

"THE SECRET OF THE TOWER!" THRILLING COMPLETE SCHOOL YARN INSIDE!

CONTINUOUS
VARIETY!
YOUR FAVOURITE
STARS—
TOM MERRY & Co
INSIDE!

The GEM

2^d



No. 1.324. Vol. XLIV.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

Week Ending July 1st, 1933.

Published by Howard Baker Press Ltd, 27a Arterberry Road, Wimbledon, London, S. W. 20.



STRANGE LIGHT SEEN IN THE RUINED TOWER AT MIDNIGHT!

The SECRET of the TOWER!



Why is there a light in the old ruined tower? Why is Gussy missing from his bed at midnight? Tom Merry & Co. scent a mystery, and they are soon hot on the trail! Read all about it in this all-thrilling long complete yarn of school adventure!

CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus is Mysterious!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY gave his necktie a final pat, and turned from the glass in Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's. There was a slightly worried expression upon the aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blake, Herries, and Digby, his study-mates, were watching him with great interest. The swell of St. Jim's had been adjusting his necktie, after polishing his silk hat, evidently preparatory to going out.

He had not told his chums where he was going, or asked them to accompany him. He had only worn a worried look. Naturally, Jack Blake could not help seeing that something was "on," and he waited for Arthur Augustus to tell him all about it. But he waited in vain.

D'Arcy had polished his silk hat, changed his waistcoat, put on a clean collar, and adjusted his necktie in grim

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silence. That there was something on his mind was evident, but it had not prevented him giving his tie that set which was the despair of the Sixth Form dandies at St. Jim's.

When D'Arcy turned from the glass, he found three separate stares focused upon him. He affected not to notice them, and glanced round for his silk hat. He had placed it on the table after polishing it, and naturally expected to find it there. But it had disappeared.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

"Going out?" asked Blake pleasantly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"For a walk?"

"Ya-as, a kind of walk, deah boy," said D'Arcy, looking a little confused.

"Oh, a kind of walk—not a common or garden walk," said Digby. "Going to hop on one leg?"

"Certainly not!"

"Or crawl on your hands and knees?" asked Herries.

"I wegard that question as widiculous, Hewwies!"

By Martin Clifford.

"Or do a cake-walk?" suggested Blake.
 "Nothin' of the sort!"
 "Then what are you going to do?"
 "I'm goin' out!"
 "Like us to come?"
 D'Arcy looked more confused than ever. He fished out his eyeglass, and polished it with the corner of his cambric handkerchief to gain time.
 "Ya-as, wathah!" he said. "I—I should like you to come, deah boys, but I am afraid that I cannot ask you to do so, you know."
 "Why not?"
 "Because—because——"
 "Go on!"
 "Because, you see, it's—it's impos!"
 "You're going to meet someone?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Why didn't you say it was the lady in the draper's at Rylcombe, and have done with it?" demanded Blake.
 D'Arcy turned pink.
 "I wegard your remark as bein' in the worst of taste, Blake. I have a great respect for the dwaper's young lady in Wylcombe, and I wufuse to allow you to speak of her disrespectfully."
 "I suppose it's disrespectful to suggest that she might be seen out with you," said Blake reflectively. "Tell her I'm sorry."
 "I wegard that remark as dewogatory to myself. Besides, I am not goin' to meet any membah of the gentle sex, deah boy."
 "Who is it, then?"
 "I am afraid I cannot acquaint you with the facts, deah boy."
 Blake looked at him suspiciously.
 "Look here, Gussy; if you're rotting, you're going the right way to work to get a thick prize ear," he said darkly. "I should uttably wufuse to have a twice thick yah!"
 "You see, you're such an ass that we're bound to look after you," explained Digby. "You admit that yourself."
 "I wufuse to admit anythin' of the sort."
 "You had a letter this morning," said Blake, holding up his hand in a magisterial way.
 "I do not deny it, deah boy."
 "You gave a jump at the breakfast-table when you read it, and spilled some of your tea on my trousers."
 "I am vevy sowwy, deah boy. I expressed my wegret at the time, but I am aware that it is a sewious mattah to damage a fellow's twousahs, and I am quite pwepared to offah anothah apology."
 "Never mind the bags now," said Blake. "That's a minor point. I asked you what was the matter, and whether your noble governor had sent you a tenner, and you didn't answer."
 "I was eatin' my bweakfast, deah boy."
 "You kept as mum as a boiled owl in class this morning."
 "I decline to be compared to a boiled owl."
 "And at dinner you never said a word to a soul."
 "We are not allowed to talk duwin' dinnah, deah boy." Blake grinned.
 "No, I know we're not; but we generally manage to do it, all the same. After dinner we met your young brother Wally, and he was wearing the dirtiest collar he's ever worn since he came into the Third Form—and that's saying a lot. And you never made a remark on it."
 "Bai Jove!"
 "In afternoon school," pursued Blake relentlessly, "you were more absent-minded and a bigger ass than usual, if possible. You told Mr. Lathom that a straight line continued to infinity, was equal to the three sides of a deponent verb."
 "Bai Jove! I am sure I nevah——"
 "Well, it was something just like that, anyway," said Blake. "You had twenty-five lines for it, and you haven't done them."
 "I shall do them pweently."
 "Now, most remarkable of all, when it's getting on to tea-time, you are going out instead of thinking of tea."
 "I am not vevy hungwy."

"The long and the short of it is, that you've got a secret on your chest, and you're keeping it so well that it's perfectly plain to the whole House," said Blake, with great severity.

"Bai Jove!"
 "As your elder, and as your guide, philosopher, and friend, not to say your keeper, it is my duty to insist upon knowing all about it."

"Weally, Blake——"
 "So just get it off your chest," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwics——"
 "We're waiting," remarked Digby.
 "Weally, deah boys, I am sowwy to have this appeawance of keepin' a secwet from my chums," said D'Arcy, with a look of great distress. "I am perfectly aware that it is a perfectly caddish thing to keep secwets."

"Then get it off your chest, ass!"

"Impos!"

"What do you mean?"

"You see, it is not my secwet!"

"Not your secret!" exclaimed Blake.

"Wathah not, deah boy."

"You don't mean to say that you're going around in possession of somebody else's secret!" exclaimed Blake, in great astonishment. "As head of this study, I must insist upon your restoring it immediately to its rightful owner."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby.
 "Pway don't wot, deah boy. The secwet is not mine; it concerns anothah fellow, you know, and he has put me on my honah."

Blake looked at his elegant chum keenly. The distress in the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not to be mistaken, and Blake's expression softened.

"Now, look here, Gussy," he said. "You know jolly well that we shouldn't want to inquire into any private affair of yours."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy."

"But we can't have you going around like a boiled owl——"

"I wufuse to admit that I bear the slightest wesemblance to a boiled owl!"

"With a secret on your mind," said Blake. "You're not the kind of chap to go in for mystery. Somebody's pulling your leg."

Arthur Augustus glanced downward.

"I mean metaphorically," said Blake, grinning. "You are being done. Look here, the other week Tom Merry had a letter, and went off to meet somebody with a lot of mystery, and there was no end of a buzz on the subject. We can't have you following in Tom Merry's footsteps like a giddy plagiarist. It looks to me as if you're rotting."

"I'm not wottin', deah boy."

"Then somebody is pulling your leg."

"Not at all, deah boy. You see——"

"Most likely it's Kerr, of the New House," said Blake.

"He's always up to some dodge disguising himself as somebody's uncle, or something. The letter you've got was a spoof letter, and the appointment is a spoof appointment; and the laugh will be up against this study if you go."

"Wats!"

"It's a joke of Figgins & Co. of the New House, or else of the Terrible Three," said Blake obstinately. "If it isn't, show me the letter."

"Impos, deah boy! It's a secwet!"

"Then how am I to know that it's not a jape if you don't show me the letter?"

"You must take my word for it, deah boy."

"I'd trust your word, Gussy, but not your brains," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "It's not good enough."

"But I knew the handwitin' in the lettah, deah boy."

"That doesn't prove anything," said Blake. "Handwriting can be imitated. Wasn't that chap Gore expelled last week for imitating Tom Merry's handwriting, for instance?"

D'Arcy started a little.

"So you see," said Blake triumphantly, "that's no proof. Better ladle out the letter."

"Impos!"

"It's a blessed mutiny!" said Blake. "I'd like to know where Gussy was brought up, to talk to his elders in this way."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Not a word! I am ashamed of you!"

"Weally, deah boy, I would twust you with the secwet like—like anythin'," said Arthur Augustus, "but it is weally not mine. And it is not a jape."

"Rats!"

"It is weally nothin' like a jape!"

"More rats!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Scat!"

"It is useless to continue a conversation which consists wholly of the wude repetition of opprobrious expressions," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "I will wotiah."

"You can retire and eat coke!"

"Where's my hat?"

"What hat?"

"My silk toppah."

"Where's Gussy's silk topper, Dig?"

"Where's Gussy's silk topper, Herries?"

"Where's Gussy's silk topper, Blake?"

"Where's your silk topper, Gussy?"

The chums of Study No. 6 asked the question in turn with solemn faces. Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked from one to another.

"Weally, deah boys, I must have my toppah."

"He must have his topper, Dig."

"He must have his topper, Herries."

"He must have his topper, Blake."

"You must have your topper, Gussy."

"I wufuse to wemain here and listen to the idiotic wpetition of absurd wemarks," said D'Arcy. "I will go in a cap. I wufuse to wemain anothead moment."

"He refuses to remain another moment, Dig."

"He refuses to remain another moment, Herries."

"He refuses to remain another——"

Slam!

The door closed behind the swell of St. Jim's with a slam that rang along the Fourth Form passage from end to end.

The Fourth-Formers burst into a joyous chuckle.

"Gussy's got his aristocratic back up," grinned Blake.

"He's gone off in a noble wax. But I say, what on earth can the matter be?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Of course, it's a jape!"

"Looks like it."

"You see it's so like what happened to Tom Merry—getting a mysterious letter, and going out to keep a mysterious appointment, you know. Now lightning never strikes twice in the same place, and so it's pretty certain that there isn't a real mystery this time. Tom Merry goes and gets mixed up with a Portuguese and a box of diamonds; but I rather suspect that Gussy will only get mixed up with some jokers from the New House at St. Jim's."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes."

"Ergo—that's Latin—ergo, it's our business to keep an eye on him."

"What-ho!"

"We can't let him get into mischief, and we can't have this study spoofed, and grinned at by every monkey in the New House," said Blake. "We've got to look after Gussy for his own good, and turn the tables on the New House japers."

"Good egg!"

"Then come on, and we'll keep Gussy in sight."

"Right-ho!"

And Blake & Co. quitted the study, and went downstairs on the track of the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 2.

An Awkward Position!

TOM MERRY of the Shell was sitting on the stone balustrade of the School House steps, chatting with Manners and Lowther, when Arthur Augustus came out.

The Terrible Three glanced at D'Arcy at once. Tom Merry & Co. were looking a little less cheery than usual.

They had been speaking about Gore, their Form fellow, who had been "sacked" from the school the previous week.

Gore had not been liked in the Shell, and he had been on specially bad terms with the Terrible Three, who had frequently interfered to check his bullying proclivities. The fault for which he had been expelled was that of imitating Tom Merry's hand in a letter, written for the purpose of embroiling Tom with his friends in the School House. The fault was a serious one, though Gore, who was less clever than he was cunning, probably did not fully realise how serious.

The matter had come to light, and Gore had been expelled. The punishment was so severe that, though he certainly deserved it, most of the fellows felt sorry for him.

"It's rotten to be sacked from school," Tom Merry remarked, as he swung his legs on the stone balustrade, "and it's more rotten than usual in Gore's case, because of the reception he was bound to get at home. Now if I were sacked, my old governess would believe it was the Head's fault, and not mine, and she'd stick to me through

thick and thin, in that unreasonable way women have—bless them! But Gore's governor, from what I've heard of him, is a sort of Brutus."

"Brutus—chap who had his son's head cut off, wasn't it?" said Lowther.

"That's it—the original, genuine Roman parent," said Tom Merry. "Of course, Gore's governor isn't so Brutus as Brutus; but I hear he's a tough customer. I couldn't help pitying Gore when I thought of his getting home, after the Head's letter to his father."

"Must have been rough."

"It must have been awful," said Tom Merry. "I rather think Gore's governor keeps a thick stick for Gore in the holidays. I dare say he needs it, as far as that goes. I know he never had all the lickings he needed at St. Jim's. But when Gore got home last week he must have found the atmosphere—well, depressing."

"He should have thought of that before he did what he did do," said Manners. "Copying a chap's handwriting is forgery, though, I suppose, it never occurred to Gore in that light. And if the truth hadn't come out, it would have been jolly unpleasant for you."

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's so. Still, one can't help feeling sorry for him."

"Hallo, here's Gussy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, changing the topic as the swell of St. Jim's appeared in the doorway. "Going out—and without his topper! I say, Gussy, what are you doing in that cap?"

"I'm goin' out, deah boy."

"What's the matter with the topper?"

"The silly asses in my study have hidden it. For a silly joke. I have wefwained from puttin' on my Sunday toppah, as there is a chance of wain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughtah," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the Terrible Three.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Whither bound, Gussy?" went on Tom Merry. "If you're going down to the village I'll come with you, if you like, and see about my new cricket bat while I'm there."

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"I am not exactly goin' to the village, Tom Mowwy."

"Going that way?"

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"Good! I'll come."

"As a mattah of fact, deah boy, I—I shall be vewy pleased if you will stroll with me as far as the gates, but no farther," said D'Arcy, turning very red.

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Hallo! What's the game?"

"As a mattah of fact——"

"Not going to smoke in the wood, are you, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry solemnly.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"It's a dark secret," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "He is going to meet a masked man under the riven oak, and gain possession of the missing will——"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

Tom Merry slipped from the balustrade and walked down the steps with the swell of the Fourth Form. Manners and Lowther remained where they were, swinging their legs, and they swung them skillfully in the way of Jack Blake as he hurried out of the School House a few minutes later.

"Oh!" roared Blake.

He fell over Lowther's feet and rolled half-way down the steps. Lowther gazed at him with an expression of astonishment.

"Jolly good!" exclaimed Manners heartily. "I should like to see you do that again, Blake."

Jack Blake scrambled to his feet and cast a wrathful glance at the chums of the Shell.

"I've a jolly good mind to wipe up the quad with you!" he exclaimed. "But I haven't time——"

"Lucky for you you haven't time!"

"Have you seen Gussy?" asked Blake, letting that remark pass unheeded.

"Yes; he's just gone down to the gates with Tom Merry."

"Good! Come on, kids!"

And Blake, Herries, and Digby swung away towards the gates. Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry had reached them, without a single word having been said on either side.

Arthur Augustus had opened his mouth several times, as if to speak, but had closed it again without uttering a word.

Tom Merry had observed these proceedings with increasing astonishment.

He remembered a previous occasion when D'Arcy had acted in that manner, and that was when the swell of St.

Jim's was confessing to have fallen in love with a certain charming girl in Rylcombe. It was borne in upon Tom Merry's mind that the swell of the Fourth had surrendered to another attack of the grand passion.

In the gateway they halted, and Arthur Augustus opened his mouth again, but still he did not speak. Tom Merry gave him a sympathetic glance.

"Feel it badly?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"Kind of worries you, I suppose?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Going to see her now, I suppose? Well, buck up, and

"Tin?.. Oh, no! I've heaps of cash!"

"Well, everything else can be handled, except want of tin," said Tom Merry. "Tell me the difficulty, and I'll advise you like a Dutch uncle."

"I am afraid I cannot confide it to you, Tom Mewwy, as it is a secret. The chap has weally put me on my honah, you know—without askin' my permish."

"By Jove! That's rather cool!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And who's the chap?"

"That's a secret."

"What does he want you to do?"



Manners and Lowther swung their legs skilfully in the way of Jack Blake as he came out of the House. "Oh!" roared Blake as he fell over their feet and rolled half-way down the steps. Lowther gazed at him with an expression of astonishment.

put on a cheerful smile, even if you don't feel like it," said Tom encouragingly.

"I fail to comprehend you, Tom Mewwy."

"If you feel at all nervous, I'll go instead," suggested Tom Merry.

"I am afraid that wouldn't do."

"I dare say she would be just as pleased."

"You are undah a misappwehension, Tom Mewwy. I am not goin' to meet a lady."

"Oh, my mistake!"

"And if I were, deah boy, I should not approve of your alludin' to it in that light mannah!"

"I stand corrected."

"Yaas, wathah! As a mattah of fact, there is no lady in the case. I am wathah wowwied about a certain mattah."

"Confide in your Uncle Merry," said Tom. "I'll help you out. Is it tin?"

"That's a secret, too."

"Where is he now?"

"That's a secret—"

"My hat! You're going in for secrets, and no mistake!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Do you think it would be a good idea to tell them all to me, and I will help you keep them?"

"Pway don't wot, deah boy! This is a sewious mattah. I should be vevy glad of your advice."

"How can I advise you if I don't know any of the circumstances?" asked Tom Merry naturally.

"Yaas, wathah; I suppose it would be difficult," assented Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps I could put a case. Suppose a chap asked you—"

"Yes?" said Tom, as D'Arcy paused.

"Suppose he asked you—"

"Well?"

"Suppose, for instance, a chap asked you—"
 "Go on!"
 "It's wathah difficult to tell you about the mattah, with-out lettin' you know anythin' about it, as a mattah of fact."

Tom Merry grinned.
 "Yes; I suppose it would be."
 "Howevah, I will put a case. Suppose a fellow asked you to help him—"

"Good!"
 "A fellow you had nevah been on good terms with. You'd help him?"

"If I could—certainly."
 "Suppose he was in a deucoid awkward posish, and wanted you to help him out, you'd have no wesoource but to do it?"

"I suppose so, if it were possible."
 "And supposin' he had done a vevy wash thing, you know—acted the giddy ox, and didn't know what to do, you'd stand by him—like anythin'?"

"I'd do my best, I suppose."
 "Yaas; but suppose you couldn't help him without appeawin', to a certain extent, to back him up in—in—wejectin' pawental authority—"

Tom Merry's face became very grave.
 "That's a serious matter, Gussy."
 "And without bweakin' some of the minah wules of the school," concluded D'Arcy.

"I don't know, and I can't say, without knowing the chap and the circumstances," said Tom Merry honestly; "but it looks to me as if somebody is trying to lead you into trouble, Gussy."

"No; he's in twouble himself, and wants me to help him out."

"He's not a friend of yours?"
 "No; we have always been on pwetty bad terms."
 "What claim has he on you?"

"None at all, deah boy."
 "Yet he has asked all this of you?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Why?"

"Because I'm a good-natured chap, I suppose."
 Tom Merry wrinkled his brows.
 "I can't make it out, Gussy. If you can't tell me any more—"

"I'm on my honah, deah boy."
 "I see. Then I don't see how I can advise you; but I'd advise you to this much—mind how you go! If it's going to lead you to break any college rules, better go slow. It looks to me as if you were being done by an unscrupulous fellow."

"Yaas; I suppose he is wathah unscwupulous,"—said D'Arcy reflectively; "but I don't see how I can wefuse to help a chap that's down. Thank you vevy much, Tom Mewwy!"

And the swell of St. Jim's went down the lane, with a wrinkled brow. Blake & Co. came out of the gateway.

"Hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Jack Blake, as he sighted the elegant figure of his chum in the lane.

"Right-ho! On the track!"
 And the chums of the Fourth started down the lane, keeping D'Arcy in sight; and the swell of St. Jim's, buried in his thoughts, did not look round.

CHAPTER 3. Baffled Stalkers!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS walked quickly down the lane, looking neither to right nor to left, and apparently never thinking of looking backwards.

After him went Blake, Herries, and Digby, at a distance of about a dozen yards.

The swell of St. Jim's reached the spot where the footpath through the wood to Wayland joined the lane, and there he stopped. All at once, as he was about to enter the footpath, he seemed to remember caution, and glanced quickly round him as if to see whether he was observed.

Full in his view, as he turned his head, stood Blake, Herries, and Digby.

Arthur Augustus started a little as he saw them. The three juniors grinned, but never a smile crossed the face of Arthur Augustus.

He simply surveyed them through his eyeglass, and then entered the footpath and disappeared under the trees.

Jack Blake wrinkled his brows for a moment.

"Blessed if I make that out!" he said, in a puzzled way.

"He doesn't seem to mind our being on the track."
 "He's going to dodge us in the wood," said Digby.
 Blake sniffed.

"We haven't practised with the Boy Scouts for nothing. He jolly well won't be able to dodge us."

"I say," remarked Herries, in his slow and ponderous way, "perhaps he was only rotting all the time, Blake, and he's taken you in."

Jack Blake glared.
 "Oh, do you think so?"

"I think it's very likely. He may be only leading you a dance, you know, so as to have a laugh against you when we get back to St. Jim's."

"Which ear?" asked Blake, pushing back his cuffs.

"Eh?"
 "Which ear?"

"I—I don't catch on! What do you mean?"
 "I suppose you're looking for a thick ear?"

"Eh?" Herries retreated a pace or two. "What are you driving at, you ass?"

"I thought you must be looking for a thick ear when you suggested that a chap like Gussy could pull the wool over my eyes," said Blake darkly.

"Oh! But—"
 "Come on, and don't talk rot!" said Blake severely.

"Gussy isn't rotting. I can't quite make him out, but there's something on."

"If he's really going to dodge us in the wood, I'd better out back and fetch Towser," said Herries. "My dog Towser will track him down."

"Your dog Towser can go and eat dog-biscuits!"
 "Come on!"

"But—"
 "Rats! Come on!"

Herries reluctantly gave up the idea of fetching Towser. His faith in Towser was great.

The Fourth-Formers hurried on to the footpath, wondering what was in Gussy's mind. The swell of St. Jim's did not seem to care whether he was followed or not, and yet he had declared that the object of the expedition was a great secret.

As a matter of fact, the swell of St. Jim's was playing a rather deep game, deeper than his unsuspecting chums gave him credit for.

In that cautious glance round at the beginning of the footpath he had caught sight not only of the St. Jim's fellows following him, but of three figures coming through the wood from the direction of Wayland.

The three were Grammarians, as he could tell at a distance by their caps, and he knew at the second glance that they were Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the leaders of the Grammar School juniors in their alarums and excursions against the juniors of St. Jim's.

On most occasions Arthur Augustus would have given the three Grammarians a wide berth, for he had only a ragging to expect at their hands. But on the present occasion he marched straight on towards them.

The Grammarians exchanged a grin as they caught sight of the elegant figure bearing down upon them.

"Gussy, by Jove!" said Monk.

"And on his lonesome!" said Carboy.

"We can't bust his topper, as he's left it at home," said Lane regretfully. "Better give him a pumping for daring to come and meet us in a cap."

"What-ho!"
 "Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, raising his cap gracefully to the Grammarians. "I am wathah glad to meet you wotahs!"

Frank Monk chuckled.

"The pleasure is mutual, dear boy!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah, I twust so. Will you pway step into the twees heah, as I want to speak to you, deah boys, without bein' observed."

"Certainly!" said Monk. "I suppose you know we're goin' to bump you for your cheek in meeting us in a cap!"

"Pway don't wot, deah boys!"

The swell of St. Jim's stepped aside from the path into the trees, and the Grammarians, wondering, followed him.

D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass and looked at them.

"I pwesume you were goin' to play the giddy goat, deah boys?" he remarked. "Howevah, I have placed you upon your honah by comin' up to meet you, and I twust that you will not pwove yourselves unworthy of my faith in your honah."

"Well, of all the cheek—"
 "And I have a little favah to ask of you."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Frank Monk, grinning. "We can't refuse anything to the one and only Gussy. You deserve anything, if only for your cheek."

"I fail to see wher the cheek comes in. I twust myself to your honah, as one gentleman to anothah. Howevah, to wesume. I am bein' followed by three boundahs who have taken it upon themselves to look aftah me."

"Your keepers?"

"Wعالى, Monk, I wegard it as oppwobwious to suggest—"

"Well, who are they—the village kids?"
 "No. They are my study-mates in the School House at St. Jim's—Blake and Howwies and Dig. I am weally vewy much obliged to them for takin' a fiendly intewest in my pwoceedings; but I don't want them to follow me now. It occurred to my mind when I saw you that you might stop them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Of course, they will lick you; but while they are doin' so I shall have time to get away."
 Frank Monk gave a snort.

"Lick us?"
 "Yaas, wathah; but while——"
 "Look here, you funny merchant, we'll do this for you; but, of course, you know that your chums will get a fearful licking if we tackle them."

"I am quite willin' to wisk that, if you are, deah boy——"
 "Look here, you ass——"
 "I wufuse to be called an ass!"
 "Better bump Gussy first, and then bump them," said Carboy. "Collar him!"

"I wufuse to be bumped. I have placed you on your honah, deah boys. I twust that you will not compel me to weward you with contempt."

"You cheeky ass!"
 "I decline to be chawactewised as a cheeky ass!"
 "Oh, come on!" said Frank Monk. "Gussy is too funny to live! Get off, Gussy, and we'll wait here for your friends. Good-bye!"

"Thank you vewy much, Fwank Monk!"
 "Not at all. It's a pleasure to lick St. Jim's kids. And you deserve any little thing we can do, for the jolly laughs you give us."

"Weally, Monk——"
 "Travel along! I can hear them coming!"
 "Bai Jove! Good-bye!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy flitted off through the trees, and the three Grammarians took cover close beside the footpath, lying there in wait for the chums of St. Jim's.

Blake, Herries, and Digby came along without a suspicion of what was awaiting them. They had lost sight of Gussy on the footpath, however, and they were glancing among the trees to right and left in search of him. And Digby suddenly caught sight of a Grammar School cap among the brambles.

"Ware Grammar School cads!" shouted Dig.
 "At 'em!" muttered Monk.

And the three Grammarians rushed to the attack. The St. Jim's juniors had hardly time to throw themselves onto a defensive attitude when their rivals were upon them.

In a moment there was a wild scrimmage in the footpath. Blake was rolling over, with Monk rolling on him, and Digby was sprawling under the weight of Carboy. Lane, however, rolled on his back under Herries, who promptly sat on his chest and pinned him down.

The juniors struggled desperately in the grass. But they were one to one, and about equal as far as muscular powers went.

Blake finally succeeded in rolling Monk over and getting uppermost; but it kept him busy to remain there.

Digby, at the same time, was got under by Carboy, and Carboy sat astride of him and gontly tapped Digby on his upturned nose from time to time, reducing Dig to a state bordering on frenzy.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake, remembering Arthur Augustus, and the fact that his elegant chum had already had five minutes to make his escape in. "Here, this won't do!"

"Gerroof!"
 "Make it pax, Monkey!"
 "If you admit you're licked——?"

"Yes, that's likely! You couldn't lick a Third Form fag from St. Jim's!"

"I'll show you! I——"
 "Now, look here, Monkey! We've got some business on hand, and we've no time to waste on you! You'll make it pax, or I'll—I'll jam clods into your mouth!"

"Pax!"
 "Ah! Good!"

Blake jumped up, and his comrades followed his example. Both the Saints and the Grammarians showed many signs of the combat.

But Monk & Co. were chuckling. They had not had the best of the combat. Honours were easy, as far as that went. But they had effected their purpose. Arthur Augustus had had ample time to get clear.

Blake rubbed his nose, from which a thin, crimson stream was issuing.

"Phew! I say, Monkey, have you seen Gussy?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Grammarians roared, and Blake left off rubbing his damaged nose to glare at them in angry perplexity.

"What's the joke?" he demanded. "Have you seen him?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather! He asked us to stop you!"
 "Oh!"

"And we've done it!"
 "You—you rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Which way did he go?"

"That's telling!"
 "You measly Grammar School rats——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You apologies for measly worms——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, never mind slanging them now!" said Digby. "Let's look after Gus!"

"Right you are! Come on!"

The Fourth-Formers of St. Jim's rushed on down the footpath. They left the three Grammarians roaring with laughter.

Up and down the wood Blake & Co. sought their missing chum.

They went as far as the Wayland Road in one direction, and as far as the ruined castle in another. They went up the bank of the Rhyll, and down the Feeder—the stream in the heart of the wood.

But they did not find Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. They gave it up at last.

By that time it was probable that the appointment had been kept, and was over, and the swell of the School House was back at St. Jim's.

Wrathfully, Blake gave the word at last to return.

"The young bouncer's done us!" he said. "I never thought that Gussy was so beastly deep before!"

"I warned you that he was pulling the wool over your eyes, you know," said Herries. "You remember that, Blake!"

"I remember you said some silly rot or other, if that's what you mean. We shall have to hop it to get in before locking-up, so come on, and don't jaw."

"We should have found him all right if Towser had been with us."

"Oh, blow Towser!" said Blake, crossly.

They arrived at St. Jim's as Taggles was about to lock the gates. They dodged in, and gave the porter a series of cat-calls to relieve their feelings. Tom Merry and his chums were in the Hall of the School House as they entered, dusty and tired.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, with a grin. "Been in the wars?"

"Rats!"
 "Or through a threshing-machine?" asked Lowther.

"Br-r-r-r-r-r-r!"
 "Boxing with a motor-car, perhaps?" suggested Manners.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

And the chums of the Fourth went on to the stairs, leaving the Terrible Three chuckling.

Blake turned round as he set foot on the stairs.

"I say, Merry! Has Gussy come in?"
 "Gussy! Yes, he came in nearly an hour ago!"

"What!" roared Blake.
 "What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing!"
 "Where is he now?" asked Dig.

"In your study, I think. I saw him doing some shopping at Dame Taggles', and I asked him if it was to stand us a feed, and he said it wasn't."

Blake & Co. went upstairs, breathing hard. Gussy had been home an hour. He had been comfortably ensconced in the study, enjoying a feed after his walk, while his baffled chums had been tramping up and down Rylcombe Woods in search of him.

The thought was exasperating.

The chums of the Fourth breathed vengeance as they drew near Study No. 6. To add to their wrath, the voice of D'Arcy could be heard raised in song as they approached.

D'Arcy was practising a tenor solo. D'Arcy, in the belief that he was destined to be another Caruso, had taken up Italian opera songs, and one of them was now ringing forth from Study No. 6.

"La donna e mobile,
 Qual piume al vento——
 Muta d'accento
 E di pensier!"

Blake snorted.

"That's the finishing touch," he said. "He shall have a bumping that will break the record. Come on!"

And the three juniors rushed into Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 4.

Feeding the Brutes!

"L A donna e mobile—"

Arthur Augustus was going strong.

He was standing before the big glass as he sang, evidently studying the attitude in which he was to stand on the operatic stage, when he had a chance of appearing at Covent Garden as the duke in "Rigoletto." He did not even notice the door open, nor see the three wrathful faces that glared in at him.

"Qual piume al vento!"

"Muta d'accento— Bai Jove!"

"My hat!" said Blake.

D'Arcy turned round.

Never had the swell of St. Jim's been so near to a heavy bumping as he was at that moment.

But the sight of the study mollified the chums of the Fourth.

D'Arcy had not been feeding on his lonesome, after all, while they were hunting for him up hill and down dale.

The study table was spread with a gleaming white cloth and a really respectable array of crockery.

And there were good things on the table—cake and jam and jelly. And in the fender were a meat-pie and a pudding keeping warm, as well as a tin saucepan, with a dozen eggs in it, ready to go on the fire.

Blake looked at these preparations for a feed, and his heart softened.

"Hallo, Gus!"

"Hallo, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus extracted his eyeglass from his pocket, and jammed it into his eye and looked at the three juniors.

"Bai Jove! You are in a state!"

"We've been looking for you."

"Thank you vevy much!"

"We're tired."

"You look it, bai Jove!"

"We're hungry!"

"I've got a feed weady for you, deah boys. I wathah thought you would be hungwy. Go and get a wash and a brush down, and I'll have the eggs boiled by the time you return."

The Fourth-Formers looked at one another.

The planned bumping faded from their minds. In the face of a reception like this, how could they bump the swell of the School House?

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "Come on, kids!"

And the juniors adjourned to the bath-room. Arthur Augustus turned towards his reflection in the glass, and slightly closed one eye. If so aristocratic and dignified a personage as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could be supposed to wink, we should certainly say that he winked at that moment.

Arthur Augustus had looked for trouble on the return of his study-mates. Perhaps he remembered the great maxim: "Feed the brute!" And perhaps that wise saying was partly the cause of that excellent feed being ready for the hungry Fourth-Formers.

Arthur Augustus drew an old pair of gloves from a drawer and donned them, and then proceeded to place the egg saucepan on the fire.

By the time the juniors returned, washed and brushed, the eggs were done, and the pie was on the table, and D'Arcy was sitting ready to carve it.

Blake gave an appreciative glance at the table.

"Gussy, old man, this is all right."

"Vevy good!"

"It's cricket."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wire in, kids!"

They wired in. If the sight of the good things prepared for them had made the juniors feel good-humoured, the feed itself was sufficient to finish the work of restoring matters in the study to their old footing.

"This is a ripping pie!" Blake remarked.

"Glad you like it, deah boy."

"The eggs are jolly good," said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And the ham," said Herries. "It's jolly ripping! I'll take some of it round to Towser when we've finished, if you don't mind."

"Good ideah, Hewwies!"

And the meal finished with the juniors in the best of tempers. Herries carried out about half a pound of best ham to Towser's kennel—a gift that Towser very much appreciated.

Blake rose from the table with a satisfied smile.

"I feel better now," he remarked.

"Vevy good!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,324.

"We licked Frank Monk and his friends in the wood, Gussy."

"Yaas; I was sure you would lick them."

"Well, perhaps it wasn't a very bad licking, as we made it pax."

"Yaas."

"And then we missed you."

D'Arcy chuckled.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What are you guggling at?"

"I was not awah that I was gugglin', deah boy."

"Have you a pain anywhere?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then what—"

"I was laughin'," said D'Arcy indignantly.

"Rats! Don't do it any more, then. I'd almost rather you sang. Where did you go after we missed you in the wood?"

"I went to my destination, deah boy."

"And where was that?"

"A secwet."

Jack Blake sniffed.

"Look here, you young ass!"

"I wefuse to be warged as an ass!"

"You're going to keep this secret business up, are you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, after that feed I don't think we'll bump you," said Blake. "But it's perfectly clear to me that you're being done by the New House rotters."

"Wats!"

"It's Figgins & Co. up to their games again," said Blake wrathfully. "They're taking you in with some silly spoof."

"Nothin' of the sort."

"I know better. I'm going to look into the matter, because it's impossible for us to allow the New House bouncers a grin up against this study. As for you, of course, you're not responsible for your actions."

"Weally, Blake—"

"And we'll jolly well go for Figgins & Co., anyway," said Digby, "just as a hint that we're not going to allow this study to be done."

"But weally, deah boys, Figgins & Co. have nothin' whatovah to do with it."

"That's all you know," said Blake, with a sniff. "You think you met somebody at that giddy appointment, don't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you think it was somebody or other—"

"I pwesume so, deah boy."

"Well, it wasn't; it was Kerr in disguise."

"Wats! It wasn't anythin' of the sort."

"Look here, Gussy, can't you take my word?"

"Yaas, deah boy. But you don't know anythin' about the mattah, you know."

"I know you're being done."

"Well, I'm not bein' done."

"I'm jolly well going to keep an eye on you, that's all," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "I know jolly well you're being spoofed, and there's not going to be a laugh up against this study if I can help it."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

And with that intelligible and extremely lucid rejoinder Blake closed the discussion, and began to do his prep.

Tom Merry looked into Study No. 6 at half-past nine that evening. It was time for the juniors to go to bed, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was missing from the ranks of the Fourth Form.

Several juniors had gone round to look for him, and Tom Merry happened to be the one who looked into his study.

There was a light in the study, and as Tom Merry glanced in at the open door he saw that Arthur Augustus was there.

The hero of the Shell gave a low whistle of surprise.

D'Arcy was standing at the cupboard in which the chums of Study No. 6 kept their provisions. He was engaged in taking out a quantity of eatables of various sorts, and packing them into a small handbag.

Tom Merry was naturally surprised.

If it had been Fatty Wynn of the New House he could have understood. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the last person at St. Jim's who could be suspected of going off for a solitary feed all on his own.

The elegant junior heard Tom Merry's whistle, and he gave a violent start, and turned round. A pork pie in a basin—one of Dame Taggles' works of art, very popular

with the juniors—was in his hand. In the start he gave it dropped to the floor, and the basin smashed into a dozen pieces.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What the——"

"Bai Jove! You startled me!"

"It's bed-time. I came to tell you."

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy!"

"What on earth are you doing with the grub?" asked Tom. "Not going to have a dorm feed to-night?"

"Oh, no!"

"Getting ready for a picnic to-morrow?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then what on earth——"

CHAPTER 5.
Midnight Feasters!

"BOOM!"

It was the first stroke of midnight. The sound echoed across the wide, shadowy quadrangle, and the faint boom came through the School House dormitories.

In the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House only one junior was awake to hear it; and he was half dozing.

But he started into broad wakefulness as he heard the stroke.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "That must be midnight!"



"Look out!" yelled Manners. It was too late. The door jerked to from outside and as the startled Shell follows rushed towards it the key clicked. Tom Merry dragged on the handle. "Phew!" he gasped. "It's locked!"

"Pway do not mention this mattah to anyone, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus, his face growing very pink. "It is all wight."

"You're going to give that grub to somebody?"

"Ya-as."

"All right; it's no business of mine," said Tom Merry, more and more surprised by the confusion in D'Arcy's look. "But you'd better come along, or Darrell will be on your track."

"Yaas, I suppose so."

And Arthur Augustus thrust the half-packed bag under the study table, and followed Tom Merry.

"Oh, here he is!" said Blake. "Where have you been?"

"In the study, deah boy."

The juniors hurriedly undressed and were in bed by the time Darrell came to see lights out.

Eleven other strokes followed.

Then silence.

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed, groped for his eyeglass, and blinked up and down the long, dark dormitory.

"Are you awake, deah boys?"

There was no reply from the dear boys, excepting a snore or two.

"Are you all asleep?"

Still silence.

"Bai Jove! That's all wight!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped quietly out of bed. He dressed himself in the darkness, even to his collar and tie. Then he stole quietly towards the door of the dormitory, and went into the passage, closing the door behind him.

There he paused, looking up and down the shadowy passage.

At midnight every light was out at St. Jim's—seldom even in Masters' Studies there twinkled a light at that hour.

All was dark and eerily silent.

D'Arcy listened for some moments, and then moved off cautiously towards the stairs. He descended to the passage upon which the Fourth Form studies opened, and made his way towards Study No. 6.

Suddenly he gave a jump.

Study No. 6 should have been dark and deserted, like every other study in the passage at that hour.

Instead of which, a light glimmered from under the door. D'Arcy stood still, staring blankly at the slit of light. The study was occupied!

By whom?

That he had left his chums asleep in the dormitory D'Arcy knew. Who was in Study No. 6? Burglars!

Burglars—there was no other possible explanation.

A shade of vexation crossed D'Arcy's face.

Burglars would have to be interfered with, and captured—and that would excite a general alarm, and interfere materially with his plans for the night.

As he stood hesitating and doubtful, a sound came from the study.

It was the click of a knife on a plate. D'Arcy started. The burglars, with unexampled impudence, were undoubtedly feasting upon the provisions in the study—feasting before they went about their nefarious work.

The click of the knife on the plate was followed by another sound—which made the swell of St. Jim's start again; the sound of a chuckle.

D'Arcy drew a deep breath.

He knew that chuckle! It belonged to Monty Lowther of the Shell. In an instant the truth flashed upon his mind.

The Terrible Three were in the study. Tom Merry had seen him packing his bag, and had observed him pushing it under the table, when he called him at bed-time.

And this was the result.

D'Arcy crept on towards the door, which was partly open, and applied his eye to the crack between the door and the jamb, between the hinges.

It gave him a full view of the study's interior.

Three cheerful youths were seated round the table, which was spread with an array of good things. The bag, emptied, lay on the floor. The Terrible Three were enjoying themselves.

"My hat!" said Manners, as D'Arcy, unseen, peeped through the crack. "This is ripping! I like Gussy's taste in plum tarts."

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry. "The rabbit-pie is a corker, too!"

"To say nothing of the jellies," said Monty Lowther. "The jellies are spiffing! I think Gussy ought to have some sort of testimonial for his skill in getting up a feed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not too loud—we don't want to wake the beaks!"

"Right-ho! Pass the cake!"

"Certainly, deah boy. Imagine it is Gussy at the head of the table," grinned Lowther. "Pway what can I pass you, Mannahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't abstain from anythin' you like, deah boy. I twust you will do your best to entahtain yourselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus breathed very hard through his nose. It was bad enough to see his bag of good things ravished under his eyes, just when he had come to the study to fetch it away, too. But to be imitated like this, in this disrespectful manner, was a little too much. D'Arcy came very near stepping into the study and saying things to Lowther at that moment. But he restrained himself. He had very particular reasons for not wishing anybody to know that he was out of the dormitory that night.

"Blessed if I know why Gussy was laying in this stock," said Tom Merry. "He told me not to mention it to anybody."

"And you didn't."

"Not a word! You fellows will admit that I never said a word to you when I fetched you out of bed and brought you here."

"Not a syllable!" agreed Manners.

"I merely said 'come,' and you came, after I had jabbed a wet sponge down your neck."

"Yes, you ass!"

"And you were quite surprised to find the grub here?"

"We were!"

"Gussy will be surprised, too, in the morning, when he finds that it's gone," grinned Tom Merry. "Blessed if I know why he was packing it in the bag. But it was like his cheek to do it, without consulting his uncles, and this will serve him jolly well right."

"Good! Pass the doughnuts!"

"Here you are. Hush! Was that a sound?"

"I didn't hear anything."

"I thought there was something."

D'Arcy almost held his breath. But none of the Terrible Three left the table. Monty Lowther yawned.

"It's your fancy, my son. This is the haunted study, you know, and it might be the ghost of St. Jim's."

"Oh, shut up!" said Manners.

Lowther grinned.

"Well, as the ghost turned out to be Binks, the boots, there's nothing to be afraid of," he remarked. "They've stopped up the secret passage that led into this study, too. The oak panel has been screwed down, and blocks of stone shoved into the passage behind it. A ghost as fat as Binks would never get through again."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Manners. "Of course, I don't believe in ghosts, but midnight ain't the time to jaw on the subject."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop your cackling. Jawing of ghosts makes me think of that tap, tap, tap of the spectre monk. Of course, we know it was only Binks in the secret passage tapping all the time, still, it isn't so funny at night as by day."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "But we're not likely to hear the tap, tap, tap now that the secret passage has been closed up."

"No; but—hark!"

"My only hat!"

The Terrible Three sprang to their feet. Through the silence came a weird, mysterious sound.

Tap, tap, tap!

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CHAPTER 6.
Prisoners I

TOM MERRY stared at Manners and Lowther, and Manners and Lowther stared at him.

Tap, tap, tap!

It was the well-known tap of the ghostly monk with which Binks, in the secret passage in the old walls of St. Jim's, had scared the whole school one Christmastide.

But the secret passage was closed up now, and Binks was in bed and asleep.

Tap, tap, tap!

"It's someone in the passage!" gasped Tom Merry.

"It's a jape!"

"Come on—quick!"

The Terrible Three rushed to the door of the study and flung it open.

The light from the open doorway extended several yards down the dark passage; but it revealed nothing but walls and doors.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had whisked down the passage, and ensconced himself in the nearest study, after administering that ghostly tap.

He was standing just inside Study No. 7 now, with the door ajar, a grin on his face in the darkness, listening.

The chums of the Shell stared blankly into the passage; somewhat like the Raven's unhappy master in the famous poem, seeing "darkness there, and nothing more."

"There's nobody here," muttered Lowther.

"There must have been somebody, though."

"Well, it wasn't a ghost," said Tom Merry. "Let's get back to the feed. It's time we were in our little bunks."

The Terrible Three returned to the study.

In spite of their nerve, however, they were a little disturbed, and they did not continue the feed with the zest with which they had commenced it.

"Blessed curious!" said Lowther. "Pass the jam-tarts, though."

Tap, tap, tap!

Tom Merry jumped up.

"That came from the next study, chaps!"

"Sounded like it!"

"It was some chap japing us! Come on!"

Tom Merry dashed out of Study No. 6, with Lowther and Manners at his heels. He ran into Study No. 7, but there had been ample time for D'Arcy to scuttle out first.

Tom Merry switched on the light. The three chums of the Shell looked round the study.

There was no one to be seen.

"Look out!" cried Manners suddenly.

But it was too late.

The door was jerked to from the outside, and as the startled Shell fellows ran towards it the key clicked in the lock.

Tom Merry dragged at the handle a few seconds too late.

"Phew!" he gasped.

"Locked!"

"Yes."

"My only hat!"

They stared at one another in blank dismay. They were locked in Study No. 7 in the Fourth Form passage, without the slightest prospect of getting out until their unknown captor chose to release them. And they could not venture to make a row in the study, either, as any noise would bring down a wrathful master upon them.

The Terrible Three were certainly in what Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would have rescribed as a "deuced awkward posish."

"Well, this takes the cake!" said Tom Merry, after a long pause, which the chums of the Shell occupied by an interesting study of one another's features.

"It jolly well prances off with the whole bakery!" said Lowther.

"We're locked in."

"We are!"

"Somebody has trapped us."

"What-ho!"

The worm tapped on the wall to make us come in here, and already had the key on the outside of the lock. He dodged out in time for us to dodge in."

"The rotter!"

"And we were taken in like innocent gulls."

"You were, you mean," said Lowther pleasantly. "We followed you."

"Exactly," said Manners.

"Oh, rats! Of course, I—well, I suppose I might have stopped to think. So might you fellows, for that matter."

"When I'm leader—"

"Now, don't you begin to jaw, Lowther," said Tom Merry warily. "Things are bad enough without you beginning to jaw. I put it to Manners."

"So they are!" agreed Manners.

(Continued on next page.)



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A "SAFE" DIAGNOSIS.

Policeman (to burglar caught at safe): "You're working too hard."

Burglar: "How's that?"

Policeman: "You need arrest!"

K. SPATCHEY, 50, Whitmore Gardens, Kensa! Rise, N.W.10.

TRY IT!

Music Teacher: "You must sing louder."

Pupil: "I am singing as loud as I can."

M. T.: "Let yourself go, open your mouth and throw yourself into it!"

DAVID H. SLANEY, 90, Woodstock Road, Moseley, Birmingham.

A GOOD IDEA.

Officer: "What is the meaning of strategy?"

Recruit: "When you don't let the enemy know you are out of ammunition, but just keep on firing!"

SAMUEL ROSE, 65, Gough Road, Birmingham.

NO USE AT ALL!

Jimmy: "Tom's gone home, and I haven't got anyone to play 'Indians' with!"

Grandfather (very bald): "I'll play with you, Jimmy."

Jimmy: "You're no good, you're scalped already!"

WILLIAM ARKELL, 97, The Avenue, Chingford, E.14.

HOW TRUE!

Garageman: "What makes you think I should make a good soldier?"

Motorist (who has just paid his bill): "No enemy could stand up to the way you charge!"

H. BENSON, 31, Bridge Road, Grays, Essex.

A POSER!

Mr. Knowall: "I always believe in fighting an enemy with his own weapons."

Cheeky Boy: "How long does it take you to sting a wasp?"

A. TERRETT, 19, Southville Road, Thames Ditton.

NO FEAR!

Doctor: "Put out your tongue."

Little Boy: "No fear! I did that to teacher the other day, and I got caned!"

E. G. ELLIOT, 52, Beemead Avenue, Kenton, Middlesex.

NOT WHAT HE MEANT!

Pat had a donkey for sale, and bearing of a man who wanted one he wrote to him:

"If you are looking for a real good donkey, don't forget me!"

J. M. FLINDALL, 114, Casenove Road, Stamford Hill, N.16.

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The Secret of the Tower!

(Continued from page 11.)

"I jolly well think you're a born idiot!" said Lowther.
 "I appeal to Manners."
 "So he is!" said Manners.
 "Look here, Manners—"
 "What I think is—"
 "Bosh!"
 "Ass!"
 "Frabjous duffer!"
 "If you had stopped to think—"
 "What's the good of—"
 "Of all the silly dummies—"
 "If you want a thick ear, Lowther—"
 "You'll jolly well get one yourself—"
 "I'll—"
 "So will I—"
 "Here, chuck it!" exclaimed Manners, pushing between the two excited Shell fellows. "No sense in slogging one another now. Besides, you'll wake the whole School House. The question is how to get out of the study?"
 "Well, there's something in that," agreed Tom Merry, calming down a little. "But you must admit that Lowther is an exasperating ass."
 "Oh, yes, certainly!"
 "You must admit that Tom Merry is a frabjous cuckoo," said Lowther.
 "Of course!"
 "It seems to me that you admit too much, Manners. I—"
 "Now, don't you begin again," remonstrated Manners.
 "We've got to get back to the dorm somehow. Hark!"
 "What's the row?"
 "Somebody in Study No. 6. Listen!"

They listened close to the intervening wall. Faint but unmistakable sounds could be heard in the next room. The unseen individual who had locked the door was clearing away the remains of the feed, doubtless for his own benefit.

"My only hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "He must have planned all that, you know."

"I suppose—"
 "I wonder who it is?"
 "It can't be Gussy; he's not deep enough."
 "I should think it was Gore. Only Gore's been expelled, so it can't be he," said Tom Merry. "Blake, perhaps."
 "I shouldn't wonder. I say, let's give a turn of tapping for his benefit," said Lowther, with a grin.
 "Good! Go it!"

Tap, tap, tap!
 There was the sound of a gasping exclamation in Study No. 6, which came faintly to the ears of the juniors through the wall, and a crash.

The Terrible Three chuckled.
 The fellow in Study No. 6, whoever he was, had been startled, and he had dropped a pork-pie on the floor, with ruinous results to the dish.

Lowther tapped again, but there was no more sound of alarm from the adjoining study. The raider was on his guard.

Tom Merry went to the door, and tapped there. He

wanted to attract the attention of the fellow who had locked him in. In Tom Merry's opinion the jape had certainly gone far enough.

"I say, kid!" he called softly through the keyhole. There was no reply. Tom thought for a moment that he detected the sound of footsteps in the passage, but he was not sure.

"I say, you ass, come here! We want to get back to the dorm. We give you best. Do you hear? I suppose you're not going to keep us here all night? Where are you? Answer!"

But only the echo of the whispering voice came back. "He's gone!" said Lowther. Tom Merry sniffed. "I suppose he has. My hat, I'll make him warm for it in the morning, if I can find out who it is!"

"Blessed if I can guess, unless it's Mellish! It might be Reilly. But never mind that. How are we to get out?"

"We can't get out."
 "What price the window?"
 "H'm!"

Tom Merry went to the window, and opened it quietly. There was ivy below, but to climb out in the dark would have been fearfully risky.

"Blessed if I like the idea of it!" said Manners. Tom Merry gave a cry.

"Look—look!"
 "What—what's the matter?"
 "Look, the light!"
 "M-m-my only hat!"

The chums of the Shell gazed in blank astonishment. Through the blackness of the night in the quadrangle a strange and flickering light shone.

CHAPTER 7.

The Mysterious Light!

TOM MERRY stared in blank amazement at the strange, flickering light that glimmered through the darkness of the quadrangle.

For some moments the chums of the Shell were silent with astonishment.

"It's in the old tower," said Monty Lowther at last. Tom Merry nodded.

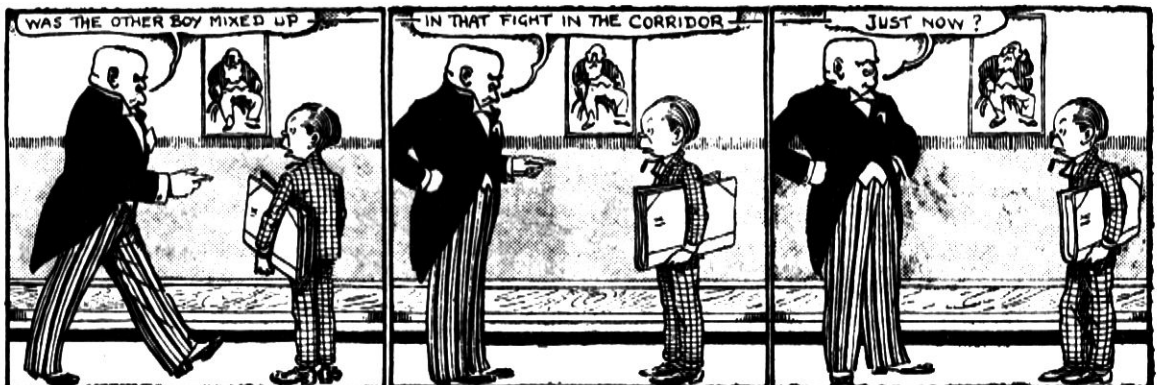
He knew that. The light that flickered through the darkness came from one of the windows of the ruined tower.

The tower, one of the oldest portions of the original structure of St. Jim's, had not been in a state fit for habitation for centuries. More than half the building was gone, and what remained was a picturesque ivy-grown ruin. But the lower parts of the massive walls had stood the storms of many hundred years, and the narrow stone staircase within was still intact, as well as some of the little dusky chambers that opened off it. On half-holidays the St. Jim's fellows frequently explored the old tower, but no one could be supposed to have any business there at midnight. Yet there was the light, gleaming through the ivy that hung over one of the old casements.

"Blessed queer!" muttered Manners.
 "Yes, rather! There are a lot of queer things happening to-night," grunted Lowther.

"You know that the tower is haunted—"
 "Oh, rats!"
 "It's jolly mysterious."

Potts, the Office Boy!



"But it's not a ghost."
 "N-n-no, I suppose not."
 "I suppose it's the chap who locked us in here," said Tom Merry. "He's cut across there, and—"
 "He hasn't."
 "Eh? What do you mean?"
 "He hasn't had time to get there, that's all."
 Tom Merry rubbed his chin thoughtfully.
 "N-no, I suppose you're right. He hasn't. It must be another chap."
 "But whom?"
 "Burglars, perhaps," said Manners. "What are you sniffing at, Lowther?"
 "Why, what the dickens would burglars want to burgle a ruined tower for?" demanded Lowther. "They couldn't burgle anything but spider's webs there."
 "Well, who is it, then?"
 "Perhaps the ghost, or a ghost-hunter."
 "It's somebody," said Manners. "But never mind, it's no business of ours, anyway. How are we going to get out of this study?"

"Ask me another."
 "We can't stick here all night."
 Tom Merry glanced out of the window again. The light was still burning in the window of the old tower.
 He looked downwards at the ivy on the school wall. Then he shook his head.
 "I don't mind taking a risk," he said; "but it's no good committing suicide. That ivy wouldn't bear a fellow's weight!"
 "Then what are we going to do?"
 "We might bust the lock on the door."
 "And make a jolly row this time of night. I can imagine Linton's face if he came down and found us here."
 Tom Merry chuckled.
 "I'd rather wait here till we're let out, than wake Linton. But we may be able to pick the lock somehow. There may be tools of some sort in the study."
 "Good! Let's look."
 "Eureka!"

Tom Merry held up a screwdriver he had picked from the table drawer.
 "I'll very soon have that lock off!" he remarked. "It's only just screwed on, on this side. I'll get it loose, and we can shift the key. It's still in the lock."
 "Good egg!"
 Tom Merry set to work. With very little noise he removed the screws, and at the end of about ten minutes the door was successfully opened. The Terrible Three turned out the light and left the study. Tom Merry looked a last time from the window. The light was burning steadily in the old tower.

But even as he looked it went out.
 Darkness suddenly blotted away the flickering gleam.
 "Still there?" asked Lowther, as Tom Merry joined him in the passage.
 "It's just gone out."
 "H'm! I was going to suggest a visit to the old tower, to look into it," said Lowther.
 Manners shivered.
 "Ugh! Better leave it alone!"
 "No good going now," said Tom Merry. "Besides, I rather think it would be better to get back to the dorm. I'm sleepy."
 "Well, so am I, come to think of it."

"Let's look in Study No. 6 first."
 They glanced into Study No. 6.
 As they expected, what they had left of the feast was gone. All that remained were fragments on the plates, and the wrecked pork-pie on the floor.
 "A clean sweep!" said Tom Merry, with a grin. "My hat! I wonder who the chap was?"
 "What price waiting up for him, and nabbing him when he comes to open that door and let us out?" suggested Lowther.
 "He mayn't intend to come back. If it's Mellish playing a trick, it's very likely he meant to leave us there all night."
 "I'll talk to Mellish in the morning."
 "Meanwhile—bed!"
 "All right!"
 And the Terrible Three returned to the Shell dormitory. They were puzzled by the occurrences of the night; but that did not prevent them from falling fast asleep as soon as their heads were on their pillows.

CHAPTER 8.

D'Arcy is a Little Too Previous!

"**B**AI Jove, there's a wiah for me!"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark as he stood basking in the sun on the steps of the School House the next morning, before breakfast.
 Arthur Augustus was looking a little sleepy about the eyes, but he had risen about the usual time, and no one in the Fourth Form had the least suspicion of the way he had spent the night.
 The elegant junior was breathing in deep gulps of fresh morning air, and trying to enliven himself that way, to make up for the loss of sleep. But in spite of himself a heaviness weighed upon his eyelids.
 The sight of the telegraph boy from Rylcombe coming across the quad, drew the exclamation from D'Arcy's lips.
 Jack Blake, who was sitting on the balustrade, swinging his legs, looked round.
 "Hallo! How do you know it's for you, Gussy?"
 "I'm expectin' a wiah!"
 "Oh! From the chap you were meeting last night?" demanded Blake severely. "The plot thickens, does it? So he's wiring you!"
 "Certainly not! I am expectin' a wiah from my governah," said D'Arcy. "My governah has been gettin' his yabs up lately. He actually had the cheek, you know, to wreply to my last lettah askin' for a fivah, by sayin' that in these bad times he was short of fivahs. Of course, I don't object to his gwumblin' at the bad times. Ewewybody does that, and I suppose he wants to do the pwopah thing. But he didn't enclose the fivah. I regarded that as sewious."
 Blake grinned.
 "So I wote by return," went on D'Arcy. "I explained that I wasn't responsible for the bad times. I suggested that he should cut down his expendituah in some othah way. My eldah bwothah, Conway, doesn't weally need so much, you know, and I suggested cuttin' down Conway's allowance instead of cuttin' down mine. Conway will be Lord Eastwood some day, and will have heaps of tin, so there's no weason why he shouldn't wuff it a bit now, you know. I werged that as unanswerable."

BLACK EVIDENCE!



"Of course it was. Has the fiver come?"
 "Not yet. I told the govannah I was in a deuce of a huwvy, and asked him to wiah the cash. You can wiah the money, you know, by payin' somethin', or doin' somethin' or somethin'."

"Go hon!"
 "That's how I know the wiah is for me. I wegard the govannah as havin' played the game this time."
 "If the wire is for you!" grinned Blake.

"Oh, that's all wight. I'm deuced short of money now, you know."

"Blessed if I know, anyway!" said Blake. "Where's it all gone? I know you had two pounds yesterday, and that feed you stood couldn't have made a very big hole in it. I hope you haven't been betting," he added, shaking a warning forefinger at the swell of St. Jim's.

"I pwesume you are jokin', Blake? You have nevah known me to entah into any blackguardly twansaction of that sort!"

"You haven't been spending it on Mild Moonshine cigarettes?"

"Weally, Blake——"
 "Then where is it?"

"I've expended it, deah boy!"
 "Oh, you've expended it, dear boy, have you?" said Blake. "As your uncle, it is my duty to inquire what you've expended it upon. I can't have you getting into ways of reckless expenditure. And, besides, I was going to borrow some of it."

"I am extremely sowwy, deah boy——"
 "Never mind the sorrow. Where's the tin?"

"Gone!"
 "Where?"

D'Arcy coloured a little. He turned to look at the telegraph-boy, who was making his way towards the Head's house, and waved his hand to him.

The boy looked at him, and then crossed over to the School House instead of going to the Head's private door.

Blake tapped Arthur Augustus on the shoulder.
 "Where's the tin?" he asked.

"Weally, Blake——"
 "Is it a giddy secret?"

"Ya-as, in a way."
 "Oh, I think I catch on! You've given it to the chap you met last night!" exclaimed Jack Blake abruptly.

"N-not exactly!"
 "You've spent it on him, then?"

D'Arcy was silent.
 Jack Blake's brow clouded a little, and he looked very seriously at his chum.

"Look here, old Gus!" he said. "This is a serious matter. I've looked on that affair so far as a jape of the New House chaps, to take a rise out of our study. But Figgins & Co. wouldn't touch your money. You've been done!"

"I haven't been done!"
 "Where's the cash, then?"

"Weally, Blake——"
 "You've been swindled by somebody!"

"Weally, deah boy——"
 "This wants looking into more than ever," said Jack, with a shake of the head. "I'm not going to have you looted in this way!"

"I wefuse—— Ah, here you are!" said D'Arcy, breaking off as the telegraph-lad came up. "It's all wight."

"Will you take it in, sir?" asked the lad, who knew D'Arcy well by sight, having brought him telegrams many a time and oft.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Shall I wait for an answer, sir?"

"Yaas, pewwaps you'd bettah!"
 "Yes, sir."

Arthur Augustus jerked the flimsy envelope open, and took out the telegram. He did it as he was speaking to the boy, without even looking at the address.

His action appeared to have a curious effect upon the telegraph-lad. His cheerful face assumed an expression of unbounded astonishment. His jaw dropped a little, and he stared speechlessly at the swell of St. Jim's.

He seemed incapable of speech for the moment, and in that moment the swell of St. Jim's read the telegram.

A puzzled look came upon his face.
 "Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?" asked Blake. "Bad news from home?"

"Oh, no! Why should Goah's fathah telegraph to me?"
 Jack Blake gave a jump.
 "Gore's father?"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Look here, sir," began the amazed telegraph-boy, "that telegram——"
 "Let's look at it!" said Blake.
 D'Arcy handed him the telegraph form. Blake ran his eye over it, and whistled.

"My son has left home. May probably return to school. Coming this morning."
 "RICHARD GORE."

Blake gave a low whistle.
 "So Gore's bunked!"

"Appawently."
 "Case of the Roman parent up to date, and the kid cutting up rough over it," said Blake. "I've seen Gore's governor, and he's not the kind of chap I should like to go home to in disgrace."

"Wathah not!"
 "But that wire——"
 "Look here, sir——"



The juniors rushed up the stairs. Arthur Augustus was borne backwards by the rush and deposited in a sitting position on the little stone landing with a bump, that made him gasp. "Ow!" yelled the swell of St. Jim's!

"That wire can't be for you, Gussy. Gore's father wouldn't wire to you. They've made a mistake in addressing the envelope at the post office."

"If you——"
 "I didn't look at the address, though," said D'Arcy, starting a little. "I took it for granted that the wiah was for me."

"Well, you frabjous ass!"
 "I wefuse to be called a fwabjous ass! Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stared at the pencilled address on the torn envelope in blank dismay. Even the swell of St. Jim's was a little staggered.

"What's the address?" demanded Blake.
 "The Head!"

"Phew!"
 "Dr. Holmes, St. James' School, Rylcombe, Sussex," read out Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "My deah lad, what did you give me the wiah for?"
 "You signed for me to come to you, sir, when I was going to the other door."
 "Yaas, but—"
 "You said you'd take it in, sir."
 "Yaas, but—"
 "I thought you were going to take it in to Dr. Holmes, sir," said the telegraph-boy, looking a little scared. "I—I was knocked over, sir, when you opened it."



"Bai Jove!"
 D'Arcy looked at the boy, and looked at Blake, and looked at the telegram. He had opened a telegram addressed to the Head of St. Jim's, and the thought of it almost made his head swim.
 "My hat!" said Blake. "You were a little too previous, Gussy!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "It wasn't the boy's fault. You'll have to tell the Head that."
 "Of course! I am not likely to twy to avoid the blame," said Arthur Augustus. "It was all my fault—or, wathah, it was a natuwal mistake to make."
 "Bosh! You ought to have looked at the address!"

"It is easy to be wise aftah the event, Blake."
 "You ass! I—"
 "I decline to be called an ass."
 "You'll get licked!" said Blake, who was really worried about his chum, and took the privilege of a worried friend in slanging him. "You cheerful ass—"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "It means a licking, and—"
 "I don't know! I shall explain to the Head as one gentleman to anothah—"
 "Look here—"
 "It's all wight!" said D'Arcy, going in.
 "Where are you going?"
 "To take this telegwam to the Head and explain."
 "You'd better let me—"
 "Wats!"
 "Look here—"
 "More wats!"
 And Arthur Augustus hurried off with the open telegram in his hand.

CHAPTER 9.
One Gentleman to Another!

DR. HOLMES was at breakfast, in the bosom of his family, so to speak, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy inquired for him.
 But it was impossible to delay. Arthur Augustus insisted upon being shown in at once, and he arrived in the breakfast-room of the Head's house, and found Dr. Holmes at breakfast with Mrs. Holmes and Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House.
 Arthur Augustus had a somewhat high colour as he entered the room with the telegram in his hand.
 He bowed to Mrs. Holmes, however, in his usual inimicable manner; the greatest confusion of mind would never have made D'Arcy forget to be polite to a lady.
 Dr. Holmes looked at him rather fixedly. The Head never liked being disturbed at meal-times, unless for a very good cause. But the sight of the fluttering slip in D'Arcy's hand mollified him. He imagined at once that the Fourth-Former had received bad news, which it was necessary to acquaint him with.
 "Good-morning, D'Arcy!"
 "Good-morning, sir! I have just received this wiah—"
 "Not bad news, I hope?"
 "Oh, no, sir! I twust you will excuse me for intew-wuptin' you at this moment, sir," said D'Arcy. "I twust Mrs. Holmes will excuse me."
 "Oh, certainly!" said Dr. Holmes, while the good lady nodded, with a smile. "What is the matter?"
 "I am placed in a deuced awkward posish, sir."
 "Indeed?"
 "Yaas, wathah, sir! I twust you do not wegard me as a chap who would intentionally open a lettah or a telegwam addressed to anothah gentleman, sir?"
 "I am sure you would not, D'Arcy!"
 "I have had the misfortune to open one addressed to anothah person, sir; but it was quite by chance, sir. And I was not awah of it till I had wead it."
 "That is rather unfortunate, D'Arcy."
 "Yaas, sir. I was expectin' a telegwam fwom my governah, sir—my fathah—and when I saw the boy come in, I concluded it was for me. I took it fwom him; and he thought I was only goin' to take it in, you see. The boy was not to blame at all."
 "Very good!"
 "Then I opened it, without thinkin' of lookin' at the address, sir."
 "That was very thoughtless."
 "I suppose it was, sir, when you come to think of it. But I did not think of it at the time, as I thought the wiah was for me."
 "Well, well! I quite believe your explanation, D'Arcy, as I am quite sure you would never be guilty of a dishonourable action," said Dr. Holmes. "The best thing you can do now is to take the wire to its proper owner, and explain and apologise. As a matter of fact, I really do not see that it was necessary to come to me."
 "I am sowvy, sir!"
 "Very good! You may go!"
 "But the wiah, sir—"
 "Take it to the proper owner. I am sure he will fully believe your explanation and accept your apology. Let it be a lesson to you in future to be more careful."
 "Yaas, sir—the—"
 "You may go!"
 "The wiah—"
 "Dear me! How persistent the boy is—I really do not make you out, D'Arcy."
 "The wiah, sir—"

"Take it to the person whom it is for," D'Arcy held out the telegram.
 "It's for you, sir—"
 The Head fairly jumped.
 "For—~~for me~~—"
 "Yaas, sir!"
 "You—you have opened a telegram addressed to me?"
 "I have explained, sir—"
 "Really, D'Arcy—"
 "I am sowwy, sir! I beg to apologise most pwofoundly."
 "Dear me!"
 The Head glanced at the telegram and started.
 "Very well! You may go, D'Arcy. Tell the boy there is no answer—er—and give him this sixpence."
 "Yaas, sir!"
 The Head glanced at the telegram and frowned.
 Arthur Augustus turned to the door, and then turned back.
 "I twust, sir—"
 "You may go, D'Arcy!"
 "Thank you vewy much, sir!"
 And Arthur Augustus left the room.
 The Head looked frowningly at the telegram, and read it aloud.
 "Dear me!" said Mrs. Holmes. "The reckless lad! So he has run away from home!"
 "It appears so."
 "And Mr. Gore imagines that he may come back to St. Jim's," said Mr. Railton. "I do not quite understand that."
 "Nor I," said the Head, stirring his tea. "The boy never showed any affection for the school while he was here; and he must know that I should not receive him if he came back."
 "He may have had a very unpleasant reception at home."
 "No doubt. And I must say that he fully deserved it."
 "Yes; that is certainly true."
 "If he reappeared here, I should send him back to his home at once, of course," said Dr. Holmes. "I cannot understand Mr. Gore's suspicion that he may be here. It is quite inexplicable to me."
 And the Head looked perplexed all through his breakfast. Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus returned to the door, and tendered the Head's sixpence to the telegraph boy, and surprised Blake by his cheerful smile.
 "Not licked?" ejaculated Blake.
 "Certainly not, deah boy! I explained the whole mattah to Dr. Holmes, and, of course, as a gentleman, he took my word."
 Blake snorted.
 "Well, you've got off jolly cheap, you ass! I suppose it's fool's luck."
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Oh, come into breakfast! Fancy Gore having run away from home!"
 "Yaas! Cuwious, isn't it?" said Arthur Augustus.
 But there was a peculiar smile upon his face as he spoke that Blake did not understand until afterwards.

CHAPTER 10. No Information!

THAT George Gore had run away from home, and that his father was coming down to St. Jim's about it, was soon known all over the school.

Blake and D'Arcy, as they had larned it inadvertently from the Head's telegram, did not feel justified in speaking of it, and they kept their own counsel; but they soon found that it was no secret.

Mr. Railton had mentioned the matter to several of the prefects, and asked them to inquire among the boys if anything had been seen of Gore about the school. That inquiry, of course, placed the whole school in possession of the facts.

That Gore had acted like a rascal, and had richly deserved being expelled, everyone fully agreed. Even his former chum, Mellish, had nothing to say for him; though it was fully believed that the only thing Mellish blamed him for was being found out. But though the School House fellows would have sent Gore to Coventry if he had remained at St. Jim's, the fact that so heavy a punishment had fallen upon him disarmed their resentment. It was the old feeling, natural to British boys, of not hitting a fellow when he was down. Gore was down; and so the other fellows were greatly inclined to forget his rascality, and to wish that he had been given another chance.

And where was Gore?

The chap was certainly in trouble somewhere. The

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fellows who had seen his father declared that they would rather go away to sea than go home to him with a tale of being sacked from school.

Gore senior was the stern parent in person. Gore had been at home about a week, and in that week he had probably been made to feel keenly that he had done the worst possible thing for himself in going home at all. If things had been made very hot for him, his thoughts would naturally turn to the school he had left, and he would wish to return!

That was impossible. But if he had run away from home, it was possible enough that he might have wandered back to the only other spot that was like home to him.

Yet he must have known that the Head would have no resource but to send him back if he came. He had been expelled from St. Jim's—and a sentence of expulsion was not easily reversed.

"Can't help feeling sorry for the chap," Tom Merry remarked when he heard the news. "I wonder where he's gone!"

"He hasn't been seen about here, anyway," said Monty Lowther. "I shouldn't wonder, though, if he turned up to borrow some tin to travel off with."

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"That's quite possible. If we should see him—"

"We won't give him away."

"Well, no, we couldn't. At the same time it would be a serious business to stand by a fellow who runs away from home. A chap has no right to do a thing like that."

"N-no. But Gore never seemed to consider whether he had a right to do a thing before he did it," grinned Lowther. "But I don't suppose we shall see him."

"I hope we don't."

"We shall have the pleasure of seeing his governor," said Manners. "I hear that he's coming to-day."

"We'll be in the quad to see him."

Kildare and Darrell came along, and they stopped the Terrible Three.

"Hold on, Merry! I want to speak to you," said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Go it, kid!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Have you seen anything of Gore since he was sacked?"

"No, Kildare."

"Heard anything of him?"

"No."

"Know any fellow who has?"

"Not that I know of!" Tom Merry laughed. "I'm not the fellow Gore would be likely to come to, you know. We were on jolly bad terms."

"I don't know. You're the good-natured sort of young ass who would help him, although you were on bad terms."

"Thank you!"

"Not at all. I hear that he chummed up chiefly with Mellish of the Fourth, but Mellish wouldn't be likely to stand by a chap in trouble."

"Well, no."

Kildare and Darrell passed on. The two Sixth-Formers caught sight of the chums of Study No. 6 in the quadrangle, and bore down upon them. Blake, Herries, and Digby stood their ground, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy moved off.

"Pway excuse me a moment, deah boys!" he said. "I'm goin' to have a look at Mellish's white wabbits."

And he walked away rather quickly.

The two prefects stopped to speak to the Fourth-Formers, taking no particular notice of the departure of Arthur Augustus. It was really Blake whom they wanted to question. Blake knew what was coming.

"Have you seen anything of Gore, you kids?"

"Not a hide nor a hair," said Blake solemnly.

"You don't know anything about him?"

"Nothing, Kildare."

"That's all right."

The prefects strolled back to the School House. They had questioned half the fellows at St. Jim's, and they felt that they had done their duty.

"It's all right," said Kildare. "The fellow hasn't come back. Gore senior is off his rocker!"

And he made that report to the Housemaster, omitting, of course, the remark concerning Gore senior.

CHAPTER 11. Gore's Father!

"**T**HERE he is!"

There was a rattle of wheels in the quadrangle, and a clatter of hoofs on gravel. The station cab from Rylcombe was well known at St. Jim's, and at the sight of it the fellows knew that Gore senior had arrived.

There was a rush from all quarters to see him.

It was close upon time for afternoon lessons, but there

was time for a look at the stern parent before going into the class-rooms.

Mr. Gore jumped out of the cab, ran up the steps of the Head's house, and rang and knocked. The knock could be heard half across the quad; the ring was audible outside the house. Mr. Gore was evidently a gentleman of strong character, and did everything in a heavy-handed way.

He was a short, stoutish gentleman, with a red moustache and fierce little eyes. He wore a black frock-coat and a silk hat and a grey waistcoat. He looked like a prosperous merchant, and a man who could drive a hard bargain in business. Nobody would have suspected him of experiencing any tender emotions, and he was about the last man in the world whom anybody would have gone to in a time of trouble for counsel or assistance.

He was admitted to the house and lost to view of the interested crowd of St. Jim's juniors.

"Nice-looking chap!" said Monty Lowther. "You can see the marks on his chivvy where he has been weeping over his prodigal son."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"More likely to see marks on the prodigal son!" grinned Blake. "Fancy going home to that chap and telling him you've been sacked from school."

"Phew!"

"I can imagine his face, and poor old Gore's. Gore was a waster, but you can't help feeling sorry for him."

"Yaas, watah!"

"And I'm not surprised that he's done a bunk from a nice, gentle, forgiving parent like that," Monty Lowther remarked.

"What-ho!"

While the fellows were passing observations, many of them extremely unflattering to Gore's parent, that gentleman was shown into the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes greeted him courteously. He did not take to Gore senior personally, but he could feel for him in his worry for his reckless son.

Mr. Gore sat down upon one chair, and deposited his silk hat and his umbrella on another. Then he looked straight at the Head, with so direct a stare that Dr. Holmes felt a little uncomfortable.

"Now, sir!" said Mr. Gore.

"Yes," said Dr. Holmes.

"I have called about my son, sir."

"Very good."

"You had my wire, sir?"

"This morning."

"Then you expected me?"

"Certainly!"

"Have you any news for me?"

"None, I am sorry to say."

"Huh!"

Mr. Gore fired off his questions and remarks like a succession of very rapid pistol-shots. Dr. Holmes, who was used to more leisurely manners, was a little disturbed and confused. He could make allowances, however, for the grieved parent's natural feelings in the circumstances, and a little excitement was pardonable.

"Then my son has not returned to the school?"

"No, Mr. Gore."

"I am surprised."

"Indeed! Have you any reason to suppose that he would come here?" asked the Head mildly.

"Huh! If I had no reason to suppose that he would come here, sir, should I have been likely to come here myself?" said Mr. Gore.

"I—I presume not."

"My time is valuable, Dr. Holmes."

"I—I suppose so."

"What will be the state of my office this morning?" demanded Mr. Gore, as if the Head of St. Jim's ought to be well informed on that subject. And he paused as if for a reply, and blew his nose violently.

"I—I really do not know!" stammered Dr. Holmes, feeling that he was called upon to say something.

"Never, sir," said Mr. Gore—"never during the past twenty years, have I missed appearing in my private office at exactly ten o'clock in the morning."

"Dear me!"

"But stay! There was one occasion—the occasion of the funeral of Mrs. Gore, sir. On that occasion I was two hours late."

"Indeed!"

"This, sir, is the second occasion. And what will be the state of my office?"

"I—I hope things will go on as—as well as can be expected."

"Yes, sir. I hope so, sir; but I have no confidence that such will be the case. The master's eye, sir—the master's eye, sir. I have always found, sir, that even the best-trained

clerks will waste whole minutes when they do not fear observation."

"Really!"

"Yes, sir. Utterly regardless of the fact that they are paid for every minute of their time which is spent in their place of business, they will waste whole minutes. The waste of a single second is, of course, sheer dishonesty."

"Dear me!"

"So I must get back as quickly as I can, sir."

"Pray do not let me detain you, Mr. Gore!" said the Head, who would have been very glad for his terrible visitor to get back to town as quickly as possible.

"Business first, Dr. Holmes!"

"Ah, yes, of course!"

"About my boy, sir. You have expelled him from this school."

"I was unfortunately compelled, on account of—"

"Exactly. You have explained the whole circumstances in your letter to me," said Mr. Gore. "I was greatly surprised."

"It must have come as a shock—"

"The crass stupidity of it in a son of mine—the utter lack of any grasp of the mere rudiments of business," said Mr. Gore. "I can understand a man forging a cheque. He gains a certain amount of cash. It is wrong—it is criminal; but there is common sense in it. My son imitated a schoolboy's handwriting, not for the purpose of obtaining money—which would have been criminal—but for the purpose of playing a childish prank! The boy is a fool, sir!"

Dr. Holmes coloured.

"I hope, sir, that you do not consider that it would have been better for Gore to imitate Tom Merry's hand for the purpose of obtaining money?"

"Certainly not; it would have been more businesslike, that is all. The Gores, sir, have always been a business-like family."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, sir. It was a great blow to me—a great blow. Such an utter lack of business ability in a son of mine amazes me—astounds me."

The Head was silent. He had not expected Mr. Gore to see the matter quite from this point of view, and he did not quite know what to make of it. The business aspect of the case seemed to trouble Mr. Gore much more than the moral aspect.

"When I had your letter, sir, I was amazed. I was shocked. When my son returned, I—"

"I trust you were not unduly harsh with him, sir," said the Head hastily.

"Not unduly so, certainly. I considered it my duty to flog him, and I gave him a very severe flogging!"

"Ah!"

"Curiously enough, this seemed to have only the effect of making him more sullen."

"Very curious, indeed!" said Dr. Holmes, with a tinge of sarcasm that was wholly lost upon Mr. Gore.

"I kept him upon bread-and-water for three days, and did not allow him to leave his room for that period. I thought that would be an excellent opportunity for him to reflect upon his faults."

"And then?"

"Then, sir, when he was released from his room he had the astounding impudence to run away from home, sir!"

"Amazing!"

"Yes, sir. I am afraid that he had been treated with undue levity at this school, and was annoyed at a little wholesome severity."

"Possibly so."

"He has now been absent several days. It did not occur to me that he might have come back to school. The thought never crossed my mind, in fact, as I knew, of course, that you would not receive him here."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Of course I should not, Mr. Gore."

"Exactly. It was only when an inquiry agent whom I employed found that he had taken a ticket on the railway for Rylcombe that I suspected."

"And when was that?"

"The day before yesterday, sir. My agent, however, only discovered the fact last night. Hence my wire to you this morning."

"I see."

"If he had come here, you would have detained him, of course, and communicated with me?"

"Immediately."

"But as he is undoubtedly in hiding somewhere, it occurred to me that somewhere near this school, in the haunts he is familiar with, would be a probable place."

"If you are sure he came in this direction—"

"I am certain!"

"Then it is very probable."

(Continued on page 19.)

PEPPY PARS FROM—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! What do you think of the old paper this week? Grand, isn't it? And, believe me, it will be every bit as good next week! Let me tell you just what I have in store for you. Firstly, there will be another ripping long complete school yarn by that grand author, popular Martin Clifford. The yarn is called:

"RUCTIONS AT ST. JIM'S!"

and tells how Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess, comes to stay at the school for a while. Unfortunately, the old lady gets it into her head that every boy should be taught housework—and then the fun starts! It's a grand yarn, I assure you! Jerry Garrison and his pal Fusty will again be to the fore in their efforts to settle with Jasper Privett in further chapters of our gripping Western thriller:

"RED STAR RANGER!"

Potts, the inimitable office boy, will be on parade again to supply you with a good laugh, while eight more laughs will appear in my column of readers' jokes, for each of which I pay half-a-crown. In addition, there will be another page from my notebook.

GRAND NEWS!

Here's a great piece of news for all readers of the GEM, who are going to the seaside this summer. Messrs. Cadbury Bros., of Bournville, have contributed no fewer than a quarter of a million bars of Dairy Milk Chocolate for our readers who buy their copies of the GEM from beach sellers, kiosks, and other places at most of our popular seaside resorts. In addition to this they are contributing pound boxes of their delicious assorted chocolates as prizes at our Concert Party, Cinema, and Gala Competitions. What ho, fellows! What a chance for you! Don't forget about this splendid offer when you go to the sea, and tell all your pals about it, too!

AN HONOURED STAMP COLLECTOR!

Here is a par of special interest to all you fellows who collect stamps. The other day, at the Philatelic Congress in London, Ronald H. Douglas, of Derby, read a paper on "Microphilately—Is It Good or Bad?" Sounds a pretty stiff sort of subject, doesn't it? Yet Ronald is only sixteen years old, and is the first fellow under twenty-one who has ever read a paper at such a congress. Everyone enjoyed Ronald's paper, and it was said to be the most interesting and THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,324.

amusing one that was read Pretty good for sixteen—can any of you beat it?

A REAL HERO!

Here is the story of a real hero. He is a Frenchman and the guard of a railway train. His train was racing towards Paris, when, about fifty miles from its destination, the fireman's clothes caught fire. The unfortunate man tried hard to beat out the flames, but in vain, and as a last resource, he jumped into the water tank which is behind the engine. In doing so his head struck a bridge and he was killed instantly. Meanwhile, the driver's clothes were also on fire, and after he had failed to extinguish the blaze, he leapt from the train and was killed.

The guard soon realised from the speed of the train that something was wrong, and it wasn't long before he was sure that there was no one in charge of the train. Without a thought for the terrible risk he was running, he climbed out on to the roof of his carriage, and slowly but surely began to work his way along the train. It was terribly tiring and risky work, but the plucky guard's one idea was to save the passengers in the train. Eventually he reached the engine and clambering into the cabin he applied the brakes, and brought the train to a standstill. Afterwards, he said that his journey along the carriage tops had been like a nightmare, but he stuck to it all the same. Bravo, guard!

HE JUST SMILED!

He was only four years old, and he was riding in a tram-car. Suddenly the tram gave a terrible lurch, left the rails, swung broadside across the road, and then crashed on to its side. A pillar-box and some railings on which it fell pierced the side of the tram, and stuck up inside. The four-year-old boy laughed, while others screamed. Men rushed to extricate the passengers, and began hacking away at the woodwork. The boy still laughed. When the workers succeeded in getting some of the passengers out, one of them was carrying the boy, and he was laughing louder than ever, and the last that was heard of him was his cheery laugh as he was carried away from the scene of the crash! Incidentally, the postman couldn't collect the letters until the whole of the pillar-box had been cut away.

HIS LAST GALLOP!

Hugh O'Neil was a grand old racehorse. In all his life he had run in a hundred and twenty-seven races, and he had won twenty-seven of them. He was a faithful old warrior, who liked nothing better than a good, hard race, and whatever the result, he always did his best. A month

or two ago, at the age of sixteen, he was sold to a farmer for hunting. The farmer found him a splendid horse, but he was a bit too fast for the country despite his age. Then his new owner began to suspect that the old horse's heart was going, so he decided to hunt him no more. The other evening he turned him out into a field with three young horses for company. Suddenly the old warrior gave a whinny, and set off round the field with the youngsters trailing hopelessly in the rear. At full speed he went round the field, then pulled up under a tree, lay down—and died. He had had his last gallop.

IN THE SHADOW OF EXPULSION!

Do you know Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's? Whether you do or not, you must read of his stirring adventures in to-day's magnificent extra-long yarn in the "Nelson Lee Library." Handy is a champion chump—always getting into trouble, mostly of his own making! But for once in a way poor old Handy finds himself properly in the soup—no less than the "sack"—for something he hasn't done! What happens to him? Read this dramatic complete story of human interest, telling of Willy Handforth's fight to save his brother from expulsion. You will thoroughly enjoy every word of it.

THE WEEK'S BEST STORY.

A man went to an auction sale at Wickford. He was not a big buyer, but he thought he might pick up a few books for a shilling or two, and he wanted some books, so he had a look round.

After a bit a bundle of books came up for sale, and he bid a shilling. No one else seemed to want them, so he got them for his first bid. He was quite satisfied. He went home and undid the bundle and one by one he began to look through the books. Suddenly he stopped and stared in amazement. Between the leaves of a book he was examining, was a £1 note! He turned over the remaining pages rapidly—and found another nine notes. So he bought a bundle of books and £10 for a shilling! Lucky man!

ODDS AND ENDS!

A Rayleigh householder went away for a holiday and when he came back he found a large live owl perched on his mantel-piece!

Captain Frank Hawks, known as the Human Bullet, has recently broken his own Transcontinental flight record by flying from Los Angeles to New York in 13 hours 27 minutes.

Siamese banks keep monkeys for testing coins. The animals are trained to bite the coins, and if their teeth make marks on the coins, they are rejected!

HE WANTED TO SEE THE SEA!

Douglas Priest, of Whyteleafe, Surrey, is only ten years old, but the other day he achieved a remarkable feat on a fairy cycle. I should think it is safe to say that Douglas broke the world's long-distance fairy-cycle record! He wanted to see the sea, so he mounted his cycle and started riding towards Brighton. By evening, tired but cheerful, Douglas reached Brighton—with a puncture. The police looked after him and sent him home again. But Douglas had seen the sea—and ridden forty miles!

YOUR EDITOR.

The Secret of the Tower!

(Continued from page 17.)

"Very good. But you have heard nothing of him?"

"Nothing."

"I presume you have made inquiries since receiving my telegram?"

"Yes. I have directed the prefects to inquire among the boys, but it appears that no one has seen your son, or heard anything from him."

"Has every boy in the school been questioned?"

"Probably not; but most must have been."

"It would be more satisfactory if every individual boy were questioned."

"I will ask the prefects to make further inquiries, if you wish," said Dr. Holmes, not without a slight touch of impatience.

"Thank you! I should be glad if you would." Mr. Gore looked at his watch. "I have to catch the two-thirty from Rylcombe; my time is valuable."

It did not seem to occur to Mr. Gore that Dr. Holmes' time was valuable, too.

"Then I will not detain you."

"I have not finished yet, Dr. Holmes. I wish to refer to the question of my son's return here. If you could receive him back—"

"Really, Mr. Gore."

"He has been severely punished. It was only a prank, after all!"

"It was a very serious prank!"

"I have punished him, too. If he does not come back to St. James', I shall send him into business immediately; but I should prefer him to finish his education at a Public school. It is a question, of course, for you to decide. I might suggest that a little wholesome severity would be useful. I shall certainly be very severe with him for leaving the home of a kind and indulgent parent in this way." Mr. Gore's lips closed like an iron vice. "He thought his last flogging severe. He shall have reason to think it was a very light one!"

"Really, sir?"

"As you refuse to take him back, I may as well take my departure—"

"One moment, sir. I—I have not refused—"

"Your consent, then?"

"Pray give me a—a moment to think—"

"Ah! I observe that you have not formed business habits, sir; but it is a matter of training, I suppose," said Mr. Gore. "I never require time to think, sir. How long do you require to think? I can remain with you another four minutes if necessary."

"I—I should prefer a day or two—"

Mr. Gore stared.

"Really, sir! I really could not remain here a day or two while you think—"

"N-no, of course not," said the Head hurriedly. "Nothing of the sort. I should be far from expecting that—far from—from wishing it. I will write to you."

"Oh, very well!"

"Meanwhile, if I hear anything of your son, I will inform you at once."

"Very good! If he turns up here you can keep him, if he is to stay; and send him to me if you decide not to take him back."

"That is settled, then!"

"Very good, sir! Good-bye!"

The Head bade his visitor good-bye with a great deal of pleasure. The station cab rolled off with Mr. Gore, destined to arrive at his office late for the second time in twenty years.

Dr. Holmes almost gasped for breath when he was gone. Mr. Railton came in and looked at him with a slight smile.

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Holmes. "I—I have had a most disturbing interview, Mr. Railton. Mr. Gore is—Really, he seems to me to bear a strong resemblance to a—a whirlwind, or—or a hurricane."

"I have noticed it, sir. He is a very businesslike man."

"Indeed he is. He wishes me to take Gore back into the school, Mr. Railton."

The Housemaster looked grave.

"That would be a serious step, sir."

"I am aware of it. But I am greatly inclined to try the experiment. In the first place, I think the lesson may have a lasting effect upon Gore."

"Yes, that is probable."

"In the second place, he seems to have been somewhat severely punished at home, in addition to the punishment he had here."

"So I should imagine, from Mr. Gore's look."

"And great severity awaits him when he is recaptured now—unless I take him back. Of course, I should not suggest allowing him to pass unpunished after running away from home. Yet it is possible to be too severe."

"Quite true."

"And—and—" Dr. Holmes hesitated. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Railton—this is quite between ourselves, of course—as a matter of fact, it occurs to me that perhaps Gore's home training, and—and home influence has not been of the best possible, and—and—and that may have something to do with his extremely unpleasant character. I think, upon the whole, that I am inclined to give Gore another chance!"

And Mr. Railton nodded.

"I agree with you, sir."

"Then if he is found he shall come back to St. Jim's. I am anxious about the foolish lad. Do you think it possible, Mr. Railton, that he is lurking in the neighbourhood of the school?"

"Quite possible, sir."

"Then if he could be found—"

"I will do my best to find him, sir, and I think I can contrive it by enlisting some of the juniors in the search. To-morrow is a half holiday, and I am sure most of the boys would gladly spend it in looking for Gore."

"A very good idea, Mr. Railton. Dear me, I feel quite disturbed still, and I sincerely hope that it will not be necessary for Mr. Gore to visit the school again on this matter."

CHAPTER 12.

The Mysterious Light Again!

TOM MERRY yawned, and sat up in bed. It was very dark in the Shell dormitory, and Tom Merry hadn't the faintest idea what hour of the night or morning it might be.

It was quite dark still, and the hero of the Shell listened for the next chime from the clock tower.

Why he had awakened he could not tell. He had been dreaming—a curious dream in which the burglar who had broken into School House a week or two before was mixed up with the mysterious light in the tower, and both with the unexplained locking of the study door the previous night.

He had started out of the dream into a wakeful mood. That strange happening of the previous night had not been explained. Tom Merry was still ignorant of the identity of the joker who had locked him up in Study No. 7. The owner of that study was ignorant of who it was that had unscrewed his lock; the Terrible Three maintaining a discreet silence on the subject.

"Groooogh!" murmured Tom Merry, as he sat up in bed. "I wonder what's woke me up? That dream, I suppose. I wonder if there's a light in the old tower to-night?"

The thought was enough to make him get out of bed. It was the lingering thought of that mysterious light which had made him wakeful, probably.

He tumbled out of bed, and pulled a washstand to the nearest window, mounted upon it, and looked out.

From this window, as from most of the windows of the School House, there was a good view of the ivy-mantled tower.

Tom Merry drew a quick breath as he looked. From that window he could see the light—pale and flickering as before, it streamed out into the dusk of the quadrangle.

"Phew! It's there!"

Tom Merry gazed steadily at the light.

What could it mean?

Burglars, or any lawless intruders into the precincts of St. Jim's, seemed out of the question. They could have no business in the ruined tower; nor could they possibly be supposed to come there, in any case, two nights in succession.

It could hardly be a tramp who had taken up his abode there, either. Tom Merry had thought of exploring the old tower during the day, but the big door on the spiral staircase had been wedged fast somehow, barring access to it.

In the darkness and silence of the night a strange and eerie thought came into Tom Merry's mind.

Was it the ghost?

If tradition was to be believed, the old tower was haunted by the spectre of a murdered monk, and the mysterious light was the sign that the ghost was walking.

In the sunshine of day the idea would have seemed absurd enough, doubtless, but in the still and creepy hours of midnight it was not so absurd.

CHAPTER 13.

The Mystery of Arthur Augustus!

Tom Merry felt a shiver run down his back. But the next moment he dismissed the thought.

"It's rot!" he muttered. "There are no ghosts. It's some fellow playing a trick, and I'm jolly well going to look into it."

He crept back to Lowther's bed, and woke his chum with a gentle shake.

Lowther started and yawned.

"Wharrer marrer?"

"There's a light in the tower again."

"Lemme alone!"

"Wake up!"

"Grooh!"

Tom Merry shook him again.

"I say, Monty, old chap, I want to go to the tower and investigate."

"Go, then!"

"Aren't you coming with me?"

"Rats; no!"

"Your mistaken; you are!"

And Tom Merry hauled the bedclothes off Lowther's bed. The junior started up with a yell of wrath.

"You fearful ass!"

"Get up, then!"

"Tain't rising-bell!"

"I want you to come with me."

"I'll jolly well give you a thick ear, you ass!"

"Oh, come on!"

"What's the row there?" came a voice from Harry Noble's bed, as the Australian junior sat up. "Who's that yapping?"

"It's Lowther! I'm waking him up. We're going out."

"Nice time for a stroll."

"There's a light in the haunted tower, and we're going to investigate," said Tom Merry. "You coming, Kangy?"

"Good egg! I'm on!"

And the Cornstalk jumped out of bed, and began to dress.

Lowther dressed himself, too.

Manners was snoring with suspicious regularity. He never snored, as a rule, and his regular snore awoke suspicion.

"Call Manners, Kangaroo!"

"He's fast asleep."

"Stick this pin into him!"

"Hallo!" said Manners, waking up suddenly. "You chaps going out?"

"Yes; and so are you."

"It's a chilly night."

"Then don't make me squeeze a wet sponge over you, or you may catch cold."

And Manners took the hint and rose peaceably.

The four Shell fellows were soon dressed, and they quietly left the dormitory.

From a window on the landing they had a view of the tower, and they looked out to see if the light was burning. It was still there.

From a narrow casement about half-way up the ruined structure it flickered and gleamed out from the network of ivy tendrils.

"That looks jolly mysterious!" muttered Noble.

"It must be a joke; somebody playing ghost."

"Hardly."

"It can't be anything else."

"But if a chap plays ghost it's usually to scare somebody. Now the chap who's lighted that glim in the tower doesn't know that anybody's awake to see it."

"N-no, I suppose not."

"So he's not playing ghost. I suppose he couldn't be playing ghost simply for his own amusement, could he?"

"It may be a feed, or something," suggested Lowther.

"Some sort of giddy revelry by night, you know."

Tom Merry started.

"My hat! That's quite possible. Some secret grubbing business, you know. Perhaps the New House chaps."

"If so, there will be a raid on the grub," said Kangaroo.

They descended the stairs quietly. The quarter to midnight had rung out, and the House was very silent, sunk in sleep.

But as they reached the lower landing Tom Merry gave a sudden jump.

"Hold on!" he whispered. "Listen!"

"What is it?"

"Listen!"

From the stairs they had just descended came a sound of cautious footsteps. Hidden in the darkness, someone was steadily descending the stairs.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,324.

THE Shell fellows felt their hearts beat hard. There was something creepy and eerie in that stealthy sound of footsteps in the deep darkness of the staircase.

"Who—what was it?"

Lowther leaned towards Tom Merry in the darkness and put his lips close to Tom Merry's ear and whispered:

"It's the chap who was out last night."

"Yes, rather!"

"The chap who locked us in the Fourth Form study."

"What-ho!"

"Let's collar him!"

"Hold on! Might injure him—a sudden fright," said Tom Merry in the faintest of whispers. "It might be a master, too!"

"Phew!"

"It would be no joke to collar Linton in the dark."

"My only hat, no!" murmured Noble. And Manners chuckled silently.

"One of the masters may have seen the light, and may be going to investigate," whispered Tom Merry, "We'd better keep off the grass."

"Right-ho!"

"Quiet now—or he'll hear!"

The chums of the Shell remained quite silent, hardly breathing, as they crouched back into the shadow of the landing.

The stealthy footsteps came closer—closer—and passed.

The unseen—not so much as a shadow had been seen—went down the Fourth Form passage, and the stealthy footsteps died away.

"My hat!" whispered Tom Merry. "You can guess where he's going."

"Same as last night."

"Yes."

"He jolly well won't lock us in the study to-night."

"Not much."

"Let's go after the bounder," said Manners. "I jolly well want to bump him for that little trick. Come on!"

"Hush!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Hush—somebody coming!"

"My hat! The whole House seems to be walking to-night."

They crouched back again close to the wall. There were footsteps on the stairs—cautious, stealthy—but easily distinguished as belonging to two or three persons.

The footsteps came closer. Then they ceased, halting within half a dozen paces of the spot where the chums of the Shell had flattened themselves against the wall. The Shell fellows almost held their breath.

Then, through the gloom came the sound of a well-known voice—whispering, but easily recognisable.

"Which way has the bounder gone?"

Tom Merry gave a gasp.

"Blake!"

There was a sharp ejaculation in the darkness.

"Hallo! Who's that?"

"It's I," said Tom Merry. "It's all right."

"Tom Merry?"

"Right!"

"Who else?"

"Lowther and Manners and Noble."

"What are you kids doing out of bed at this time of night?" demanded Blake severely. "I don't know whether I ought to report this to your Form master."

"Oh, come off!" said Noble. "What are you doing out of bed yourselves?"

"Looking after Gussy."

"Gussy!"

"Yes. Have you seen him?"

"I can't see you," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"Well, has he passed you, then?"

"Somebody passed us."

"Good! That was the duffer."

"But I don't catch on. What has Gussy got up for?"

"Can't make it out, unless he's walking in his sleep. But he's been jolly mysterious lately," said Blake. "I'm keeping a fatherly eye on him; he was sleepy all day to-day, and it struck me he had been up the night before. You see, he's been keeping mysterious appointments with some spoofer, and we're looking after him. I thought at first it was Figgins & Co. trying to take a rise out of Study No. 6;

but I find that the spoofer, whoever he is, has been making Gus spend money. That looks serious. He's got himself tangled up in something, and we're going to untangle him."

"I see. Then it was Gussy who—" Tom Merry paused.

"Who what?"

"Never mind; go on."

"You were going to say something."

"I've changed my mind. Go on."
 "Oh, all right! I woke up several times to-night, and each time I looked at Gussy's bed. Last time I looked it was empty, and I thought I heard the door just closing."
 "I see."
 "So I called Herries and Dig—"
 "You jabbed your silly finger into my eye," growled Herries.
 "And bumped your fatheaded elbow on my nose," said the voice of Digby.
 "Well, I was in a hurry. I didn't want to lose Gussy."
 "You've lost him, all the same."
 "Tom Merry found him, though," said Blake, with a chuckle. "Which way did he go, kid?"
 "Down the Fourth Form passage."
 "Good! We'll go after him."
 "We'll come, too," said Tom Merry. "If Gussy's sleep-walking he'll have to be taken care of by an older and more sensible chap—"

"There was one last night, too," said Tom Merry. "We're going to investigate."
 "Good! It's curious! We'll come with you when we've caught Gussy and yanked the young ass back to bed."
 "This way, then."
 Quietly and cautiously the juniors made their way into the Fourth Form passage.
 Tom Merry uttered an ejaculation.
 "There's a light in Study No. 6!"
 "Phew!"
 "Gussy's in the study!"
 The juniors stared along the passage. There was certainly a light in Study No. 6.
 But even as they looked it went out, and there was the sound of a closing door.
 "He's coming back!" whispered Blake.
 "Wait for him, then."
 "Careful how you touch him, in case he's sleep-walking. It's dangerous to wake up somnambulists suddenly."

WHO'S WHO AT ST. JIM'S.



TOM MERRY.

Junior Captain of the School and leader of the School House juniors (despite anything that Blake may say)! Tom Merry is also Junior Captain of Cricket and Football, positions that he has fully earned for himself, as he is undoubtedly the finest athlete in the Junior School. His prowess at all sports and his cheery nature have made him universally popular with masters and boys alike, with the exception of one or two members of the "Smart Set," who don't like Tom because he has no use for their rotten habits. Tom's old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, is a well-known visitor to St. Jim's, where she causes much amusement for his chums and acute embarrassment for Tom by insisting in regarding him as a "delicate little boy." What would she say if she were told that Tom can lick any junior fellow in the School?

"Eh?"
 "Well, you can't be too careful, you know."
 "You had better be careful, I think; you are in great danger of getting a thick ear, Tom Merry."
 "This isn't a time for you kids to begin checking your elders."
 "Poo-o-o-o-oo!"
 "Look here, Blake—"
 "Oh, chase it!" said Kangaroo. "Let's get on with the washing!"
 "Well, if Blake will jaw—"
 "You haven't explained yet what you're up at this time of night for," said Blake suspiciously. "Was it a jape on us?"
 "Oh, no! We're ghost-hunting!"
 "You're what—whatting?"
 "Ghost-hunting."
 "If you're trying to be funny—"
 "Look there!"
 "Look at what?"
 "From the landing window, towards the old tower."
 Jack Blake looked, and uttered a suppressed exclamation. The light was still burning steadily in the old casement.
 "There's a light there!"

"Yes, rather!"
 The juniors drew close to the walls of the passage and waited. They naturally assumed that the swell of the Fourth, after finishing his business in the study—whatever it was—would return to the dormitory. In that case, he would have to pass them.
 But they listened in vain for his footsteps.
 Several minutes passed; but the silence of the passage was unbroken.
 "He's not coming back!" whispered Digby.
 "Looks like it."
 "Hark!"
 There was a faint click audible in the stillness.
 "My hat! He's opening a window on the ground floor!" breathed Blake excitedly. "He's going out! Come on!"
 The juniors ran along the passage and down the stairs. They found the lower hall window unfastened; but there was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
 "He's gone out!"
 "Yes. And we're jolly well going after him!"
 "I say, hold on a minute! Is it possible—"
 Tom Merry paused.

"Is what possible? Quick!"

"Can Gussy's going out have any connection with the light in the tower?"

"By Jove!"

"If we miss him in the quad we'll try for him that way," said Noble. "Come on!"

He pushed up the sash quickly, and the juniors dropped outside the window one by one.

The quad was very dark. Only a few stars glimmered in the black vault overhead, and they seemed only to render the darkness visible.

There was no sound—nothing to be seen. No sign of D'Arcy. Not a hint of a footstep.

Where was the swell of St. Jim's? Their eyes sought the old tower. From the casement the light was gleaming.

"Is he there? Ah, look!"

Tom Merry pointed.

The light in the tower was suddenly extinguished, and the ruin disappeared, swallowed up in the darkness.

CHAPTER 14.

A Startling Discovery!

TOM MERRY drew a deep breath.

"He's there, kids! Come on!"

"But—but what—"

"We shall soon see!"

They hurried towards the old tower. They knew the way well enough, but in the dark they had many a stumble before they reached it.

As they came closer they saw that the light, which had seemed to be extinguished, was only concealed by a cloth that had been dragged across the window. On closer view several stray beams of light were visible.

The door in the thick stone wall of the tower stood wide open.

The juniors entered it, and they found the door on the spiral staircase open, too. It had been wedged when Tom Merry tried to open it that afternoon. It was pretty clear now that it had been wedged on purpose from behind.

The juniors stepped quietly upon the winding stairs. As they ascended there came a glimmer of light from above. The lamp was still burning in the room there.

Was D'Arcy there?

Another minute would tell.

In single file the juniors pressed on up the staircase. There was a sudden clink as Lowther's foot slipped on a loose stone.

"My hat!"

Clink, clink, clink!

The stone was rolling down the steps, with a separate clink on each one. The noise was slight, yet in the intense quietude, and to the startled ears of the juniors, it had a sound like thunder.

There was a startled exclamation from the lighted chamber above, the open doorway of which the juniors could now see on a little stone landing.

A form came quickly into the lighted doorway, and they recognised the swell of the School House.

"Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stared down at the group of juniors in blank astonishment.

"Gussy! So you're not walking in your sleep!" exclaimed Blake.

"Certainly not, Blake!"

"Then what the deuce are you doing here?" demanded Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus reddened.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We've come to investigate," said Noble, taking a step upward. "Get on, you chaps!"

Arthur Augustus gave a slight ejaculation, and stepped down one step from the landing. He blocked the path of the ascending juniors.

"Hold on, deah boys!"

"You're in the way, Gussy!"

"Yaas, watah!"

"Well, get out of it, then, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"We're coming up—"

"Pway wetiah, deah boys! I do not wish you to come up!"

The juniors stared at him.

D'Arcy was evidently very much in earnest, and, without using force, they could not get past him. He blocked the way as he stood on the top step, and he had a hand on the stone blocks at either side of the narrow staircase.

"Off your rocker?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I wefuse to answer such a fwivolous question, Lowthah."

"We're coming up," said Tom Merry. "We saw the light in the tower, and we've come to look for the ghost."

"There's no ghost, deah boy."

"I know there isn't. But there's somebody here."

"Yaas, watah! I'm here!"

"Somebody else, too!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Come, Gussy! Get out of the way! Blessed if I can make you out. But we've come here to investigate, and we're going to clear up the mystery."

"There's no mystewy, deah boy!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not to you, perhaps. But there is to us. And we're going to clear it up."

"Besides, we've got to look after you!" said Blake severely. "We've been given a lot of trouble over you the last day or two. You've jolly well got to explain yourself."

"I wefuse to explain myself!"

"Look here—"

"Wats!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Herries. "Shove him aside! We're looking into this for his own good, and I must say I consider Gussy ungrateful!"

"I should be vewy sowwy to be consided ungwateful—"

"Then explain yourself, you boulder!"

"Let us pass!"

"I am sowwy, but it is imposs!"

"Look here—"

"I beg you to wetiah."

"We're jolly well not going to retire," said Tom Merry warmly. "I don't want to have to tread on you, Gussy—"

"I should uttably wefuse to be twodden on!"

"But I shall have to do so if you don't clear out of the way!"

"Wats!"

"Rush when I saw the word!" said Tom Merry, looking round. "If Gussy isn't out of the way by the time I say 'Three!' rush him!"

"What-ho!"

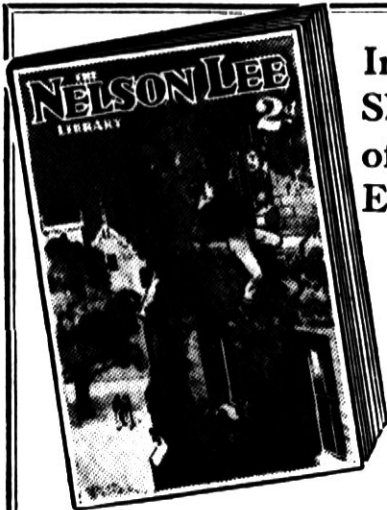
"I wefuse to be wushed! I—"

"One!"

"I wogard you as a set of wottahs! Undah the circs—"

"Two!"

"I shall wesisit you by force—"



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Shadow
of
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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Three!"

"Weally, deah boys— Ow!"

The juniors rushed up the stairs.

Arthur Augustus was borne backwards by the rush and deposited in a sitting posture on the little stone landing, with a bump that made him gasp.

The juniors rushed past him into the lighted room. Then they uttered exclamations of surprise.

The chamber was empty!

On a stone ledge stood a lamp, burning. A large cloth had been pulled over the case. On the floor were plates, cups, saucers, knives and forks, and the remains of a meal, as well as a bag containing a quantity of provisions—the same bag that the Terrible Three had seen in Study No. 6. In the corner of the room were a heap of bedclothes—the sheets and blankets so new that they were evidently recent purchases.

There was little more to be seen.

The juniors gazed round the room in amazement. It was clear that someone had been using it to live in, and sleeping there, but whoever it was he was not visible now.

Why had D'Arcy guarded the room so obstinately?

"You uttah wottahs!" Arthur Augustus followed the juniors into the room. "You feahful boundahs! I—"

He broke off, and stared round the room with a surprise as great as that of Tom Merry & Co. It was plain that he also expected to see someone else there. Tom Merry tapped him on the shoulder.

"Who was here with you, Gussy?"

"I wefuse to weply."

"Where is he now?"

"I weally do not know."

Harry Noble laughed suddenly, and ran towards the heap of bedclothes in the corner. A suspicious bumpiness about them attracted his attention. There was certainly no one in the bed, but—

"Here he is!"

Noble stirred the bedclothes with his foot. Underneath them, hidden between the heap of blankets and the stone floor, a form wriggled.

"Come out!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come out, whoever you are!"

The bedclothes were thrown aside, and the hidden form revealed. A sullen, sulky face was turned to the juniors. There was a general exclamation of surprise.

"Gore!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Return of Gore!

"GORE!"

It was Gore! The cad of the Shell—the tellow who had been expelled!

The mystery was explained in a moment.

The juniors stared at Gore, and Gore stared at them. The cad of the Shell was scowling savagely. But his expression slowly changed.

"You've found me out!" he snarled.

"Bai Jove!"

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry. "We hadn't the faintest idea it was you here. Why didn't you have sense enough to keep the window covered?"

"How was I to know anybody would be up at this time?" growled Gore. "Besides, I left it to guide D'Arcy. When he got here he covered the window."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake. "So this is the giddy mystery. It was Gore you had that blessed letter from, Gussy?"

"There is no secwet about it now, deah boy."

"He had the colossal cheek to ask you to help him?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And it was Gore you went to meet—eh?"

"Yaas!"

"And you brought him here—"

"He came here latah that night."

"And that's where your tin went?"

"Well, I lent it to Goah, you know, to make some purchases. We put our heads togethah, you know, and decided that he could stay here for a bit, until things turned woud."

"D'Arcy was very decent," said Gore, with some feeling in his voice. "I know it was like my cheek to ask him, but I was desperat. There wasn't another chap in St. Jim's I would have asked—"

"You had your friends—"

Gore laughed bitterly.

"They would have done a lot, wouldn't they?"

"H'm! Not much, I suppose."

"I was weally vewy pleased to help Goah. The only thing

I didn't like about the business was appeawin' to back him up against pawental authority. But I explained to Goah that my helpin' him must not be undahatood as approvvin' of his wunnin' away fwom home."

"You fellows don't know what I've been through," said Gore huskily. "You don't know my father. He's not a bad sort, in his way. But he's as hard as nails: He gave me a licking. I've been flogged here; but what you get here was a joke to it."

"Phew!"

"Then I had three days' solitary confinement on bread and water."

"My hat!"

"And then I bolted."

"Well, I'm not surprised," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry; but you brought it on yourself, and we did our best for you when the row came."

"I know you did; and I shan't forget it, either," said Gore. "I treated you like a mean cad, and you tried to help me with the Head. It was jolly decent of you, and I shall remember it. I've had a rough time. I had hardly any money. I slept out of doors one night, and it rained. Ugh! Then I thought of St. Jim's. I daren't go home. I'll never go home. My pater would go for me baldheaded. I wouldn't mind so much if he was just a bad-tempored man. But it isn't that; he does it from a sense of duty. When a pater licks you from a sense of duty, you know how he lays it on."

And Gore groaned reminiscently.

"Yaas, wathah! I suppose it would be wuff."

"Then he's going to shove me into the office, and make me work my way up from the lowest position," said Gore. "I won't have it. I'd rather go to sea!"

"I'm sorry," said Tom Merry again. "I don't see what's to be done. I wish you could come back to St. Jim's—if you'd try to be decent."

"If I had another chance—"

"The Head isn't likely to change his mind," said Noble. "He had his back up awfully over that letter business."

"I was a silly ass," groaned Gore. "I—I never thought about it really, before I did it. It was a jape. I know it was a rotten sort of jape, but it never struck me that I was forging in imitating another chap's hand. Honest!"

"You must be a silly ass, Gore."

"I suppose I was a silly ass, or I shouldn't have got into a fix like this."

"Well, you needn't worry about our finding you out," said Tom Merry abruptly. "We won't tell about your being here, you may be sure of that."

"Yaas, wathah! You can rely upon honourable tweekment fwom these chaps, Gore."

Gore nodded eagerly.

"Thank you."

"I don't know what good it will do you to stay here, though," added Tom Merry. "You are bound to be discovered sooner or later."

"I—I suppose so."

"And what then?"

"I shall have to bunk, I suppose."

"Why not go back to your father?"

Gore shivered.

"If you knew my governor, you wouldn't suggest it," he said.

"It wouldn't be pleasant, I suppose—but it must come in the end."

"I'm not going home!"

"But how is it to end?"

"I'm not going—and I don't care!" said Gore doggedly. "I'm not going back to the gov'nor. If the Head won't let me return to St. Jim's, I shall go to sea. I'd rather go to sea than work in the office under the pater's eyes. You don't know my pater."

"Well, you can rely on us, as far as that goes. Only don't let that light be seen from the tower again. A master might see it any night—"

"A master has seen it," said a deep voice in the doorway.

Mr. Raiton stepped into the light. The juniors stared at him blankly.

Gore gave a groan, and collapsed against the stone wall in utter despair. The tears ran down his cheeks, very seldom thus moistened.

"It's all up!"

Mr. Raiton looked at him steadily.

"I half-expected to find you here, Gore. I caught sight of the light in the tower before it was covered up. It occurred to me that you might be, as your father supposed, lurking in the vicinity of the school. I did not expect to find so many of the boys of my House here at this hour."

"If you please, sir—"

"You need not explain, Merry; you did not subdue your voice, and I have heard enough of your words as I came here to enlighten me. Who has been supplying Gore with food in this place?"

D'Arcy stepped forward sturdily.
 "I have, sir."
 "Ah! You stole out at night to do so, I presume?"
 "Yaas, sir!"
 "And the others, I suppose, came to look for you. Very good. You boys may return to your dormitory, and I shall overlook this matter. As for you, Gore—"

"Oh, sir!"
 "I think you have been severely punished for your fault, serious as it was—"

"Won't you speak to the Head for me, sir?"
 "Do you deserve it, Gore?"
 The cad of the Shell hung his head.
 "No," he said, in a low voice—"no, I don't, sir! I—I'm not asking it because I think I deserve it. I—I don't know what will become of me if the Head doesn't take me back, sir."

Mr. Railton's face relaxed.
 "That is a better spirit, Gore. If you were sensible of the wrongdoing you have been guilty of, there would be hope of your amendment."

"I'd try to do better, sir. I—"
 "Very good! Dr. Holmes has almost decided to give you another chance; I think I may say that he will do so, if you show real signs of a desire to improve upon your past."

"Oh, sir!"
 "I can answer for it that you will be given a chance, at least; and it will depend upon yourself during the next few weeks whether you are allowed to remain at St. Jim's after this term."

The tears streamed down Gore's face.
 "Oh, sir, you shan't be sorry for this! I'll do my best—indeed I will, sir!"

"I hope so, Gore. You may now go to the Shell dormitory with Tom Merry. I will see you to the House."

And the School House master did not lose sight of the juniors till they were safely ensconced in their several beds.

When Mr. Railton had left them, Gore—very relieved and happy in mind—lay silent for some time.

When at last he spoke it was in a low and tremulous voice.

"Are you asleep, Merry?"
 Tom Merry came out of a doze.
 "Yaw-aw! Somebody speak?"

"Yes, I spoke. Sorry if I woke you up."
 "No harm done; I shall be asleep again jolly soon. Did you want to say anything?"

"Ye-es."
 "Go ahead!"
 "I—I—I—"

"What the dickens is the matter?" asked Tom Merry, puzzled.

"I was thinking of the future," said Gore quietly.
 "Oh! You are a funny merchant, to wake a chap up in the middle of the night and tell him you're thinking of the future!" said Tom Merry, in wonder.

"I—I— It doesn't matter. Good-night!"
 "But it does matter," said Tom, fully awake now.
 "What is it? Go ahead!"

"I—I—"
 "Go it!"
 "I was thinking—"
 "Yes?"
 "You've treated me awfully decently over this matter, Merry."

"Oh, is that all?"
 "So have the other chaps."
 "That's so."
 "Especially D'Arcy."
 "Yes; he's a good little ass!"
 "I—I think I'm going to try to run a bit straighter in future. That's what I wanted to say. I—I think I could do better if—if you helped me a bit."

"What-ho! I'll stand by you like a Dutch uncle."
 "I'm going to give up smoking—and playing the fool generally," said Gore. "I'm going to drop that rotten, silly bosh of a smart-set business. I'm going to play the game—if I can—"

"You can—if you try."
 "Do you think so?"
 "Sure of it, old son."
 "Well, I'm going to have a jolly good try," said Gore.
 "That's all."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "I'm with you. Keep it up, and it grows easier. Good-night, old son!"
 "Good-night!"

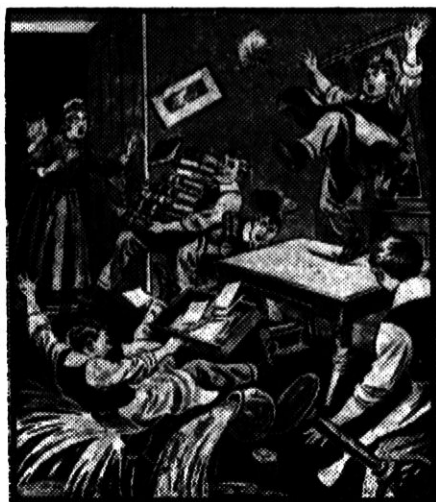
And there was silence in the Shell dormitory.

The return of Gore was something of a surprise to the St. Jim's fellows; but they were glad for him to have another chance. His father was informed, and replied by post, and was kind enough not to call personally, much to the relief of the Head.

Gore had his chance. It remained to be seen whether the fellow who had always been called a cad would be able to "run straight." But one thing was certain. In the effort to "play the game," he could count, at least, upon the friendly support of Tom Merry & Co.

THE END.

"RUCTIONS AT St. JIM'S!"



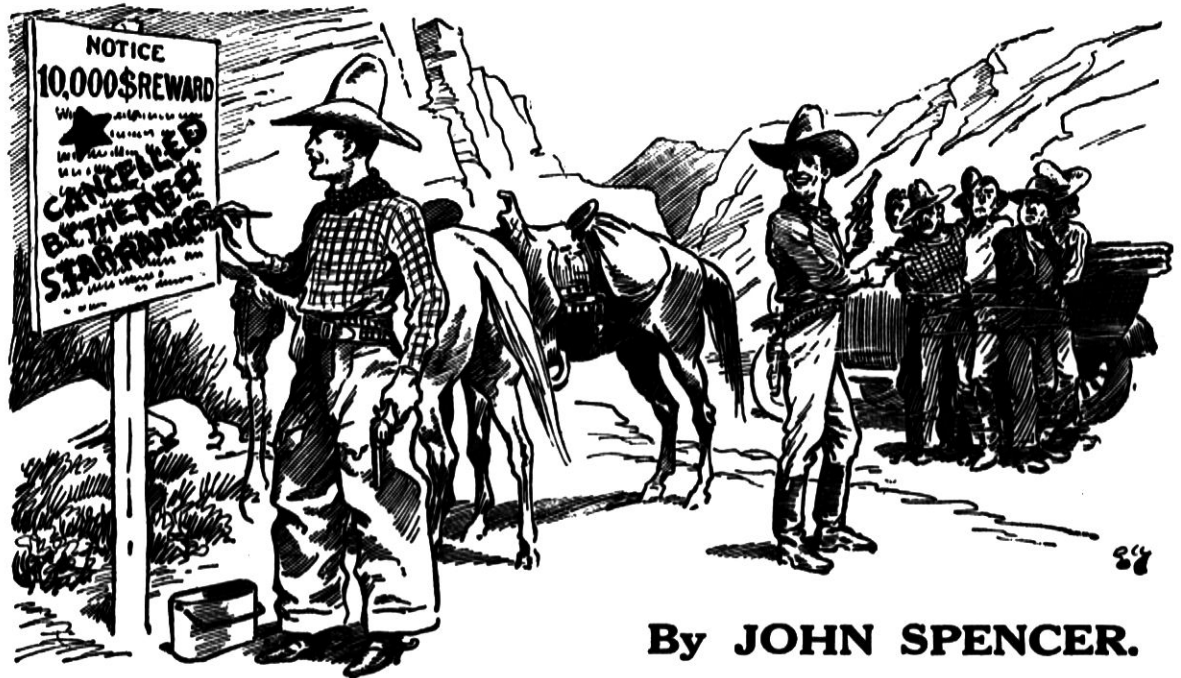
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RED STAR RANGER!



By JOHN SPENCER.

JERRY GARRISON and his pal FUSTY have been "framed" and outlaid by JASPER PRIVETT, the rascally Mayor of Red Rock. They know that Privett is in league with gunmen who have a stronghold in the mountains, and they are determined to find the place. Fusty takes Jerry to a secret hide-hole which Fusty thinks has only one way in—but Jerry finds another, and the two pals set out to explore it.
(NOW READ ON.)

The Second Skeleton!

BEHIND the pals frowned the mountains. In front of them swept the sky. They followed the trail at a walk, and soon saw ahead of them a way through the high rock walls, which might have been carved by a giant stonemason after infinite labour.

"Wonder what we shall find through there?" said Jerry, as he urged his pinto, Paintbox, to a faster pace.

He was right near the cutting when the pony shied, and, looking down to find the cause, gun in hand because he suspected a poison snake, Jerry saw a head grinning at him out of the lank, weedy grass.

It was the head of a skeleton.

Jerry sat motionless, his tanned face suddenly grown pale.

He did not hear Fusty on Jenny, the dun pony, range up close behind him, or know that Fusty, too, was looking down at the grinning skull.

It was Fusty's harsh voice which broke the spell.

"Lawks, Jerry! It's the other guy!"

Jerry swung himself out of the saddle and brushed the accumulated earth aside, so that he might the better view the man who lay rotting in the path.

The man had fallen upon his face. Even after all those years some fragments of leather lay about the feet and parts of the boot soles, and bits of tattered and crumbling rags.

Fusty helped Jerry to clear the earth aside, and so they found two things which sharpened the keen edge of interest. The first was a heap of gold dust, in which were imbedded several nuggets of fair size. And the second a revolver, so badly corroded and eaten with rust that the barrel, frame, and cylinder were joined together; the stock-plates, of bone, had fallen away from the setting.

The gun lay a foot or so from the skeleton's right hand.

Jerry continued the search with zeal, and, embedded in the stony ground he found two more revolvers, as rusty as the first, laying amid the crumbling leather of the holsters that once had held them.

Then Fusty yelled.

"Kid, I found another!"

Fusty held a fourth revolver up for Jerry to see, only

recognisable from its shape. He had found it in the ground close beside the skeleton.

"What's it all mean?" Fusty asked, as he bent over the pile of gold-dust and began to rake it up.

In all, the gold-dust and the nuggets must have weighed twenty pounds or more. Jerry filled a pocket. Fusty did the same. And all the while Jerry did some quick thinking.

"Got any theories, Joe?" he asked.

Fusty shook his grizzled head.

"This must be the other guy," he admitted; "but it's got me beat!"

"How's this fit, then?" expounded Jerry, his blue eyes shining as he pointed back along the path. "Number One was the guy who found the dust. Number two, whoever he was, and there's not a mark to show, knew he'd got it, and trailed him. Where Number One found the gold don't matter much now, but he clumb up to the pocket, intendin' to sleep thar."

"In which case he must have known of it," growled Fusty.

"Of course he knew of it, egg," said Jerry. "Probably went there thinking he was safe. Didn't know No. 2 was tracking him, of course. P'raps No. 1 laid him down to sleep. Then No. 2 stole on him, grabbed his guns, an' robbed him of the gold dust."

"And No. 2 killed No. 1?"

"Looks like, Fusty! No. 1 might have woke up. Then No. 2 drilled him and headed along here down the trail."

"How'd he kem to die, then?" asked Fusty, lips pursed in doubt.

"He'd shot No. 1. Supposin' No. 1 wasn't that dead, an' rose and stuck a knife through the other guy's back as he went? No 2 staggered to this spot, a stolen gun in one hand, the second gun in his side pocket, the bag of gold dust in his left hand, his own guns in his holsters. But when he reached this point he hadn't strength to go any farther, and pitched on to his face and died."

"And what became of the hoss?" Fusty asked sceptically.

"What hoss?"

"I said I found hoofmarks on the trail."

It was a facer, and, after thinking it over, Jerry Garrison shook his curly head.

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"Dunno what became of the hoss," he answered. "And there's none to tell. Maybe, the critter got away alone. Should say the shoemarks you found belonged to the pony rid by No. 1. No. 2 might have had a hoss, likewise, these being no parts for a man to foot it in. Anyway, that's my theory, pard, and it stands until you ken show me a better. Now what say we bury decently these old bones?"

"Nobody ken ride the trail until they're moved," said Fusty, nodding agreement. "And I'm sore to find out what's to see lower down."

They drew their knives and dug in the soil, scraping and hollowing out until they had made a grave deep enough to hold the remains.

Then, with bared heads, they lifted the skeleton and bore it to the hole, threw in the rusty weapons, and piled the earth on top. Then they carried as big boulders as they could lift between them and dropped them on the loose earth.

And that done, the trail was clear.

The Man on Guard!

JERRY and Fusty took their time, there being no need for hurry. The way between the rock walls was longer than they had anticipated, and when at last the trail opened out it broke into narrow ridges and plateaux much too dangerous to ride. From this point a boulder-strewn footway not as wide as a goat track led precipitously downward.

It certainly was a way out, but to descend it meant leading the horses, and there was no telling, once they started down it, if they would ever be able to get back should they find the path end abruptly in a sheer drop.

Jerry moved to the edge of a narrow ledge, and, dropping full length, with his hands gripping the brink, peered eagerly downward.

The position commanded a magnificent view. Jerry saw that the mountain face dropped several thousand feet below him, and as he slowly turned his head he saw nothing but mountain peaks, and cloud, and patches of blue sky, and—

"Fusty!" he hissed, stretching out his hand behind him. "Gimme your glasses!"

"Wherefore?" asked Fusty.

"Don't ask questions, you old punk!" snorted Jerry. "I'm slippin'. Want me to do a head dive? Gimme the glasses."

Fusty obeyed.

"See anything?" he asked, after Jerry had focused them and held them in one position for several long minutes.

"I see a-plenty, Fusty!" answered Jerry. "Sprawl your old carcass down alongside me if your rheumatics will allow, and set the glasses on a spot a little to the right of that spur where all the birds are flockin', and then tell me if you see anything."

Fusty obeyed, as cool as a cucumber, but with two red spots burning in his cheeks—a sure sign that his blood was racing. After looking a long while, Fusty withdrew the glasses from his eyes.

"Land snakes, Jerry!" he gasped. "That pint you showed me's a look-out post, and a sentry is standing there with a rifle on his shoulder. Ain't he? Or ain't he?"

Jerry nodded slowly his curly head.

"He sure is," he said. "That's what I made out. But as I might have been going nuts I wanted a confirmation." Jerry pushed himself back from the brink and sat cross-legged in the dust in front of the patient ponies, knowing that even the sentry's sharp eyes could not spot them from that look-out post below. "Old timer, what're we going to do?"

"A man with a gun—watchin'," growled Fusty. "Let's hear what you make of that, kid. I've my own idee."

Jerry's lips tightened, and he regarded his friend with solemn stare.

"Fusty," he said, "when I rode into Red Rock and called on you and Sheriff Jim Ross askin' for a job, the State Bank was robbed by bandits. In the shoot up that followed Sim Ross was killed and I shot Al Rivers, the gunman that got him. Then the vigilants got hold of me, and I was tried and sentenced to a hanging—the mayor, Jasper Privett's gang swearin' I killed the sheriff. And if you hadn't come to the calaboose, held up the gaoler, and helped me get away, I'd have cashed in long ago."

"Then Jasper Privett outlawed both of us, Fusty, set 10,000 dollars reward on our heads, dead or alive. And here we are—and what does that show?"

"Yo're tellin' me," grinned Fusty.

"It shows that it's as I always said it was—Jasper Privett, the Mayor of Red Rock, is a racketeer, a blackmailer, a bank robber, and a murderer. He's been hunting us,

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Fusty, because he scents we're dangerous, and he wants to kill us under shelter of the law before we blow up his little game. And that sentry down there"—Jerry pointed—"means that we've stumbled on the bandit stronghold we thought was up in the mountains."

"That's how I figgered it myself," said Fusty, with a grim smile. "And since we've found it—then what?"

"We'll go back to the arena, gather up our packs, and go down the trail with the ponies under cover of the dusk, when it's not likely the men on watch down there will be quite so keen," said Garrison.

"O.K.," Fusty agreed. "I had a good look-see at that narrow path, too, through the glasses, and it don't look quite so bad as it might have bin."

"Meaning you think we can make it?"

Fusty was no optimist, and his answer was therefore more than reassuring:

"Sure!"

The sentry on that look-out post might have had the eyes of a hawk, but if so he did not use them—at any rate, properly—or else he gave all his attention to the trails and tracks below and never once looked up at the mountain wall behind him.

Had he done so he might have wondered why every now and then a loose stone hurtled down, or dust ran in rills. And had he observed these phenomena he might, later, when Jerry and Fusty were forced for a while to show themselves, have seen two men, wearing broad-brimmed hats, and leading a pinto and a dun pony, swarm down the steep hillside like cats.

But no man had ever been known to climb up there, and danger, as a rule, does not threaten from the mountain peaks. The sentry kept his gaze set the other way.

And so by moon up, stealthily and slowly, the two outlaws approached until Fusty was sitting in a gap between high boulders guarding Paintbox and Jenny, whilst Jerry, bent double, crept noiselessly nearer and nearer to the post.

The sentry had grown feverishly impatient when at last he heard footsteps approaching, and, leaping to his feet, rasped out:

"Who goes there?"

"A friend!"

"Advance, friend," grated the sentry, "and give the countersign."

"Mongoose!" called out the newcomer, saluting rifle with rifle.

"Gee!" said the sentry. "I'm glad you've come, Sam! My legs is tired. Anything goin' on along thar?"

"The boss is plannin' a raid," said the new sentry.

The relieved man talked for a while, then wished his pal good-night and stalked away. The new sentry lit a cigarette and sat down on the rock, his rifle slanting over his shoulder, head and body making a black silhouette against the moon. And down below crouched Jerry Garrison, lariat in hand, swinging the coiled loop gently as he judged his throw.

Whish! The loop swung up and settled down over the head and shoulders of the rifeman. Jerry straightened and drew the loop tight, gave the rope a yank, and—whop!—over the top of the rock tumbled the startled man!

He dropped down on Fusty and Jerry, who broke his fall, but before he could regain his balance or offer fight—whack!—Jerry slammed his right fist to jaw angle, and the sentry crumpled like an empty sack.

They carried him away and tied and gagged him, after Jerry had removed his coat, his gun-belt, and his scarf and hat, all of which he donned.

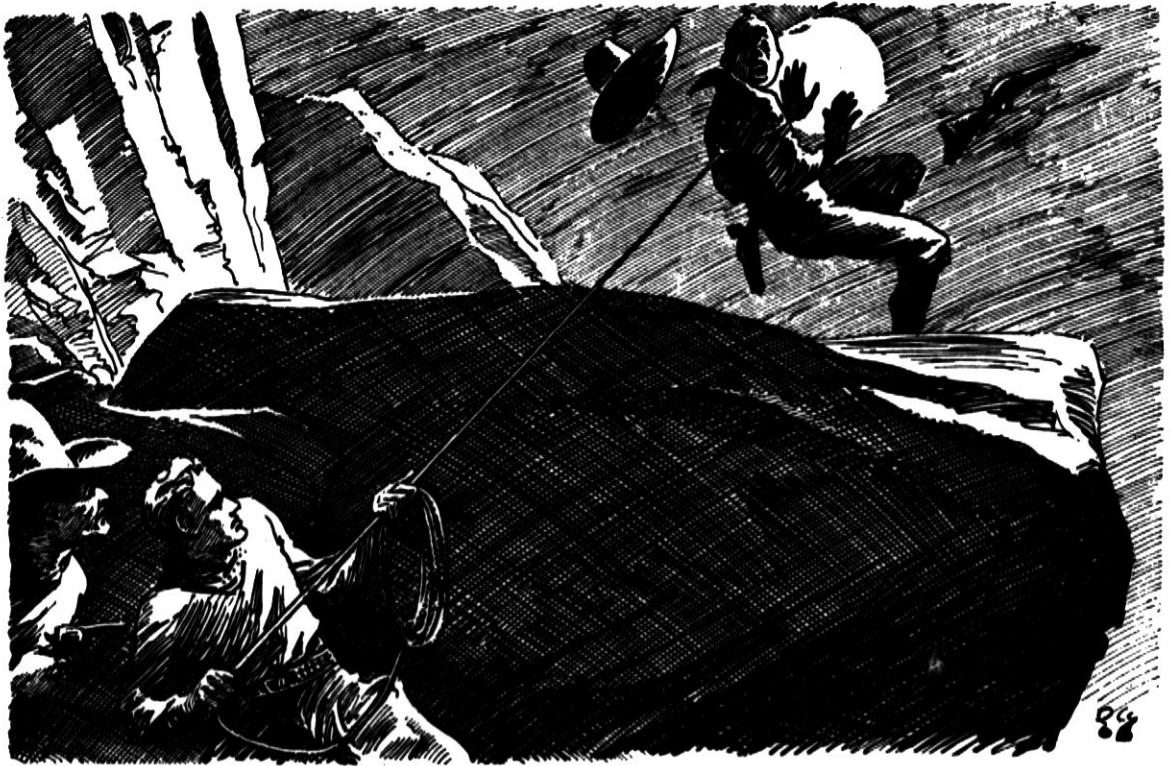
"I'm going scouting, Fusty," said Jerry, as he began to climb the rock. "If that polecat starts to wriggle, whop him another sleeping potion. I'll be back with the news."

Jerry found the rifle on the unguarded post, emptied its magazine in case of accident, and crept off like a cat in the dark.

The bandit's stronghold was of some extent, he found, as he spied about. Men were singing and gambling in a low-roofed shanty, lit by oil-lamps. He heard a horse whinny in a stable. Across what looked like a playground stood a pretentious timber shack, whose lighted windows gleamed in the dark. To this Jerry crept.

A window was open, and the blowing curtains enabled him now and then to see a group of men seated round a table, talking, smoking, and drinking. One of them was a giant, with long hair and a beard, whose name, it seemed, was Slade—at least, that was what the man called him.

"Well, there it is, boys," this man Slade said, after draining his mug and pulling at a big cigar. "We ride into Mongoose in the mornin' and clean-up the bank. All you'll have to do is to muffle yore faces, draw yore guns, scare the citizens, and shoot-up any who try to stop our get-away."



Whish! The loop swung up and settled down over the head and shoulders of the rifleman. Jerry straightened and drew the loop tight, gave the rope a yank, and—whop!—over the top of the rock toppled the startled guard!

"The boss has given me the dope. I know where to find the keys of the vault and where the gold and stuff is hidden. We'll clean-up in a few minutes, scatter when we reach the foothills, and ken along here by different trails."

"Sounds good, Mr. Slade. But what about the Red Star Ranger and Joe McKraw hidin' up in these hills?" challenged one of the men.

"Hiding nothing!" answered Slade, with a scowl. "The boss combed the trails clean. Jerry Garrison and Fusty have quit the state. An' they're wise. Hang 'em on sight is the order given, if a bullet don't kill."

"When do we start?" asked the grumbler.

"Sun-up—leavin' six of the boys behind to hold the fort."

Jerry, outside, heard a door open and a man's feet ring upon the stones. He sidled away. The man caught sight of Jerry in the moonlight, recognised his clothes.

"Thought you was takin' sentry dooty, Sam?" he called out.

"So I am—jest goin' back," Jerry answered, and he called out the watchword "Mongoose!"

Six minutes later he had dropped down to Fusty's hiding-place.

"It's all right, Fusty!" he whispered, whilst the gagged and bound bandit wriggled helplessly in the dark. "The gang ride into Mongoose in the morning to rob the State Bank. They'll leave six men behind—and as soon as they're gone we'll take the fort."

The squirming figure gurgled. Fusty gave it a poke in the ribs with his boot.

"Lie still!" he grunted. "Yo're supposed to be dead in this act!"

The Big Blow Up!

AT the end of four hours the relief sentry came to change guard. He saw a lone rifle and peered around, puzzled.

"You there, Sam?" he asked of the night.

Whiz! Wham! Whop! Clatter and crash!

A loop dropped over his head; he was yanked off his feet and hurtled down over the boulder, followed by his rifle, to be chinned and gagged and tied up like Sam—and Fusty donned his clothes!

It was nearing daybreak, and Jerry and Fusty had their ponies ready to ride.

Together they crouched in hiding, watching ponies led out and armed bandits mount them, wave good-bye, and

ride away. Later, from below the look-out post, they saw the string of horsemen making swift progress down the trail.

Jerry and Fusty, carrying the borrowed rifles, and looking like Sam and his pal in their borrowed clothes, and simply bristling with six-guns, advanced into the fort.

They saw a man emerge from a shack carrying a pail, and Fusty put a rifle bullet clean through the pan. As water gushed and the man dropped the container to hold up his hands, others came streaming out of the shack.

Braang! Braang! Braang!

Jerry and Fusty splintered the windows, and plugged the plank walls with lead, and the men held up their hands.

"If it ain't Sam and Butcher gone nuts!" moaned one of them, looking scared.

"Have another guess," said Jerry, pulling the scarf away from his mouth, tilting his hat brim, and showing the red star that shone upon his breast. "Your pals are out of action. I'm the Red Star Ranger. Frisk them guys while I cover them, Fusty, and lead-fill any who resist."

Fusty waddled bow-legged to his work, and relieved the long-faced and startled bandits of their six-guns and their knives. Then Fusty tied them up hand-and-foot, and they slumped upon the ground.

"Jerry Garrison and Fusty Joe McKraw!" moaned one of the prisoners. "An' ten thousand dollars' reward—coo, what a break!"

"Any more of you rats around hyar?" asked Fusty, thrusting out his underjaw.

"No, sir; we're the lot," replied the man who had just spoken.

"And a punk lot, too!" growled Fusty. "Kid, let's look around!"

Jerry and Fusty found the quarters comfortable. The bunkhouse contained beds and a living-room, the kitchen being detached. The boss' house had three reception-rooms, in one of which they found a roulette board, and dozens of packs of cards, and poker chips by the hundred. In the stables were eight ponies, the harness being neatly arranged. There was also an oil-shed, a stores shack, a motor-house, with petrol in plenty. And the way out crossed a ravine by means of a lowered drawbridge, wide enough to permit of two ponies going abreast. Below it a ravine dropped a thousand feet down to a purling mountain stream.

Their examination over, Jerry and Fusty fetched the ponies, and, loosing the leg bonds of Sam and his pal, drove

them up into the fort, where they tied their ankles again for further security.

Jerry and Fusty ate at their leisure, sampled the Boss Slade's fine cigars, and packed several boxes against the future.

The day wore pleasantly on.

In mid-afternoon the outlaws loosed the feet of the captured bandits, and drove them over the drawbridge, then tied them up in a bunch on the other side.

They went back and drove the eight ponies headlong out of the stable and over the bridge, and, with wild cries, sent them galloping in panic down the mountain trail.

That done, they emptied tins of petrol in every building, and Fusty took their own ponies across. Jerry, grinning from ear to ear to think how what he had done must rub Jasper Privett, Mayor of Red Rock, on the raw when he heard of it, threw lighted matches into the petrol fumes and started blaze on blaze.

Haunted by the roar of flames, and blinded by choking smoke, he strode back over the bridge and joined Fusty on the safe side.

"Who's gonna crash that bridge?" asked Fusty, licking his lips enviously, for he had wanted to start the petrol fires.

"I meant to, wart," said Jerry, with a grin. "But I think I'll hand that plum to you. You'll find the dynamite in the little bag."

Joe McKraw searched for and found what he wanted—a stick of dynamite, with a fuse attached—and this he set securely in a crevice in the middle of the bridge, and, kneeling, lit the touch-paper.

Szzzz!

"Time we was movin', kid!" he said, with a boyish grin, as he set a foot in the stirrup and swung himself up on Jenny.

"Slade and his gang went that way," said Jerry, pointing. "We'll go t'other. But we're nowhere nig'r cur hiding-place now, Fusty, an' life may become hard!"

Fusty's grin broadened.

"What's it matter?" he said. "Let's listen to the big bang."

It came as they reached a turn in the trail.

Braang!

In a moment the bridge was gone, blown to splinters by the deafening explosion. Six tied-up prisoners yelled in terror as the burning debris came hurtling down.

Slade and his bank robbers, riding up the trail, heard it, too, and hastened to find their fort blazing to utter ruin and the drawbridge gone, so that they could not cross the ravine, and six white-faced crooks, bound hand-and-foot, all laid out in a row.

"Who did this?" screamed Slade, mad with passion, though the bank raid had proved a success, and every man was weighted down with gold.

"Fusty an' the Red Star Ranger," gurgled one of the tied-up bandits.

"The Red Star Ranger!" shouted Slade. "Where is he?"

"Ridin' down the Red Rock trail!" shouted Sam.

Slade and his men turned and looked. They saw Fusty and Jerry Garrison streaking on their ponies in the direction of the foothills, mere dots on the trail below, and Jerry doffed his hat and waved it as they went.

"Get 'em! Get 'em! Shoot 'em down!" roared Slade.

But the bullets from the volley hit dust up a long way short of the fleeing ponies. And Slade knew that he and the gang could never catch the Red Star Ranger and his pal, for their horses were tired from the double ride, and the pinto and the dun were fresh.

And so he raised his clenched fists above his head, and through set teeth uttered anathemas that made the sun god wink and hide in shame behind a cloud.

Then the rain came. But the fire burned on.

"Some bandits are going to get wet," said Jerry, as he donned a rainproof riding-coat. "That was grand work, Fusty!"

Rusty said nothing, but his grunt was almost a chuckle as he and the Red Star Ranger rode on.

(Jerry and Fusty have smashed up the gang's headquarters, but they've got to smash the gang yet, so look out for thrills next week!)

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Printed and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription rates: Inland and Abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd., and for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd.—Saturday, July 1st, 1933. LL

