money here, and I've got to go to the bank to collect."

"We shall need it, I should think!" said Bob.

"But what's more important, even, than that," continued Steve, "I've got to hang about the bazaars and find young Mustapha, the son of Mustapha. You get me? You've heard me talk of that Arab Johnny whose life I saved when I was this way during the War? Well, this old bean here is that fellow's daddy. Now you understand. He's told me where I can find young Mustapha, and young Mustapha will rake around and find out where Sweetman's little family are hanging out. And we'll arrange to burgle that show after dark and get the Black Ruby."

"But we could go about a bit?" suggested Syd.

"No; you'll have to stay here until I come back for you. Don't you dare venture out till I come back. It isn't healthy in these parts. Ah Wong could easily tickle between your ribs with a knife, and no one would be any the wiser. You stick here."

"But suppose you should want us," argued Syd, "and not be able to come and fetch us?"

"Then I'll find a way to let you know. Don't you worry," replied Steve. "But I've got no time to lose. So long! See you later."

He went. The wooden door was unbolted to allow him to make his exit, and was bolted after him. Syd and Bob sat down on the couch, while the old Arab, his face set inscrutably, like a mask, smoked away at his hubble-bubble.

And what a dreary wait that was! The old Arab remained silent, almost motionless. He knew precious little English, and the boys knew no Arabic. They just

had to sit there and wait—wait—the tropical heat making the little hut like an oven, and the acrid fumes from the old Arab's pipe not improving matters at all.

Bob soon got fed up, and amused himself with a bit of stick, playing noughts and crosses in the dust on the floor. Syd joined in the game, but that palled after half an hour of it.

They rose to their feet at last, and weary and restless of the waiting, paced to and fro impatiently. From a tiny window they could look out into the narrow, evil-smelling street, swarming with all the races of the crowded East. There were Arabs, Soudanese, negroes, fellahen of the Nile basin, Chinamen, Turks, Levantines, and Jews.

One Chinaman came strutting along, with two negroes in attendance upon him. To judge from his flowing dress, he was a man of some substance. But outside the hut he halted and stared straight at the window where the pals stood. Syd suddenly grabbed Bob's arm and hauled him back into the darkness of the hut.

"We're idiots!" he rasped. "If that had been Ah Wong—"

"Don't see how it could have been," argued Bob. "But, all the same, I suppose we are running risks by showing ourselves to the general public. Yet hang it all, Syd, I'm fed up to the back teeth being cooped up in this show! I wish—"

He had no chance to say what he wished for someone rapped on the door. Very leisurely the old Arab rose and shot the bolts back, and opened the door about five inches—just enough to peer through the aperture.

A half naked urchin stood outside. He thrust a white note in the hand of old Mustapha, and cried shrilly for "Backsheesh!" The old Arab opened the door a bit wider—just wide enough to allow him to thrust his foot and kick the urchin into the middle of the road. Then he slammed the door and bolted it.

For a moment he turned the envelope over and over, squinting at it in the doubtful light. Then he tore it open and extracted the note. He turned that over and over, but could make nothing of it, so he handed it to Syd, grinning from ear to ear.

And Syd gasped. That note was from Steve Barrett!

"Come at once," it ran, "to Ben Ali's lapidary shop in the road below the mosque."

"STEVE."

"Lapidary!" exclaimed Bob. "That means a sort of jeweller, doesn't it?"

"I wonder—the Black Ruby—" Syd faltered dubiously. "Never mind what you wonder!" cried Bob. "Let's go and find out."

He strode to the door, but old Mustapha stood there shaking his head vigorously.

"But we've got to go," declared Bob. "Steve's sent a note."

"Barrett effendi—him say—no go!" spluttered the old Arab.

And all the protestations of the pals could not move him. For one thing, the old Arab could not read the note, and for another he knew precious little English. Try as they might, the pals could not make him understand English, until Syd had a brain-wave and spoke up for himself in French. And to his joy the old Arab answered in the same language, fluently.

"Of course," he said. "If that note is from Barrett effendi you must go, but be sure it is genuine. This city is full of scoundrels."

"We are sure—dead sure!" declared Syd.

"Then go!" cried old Mustapha. "But, whatever happens, do not lay the blame at my door."

"Don't you worry," said Syd. "No one will blame you."

The door was unbolted and they went out. There was no difficulty in finding the mosque. The great cupola towered over the native quarter, and could be seen everywhere. The pals headed for it, along the hot, sweltering, narrow streets, keeping carefully in the centre of the garbage-strewn roadway.

The motley swarms of Asiatics eyed them curiously and intently; but they kept on their way until they came to a road that ran along one side of the mosque, and saw a dark, low building, with the front open. They saw all sorts of brass ware gleaming in the hot sunshine in the doorway. Farther back they saw an array of gems on a rough wooden bench, and guessed they had found Ben Ali, the lapidary.

"Although," said Bob, "it's a lot of junk he's showing the public. I've seen a better show in Woolworth's. You're sure that is Ben Ali's hang-out?"



As the Swede made to dart off, Bob thrust out his foot and tripped him up. The man went down in a heap, clutching out wildly as he fell. His podgy hand grasped a basket of eggs which a negress carried on her head, and brought it to the ground with a crash. The next moment the negress lashed out a huge black fist. (See this page.)

"We'll soon find out," declared Syd.

Boldly he stepped into the shop. Coming into that gloom from out the brilliant sunshine blinded them for the moment. They saw the dim figure of an old Arab squatting on cushions, and a European standing there haggling with him.

At first the pals really thought they had found Steve, but as the dazzle of the sun passed away they realised that the European was far too stout for Steve. And then the man turned.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Bob. "It's Svenskhem!"

The big Swede stared at them in dismay. His fat face paled. His eyes goggled fear.

"Vot you vant, heine?" he cried.

"Where's Barrett?" rasped Syd.

"Dot lunatic, ain't it?" queried Svenskhem. "I not vere he ist know. I not him keeper am. Donnervetter! I so tired of you am! Ja! Go away, and let me meine pizness do!"

"We want Barrett!" snapped Bob, stepping forward fiercely.

"Poot, I not him haf!" declared Svenskhem. "Go away, I der pizness haf mit dis shentelmans. Go away! I to der lapidary vos haf der pizness talk."

Syd scowled.

"Strange!" he said. "We lost a jewel, you'll remember. And we find you here selling something."

"Nein! Nein!" spluttered Svenskhem. "I not him haf! I not der seller am. I der buyer ist!"

Syd pointed to the Swede's fat hand, in which he clutched something that might have been the Black Ruby.

"If I were sure you were in with those crooks——" he began.

"Gosh!" snapped Bob. "We'll soon find out. If he has got the Black Ruby we'll get it off him. Look here, you——"

But Svenskhem wouldn't wait. He was scared—badly scared. With the speed and force of a rhinoceros he plunged forward. Sweeping his arms wildly, he brushed the pals from his path and bolted out of the shop into the sunlit street.

Bob and Syd were close on his heels.

"Stop!" they yelled. "Thief!"

Then the old lapidary came to life. He whipped out a wicked knife from his belt.

"Dog!" he screamed. "Bring back my Ruby! Help!"

I am robbed! Meddling Inglesi! My Ruby! By the beard of the Prophet, I am robbed! My Ruby!"

And away he went after Syd and Bob.

Svenskhem first, terror-stricken, still clutching something in his fat hand; then Syd and Bob, sprinting after the Swede, intent on solving a mystery; and then Ben Ali, the lapidary, brandishing his knife, following up in the rear.

Svenskhem raced madly down the street, under an arch, down a dingy alley, along another street, until Bob caught him round the waist.

"Got you!" he panted.

"Help!" roared Svenskhem. "Murdered vatally, I vos, ain't it! Der madman haf me got! Ja! Help!"

Frantically he squirmed out of Bob's grasp, and was off again. But Syd thrust his foot out and tripped him up. The big Swede went down in a heap, clutching out wildly as he fell. His podgy hand grasped a basket of eggs which a negress carried on her woolly head, and brought the lot to the ground with a crash.

Eggs spluttered all ways, and most of them fell on top of Professor Johan Svenskhem, squelching all over him. The negress glared her yellow eyes-rolling excitedly. She cried aloud in Swahili, and promptly jumped on the Swede, who roared like a bull.

"Help! I haf der not'ings done. Nein!"

Bob darted forward. As the Swede fell he noticed that whatever he had been clutching had rolled away to the guttering in the middle of the street. Bob picked it up, staring in dismay. It was an enormous diamond, and not the Black Ruby.

"We've made a mess of this, Syd!" he rasped.

"Better fade out," suggested Syd.

But they had forgotten Ben Ali, the lapidary. He came up, shrieking with rage.

"Dog! Cursed Inglesi! Thief!"

Bob held the big diamond, and Ben Ali, seeing it in his hand, went for him like Saladin of old. The knife whistled in the air.

There was no time to argue or explain. Svenskhem was yelling and rolling in the eggs, while the negress hissed curses and stamped on his neck.

Bob did the best thing he could do in the circumstances. His hand flashed out and gripped Ben Ali's wrist, and he thrust the diamond into the lapidary's free hand.

"The Trail of the Black Ruby!"

(Continued from previous page.)

"There you are!" he said. "We got it back for you. Now fade out, and—"

Just then a Soudanese policeman came strutting round the corner. He eyed the scene with amazement, then out came his whistle and he blew it shrilly.

Svenskhem was still shrieking.

"Help! Efezy pone in meine pody so schmashed ist! I der chokers haf! Help!"

The negress slowly withdrew at the sight of the policeman. She protested volubly, indicating the smashed eggs all over the Swede.

Svenskhem scrambled to his feet. The pals tried to get away, but he saw them and brandished an accusing finger in their direction.

"Tey tere von, two pig scoundrels vos, ain't it!" he hissed. "Tey me down knocked. Ja! I der revenge haf! To treat a harmless mannen so! I t'em trash! I keel! I der pones preak! Voi der zwei ov de pins I der heads so crack! Blitzen! If I you catch!"

He sprang at Bob madly, like a charging buffalo. Bob had to defend himself. He planted his hand on Svenskhem's massive chest and pushed him back.

"Cool down, professor!" he said. "And—"

Svenskhem went back, gasping for breath. Bob had pushed a trifle harder than he had intended. The professor's foot slipped on a broken egg and he slid up. His heels waded in the air. His podgy arms flew out like threshing windmills. One fat hand caught the Soudanese policeman full in the face, bowling that dusky official over like a ninepin.

Bob nudged Syd and jerked his head.

"It's our chance!" he hissed. "Come on! We'd better go!"

Then the pals went, helter-skelter along the street, round a corner, under an arch, along an alley, searing dilapidated chickens and mangy dogs, hustling all sorts of Asiatics, until, careering out of a dark alley, Syd crashed into a Chinaman.

"Pig!" growled the Chink, and a knife flashed.

But Bob saw and acted. His fist landed on the yellow man's jaw and toppled him over in a heap.

That was the beginning. The Chink shrieked, and from every doorway came ruffians of all nations—more Chinamen, big negroes, Arabs, and Turks, and Lascars, all armed with gleaming knives.

For a split second Bob caught a glimpse of the man he had floored.

"Ah Wong!" he cried.

The next moment he was beside Syd, their backs against a blank wall, fighting desperately.

Bob accounted for half a dozen ruffians in as many seconds. Syd was battling against odds, cleverly, gallantly. But it was obvious that they couldn't tackle that horde themselves. Their number was up! Sooner or later one of those knives would finish the fight.

As it was, Bob's left arm was bleeding, and Syd had a nasty cut on his shoulder. But they fought on, grimly, their fists darting out like stabs of lightning, and men dropping around them.

Two burly Arabs came round the corner. They took one look, then charged that howling horde. A revolver spat viciously, and a big negro went down screaming, a bullet in his leg.

The two Arabs ranged alongside the pals.

"You idiots!" hissed the larger of the two. "I told you to stay in the hut!"

"Steve!" gasped the pals.

"Yes. Come on! This way!"

The four of them charged through that mob and dispersed them, Steve's gun taking all the fight out of the ruffians. Steve led the way down an alley, in at a dark doorway, clean through a house, and out into another alley, and so to the hut of old Mustapha.

When the door was bolted he told the pals exactly what he thought of them for venturing out.

"But you sent a note!" said Syd, disgruntled.

"I never did. Show me."

They showed him, and his eyes glistened.

"A forgery. Ah Wong's work, if I know anything. Tell me what happened."

They obeyed, and he granted at the record.

"Undoubtedly, it was Ah Wong sent that note, though how he knew where you were I can't fathom, or how he knew how to forge my handwriting. You see, there are scores of streets here under the mosque, and dozens of lapidaries and hundreds of Ben Ali's in this beautified place. I reckon Ah Wong expected you to scour the place looking for me, what time he could have you followed and done in, as he tried to do. But that doesn't explain old Svenskhem. I wish I knew for sure whether he is in co. with the Crooks or not. But let that rest. He hasn't got the Ruby, anyway. Sweetman has it. I'm sure of that. And Mustapha here, the son of old Mustapha here, is going to help us get it after dark to-night. Till then you boys rest, for goodness alone knows when you'll get your next beauty sleep. Anything may happen to-night."

The pals had no heart to argue. They felt a bit sheepish after their adventures in broad daylight, not to say tired. So they obeyed and rested as best they could in the old, smelly hut of Mustapha's.

(The Black Ruby has changed hands a few times, hasn't it, chums? Who's got it now? Sweetman? You'll find out when you read next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful serial.)

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