

"THE CRACKSMAN'S DUPE!" POWERFUL LONG ST. JIM'S YARN— WITHIN

The GEM

THE BEST PAPER FOR BRITISH BOYS 2d



THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR!

The CRACKSMAN'S



To Joe Frayne, it seems that his father, an ex-convict and burglar wanted by the police, is risking arrest in coming to see him at St. Jim's. But little does Joe realise that he is to be the dupe of the cracksman's cunning scheme!

CHAPTER 1.

A Letter for Joe!

THE waif of St. Jim's came out of the Third Form Room, and walked down the passage with a cheerful smile upon his face. It was a rugged little face, was Joe Frayne's, and it bore the signs of the hard life the little waif had been through in his earlier years before Tom Merry had rescued him from the slums and brought him to St. Jim's.

But Joe's heart was light, and those signs of earlier sufferings were fading away—in a short time bade fair to cease to exist.

And Joe was looking very cheerful now.

He had had a kind word from his Form-master, and a kind word from Mr. Selby meant something—he had few to spare.

Joe was making progress with his work—the work that had seemed like an impassable barrier when he first came to St. Jim's. Some glimmering of meaning was dawning upon him when he looked at the pages of Virgil, and that opened a new and wonderful world to Joe.

Mr. Selby had been pleased to commend him, keeping him a few minutes behind the Form for that purpose, when the class was dismissed. And Joe seemed to be walking on air as he came down the Form-room passage.

There was a buzz of voices in the Hall, and Joe knew that a good many of the Third were waiting there.

But he did not care.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,358.

He feared nothing at that moment. Had he not a true and faithful friend in the Third Form—D'Arcy minor, generally known as Wally? And Jameson and Gibson, too, had finally declared for him—they were his friends, too. The fact that Joe's father was more than suspected of being a well-known convict had not, as the waif had expected, been his ruin at St. Jim's. It seemed to make many of the fellows sorry for him, and certainly it had made his friends stick closer.

His enemies in the Form made the most of it, but Joe Frayne was learning not to care for them.

Joe glanced at the group of juniors. They were gathered before the letter-rack; but as he came along they turned round and stared rudely at him. Joe recognised many of his old enemies in the group—Picke, and Fane, and Hobbs, and Colley. He gave them a careless glance, and was passing on, when they called to him.

"Frayne!"

"Letter for you!"

Joe paused.

He had not expected a letter—there was no one to write to the waif of St. Jim's. There was no one he had known in his old life in London from whom he would care to hear a word.

That there was a letter for him surprised him; that he should have his attention drawn to it by Hobbs & Co. was a greater surprise. He had been far from expecting a good-natured action from them.

"Thank you kindly," said Joe.

Hobbs grinned.

—YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO. IS FULL OF EXCITEMENT!

DUPE

By
Martin Clifford.

"Oh, we spotted it at once, and meant to tell you," he said. "It's a ripping letter, to judge by the writing—I don't think!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Joe glanced at them quietly, and then he looked up for the letter. A square, coarse envelope was stuck in the rack, dirty and crumpled, with grubby fingermarks over it. In a large, sprawling hand was the address: "Joe Frayne, School Ouse, St. Jaim's Kollegit Skool, Sussex."

The autography of Joe's unknown correspondent was peculiar, and naturally provoked a smile, but it seemed to be the cause of a veritable triumph to Hobbs & Co. They grinned and chuckled over it gleefully.

Joe flushed as he took down the letter.

He did not know the writing, but it was clear that the letter was from someone who had known him when he was a denizen of Blucher's Buildings.

"Open it, my son," said Fane. "We want to see whether there's the same variety of spelling inside."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's from your governor, I suppose?" Hobbs remarked. "It may be the happy news that he's just been let out of prison."

"Wrong!" said Picke. "Frayne's father isn't in prison—the police are still looking for him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Joe's face was crimson. He took the letter in his hand and walked slowly away with it. But the fags were not disposed to let him escape easily, and most of them were curious, too, to see what was in the letter. They hoped to be able to badger Joe into letting them see it.

"Give us a view," said Fane imploringly. "Let's see the orthography and the diction. It's bound to be interesting, and I've no doubt there'll be a Latin quotation."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Arma virumque cano—arms and the burglar, I sing," grinned Hobbs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's have a look, Frayne."

"Read it out."

"We want to hear from your governor, you know."

Joe made no reply. He went out into the quadrangle with his letter. There was a blaze of warm sunshine there, and the quad looked very green and cheerful. From the playing field came a roar of voices, and the thud of a football being kicked about. The Fourth and the Shell were at practice, and in the distance Joe caught a glimpse of Tom Merry of the Shell trying to shoot a goal against the "keeping" of Fatty Wynn of the Fourth. But Joe did not give a second glance at the football ground.

He wanted a quiet spot where he could look at his letter. It was a new experience getting a letter, but that was not all. Had it been from some old acquaintance in the slums, who had found out his address, Joe would not have minded. Life at St. Jim's was not making him snobbish. He would gladly have extended a helping hand to any old acquaintance, as far as he was able. But a nervous dread was tugging at the heart of the little waif.

Only one man, so far as he knew, from his old life knew that he was at St. Jim's—the drunken, brutal tramp who had called himself the Weasel. That ruffian had seen him at the school, and extorted money from him, and finally disgraced him before all the fellows. After that he could do no more injury, and he was kicked out by the juniors, and had not been seen since.

Was this a letter from him, renewing his demands, since he could no longer come to the school? If so, Joe's mind was already made up. He would not even answer it. But was the letter from another? Had the Weasel, as he had threatened, seen Bill Frayne, and told him that his son was at St. Jim's? Was this letter from Joe's father—the hunted criminal?

The green trees, the sunny quad, the grey old buildings at St. Jim's, seemed to swim round the little waif as he thought of it.

What if Frayne should come?

True, the man could not show himself in public without risking arrest. He was a ticket-of-leave man, and wanted for not reporting himself to the police.

Villain and ruffian Bill Frayne undoubtedly was, but he was Joe's father.

Was he his father? Joe had been told so; that was all he knew. He had belonged to Bill Frayne—but he had belonged to more than one man in his young life, and had been sent out to beg, under threat of thrashings. He had long had a secret hope that he was no relation of Bill Frayne's. But he was only too miserably conscious that the wish was probably father to the thought.

With gloomy and foreboding thoughts in his mind, Joe was scarcely conscious of the half-dozen fags following closely in his footsteps. His tormentors were determined not to let him escape. The fact that Joe was gaining more and more the esteem and regard of the Form exasperated the juniors who had set themselves against him, and made them more resolved to humble him.

Hobbs & Co. had something of the spirit of the Pagan persecutors.

Joe stopped at a bench under the old elms near the School House, and sat wearily down. The brightness was all gone from his face now. As he sat down the fags gathered round him.

It was as if to suit them that Joe had chosen a secluded spot. The little waif looked at them as if suddenly becoming conscious of their presence.

"Wot do you want?" he asked.

The fags grinned.

"Want you to read out the letter, Frayne?"

"No, I won't."

"Give us a sample of the spelling."

"Oh, go away and lemme alone," said Joe.

"Rats!"

"Show us the letter."

"Read out something from your governor."

"I won't!"

"Just a sentence from your dear father—just to say whether he's been arrested or not," grinned Hobbs.

And the fags yelled with laughter.

Joe gave Hobbs one look, and then he crumpled the letter in his left hand, and clenched his right hard. The fist shot out, and caught Hobbs fairly on the nose—a rather prominent nose, favourably placed by Nature for stopping a fist.

"Oh!" gasped Hobbs.

And the next moment he was rolling on the ground.

Joe cast a fierce glance round at his tormentors.

"Now, come on, any of you!" he exclaimed savagely.

CHAPTER 2.

Wally Takes a Hand!

HOBBS staggered to his feet.

His nose was crimson, and already swelling, and the force of the blow had brought the water to his eyes.

He was simply stuttering with rage.

"You—you guttersnipe!" he panted. "You beggar! Punch my nose, will you, you young convict!"

"It ain't my fault if my father's a convict," said Joe, "and it ain't decent to chuck it in my face. But if you can't let a chap alone, come on, Master 'Obbs, I'm ready for you."

He had thrust the letter into his pocket, and he had his hands up.

Hobbs rubbed his nose, and sneered.

"Do you think I'm going to fight you?" he said. "Think I'd lay hands in fair fight on a slum convict? No fear!"

"You're afraid, Master 'Obbs, that's what's the matter with you."

Hobbs crimsoned.

That was exactly what was the matter with him, and he knew it, and he was afraid that the other fags realised it, too.

"You young ruffian!" he snarled. "You're not decent enough to lick—but we'll rag you bald-headed! Collar him!"

"Good egg!"

"Hands off!" yelled Joe, stepping back. "Hands off, I say. I shall hit out!"

"Collar the cad!"

"Get the letter!"

"Hand over the letter," said one, "and we'll let you off!"

"We won't!" roared Hobbs.

"Yes, we will, Hobbs! You shut up!"
 "Hand over the letter, Frayne!"
 "The letter's mine," said Joe. "It's mean to read another chap's letter—rotten mean! Master Tom says so!"
 Fane turned red.
 "Don't Master Tom us, you young cad!" he exclaimed.
 "Do you think we care twopence for any Shell bounders, and what they think?"
 "Oh, that cad sucks up to the Fourth and the Shell," said Picke. "He can't stick to his own Form, like a decent chap."
 "You don't gimme much chance," said Joe.
 "Oh, don't jaw at us, young Frayne. Hand over that letter and you can clear out as soon as you like."

"I won't!"
 "Then we'll take it."
 Joe did not reply to that, but his fists clenched harder. The hard glitter in his eyes showed the fags plainly enough that they would not get the letter so long as he could strike a blow, and they knew from former encounters how tough he was.

But for very shame's sake they could not draw back now. Fane, who had more pluck than the rest, led the rush onward.

"Collar him! Down with the slum cad! Oh!"
 Fane's words were stopped by a heavy drive on the jaw, and Fane dropped on the ground as if he had been shot.

But the others were rushing on.
 Colley fell across Fane, feeling as if a mule had kicked him under the jaw; but the others were hammering at Joe at close quarters now.

The waif of St. Jim's backed away, defending himself as well as he could against the heavy odds.

Fane and Colley scrambled up and rushed to the attack again, and stumbled over Hobbs, who had just been knocked down. Hobbs was hurt, perhaps, or perhaps believed discretion to be the better part of valour. At all events, he remained where he had fallen on the ground.

But the other five were pressing hard. Joe backed against a big elm, still fighting.

A heavy blow by Fane came through his guard, and crashed him back against the trunk of the elm.

The waif slid down into a sitting posture, and before he could recover the ragers were upon him.

"Got him!" yelled Picke.
 He rolled on Joe, and Fane and Colley seized the waif by the arms, and the others grasped him anywhere, and even Hobbs rallied now and lent a hand.

Joe still struggled hard, but it was evidently useless. He was held too tightly to have a chance of getting away.

"Now," panted Fane, "are you going to give us the letter?"

"No!" yelled Joe.
 "Give it to me, you young fool!"

"I won't."
 "Take it out of his pocket, Hobbs!" said Fane.

Possibly Fane did not care to do that himself. But Hobbs had no objection. He groped in Joe's pocket for the letter.

Joe made a desperate effort to tear himself loose. But it was in vain, and Hobbs dragged out the letter, and held it up.

"There you are, Fane!" he gasped.
 Fane held out his hand for the letter, and then drew it back.

"You read it out, Hobbs," he said.
 "Right-ho!" said Hobbs.

"Gimme my letter!" shrieked Joe.
 "Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You—you cad to read my letter! Gimme it!"

"Keep him quiet! He'll wake the blessed place!"
 "I— Oh—groogh!" gurgled Joe, as a handkerchief was stuffed into his open mouth. "Groogh! Oh— Ah! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Hobbs thrust his thumb into the envelope, and slit it open.

He dragged out a rough sheet of paper upon which words were scrawled in pencil.

Joe made a tremendous effort, and his captors rocked for a moment, but they pinned him down again.

"Read it out, Hobby!" shouted Fane.
 "What-ho!"

"Ow!" gasped Joe. "Elp!"

There was a sound of rapid footsteps, and a fist smote Hobbs under the jaw as he was beginning to read. Hobbs sprawled on the ground, and the fellow who had knocked him down stooped and picked up the letter.

It was Wally of the Third—D'Arcy minor.
 His eyes fairly blazed at the fags.

"You cads!" he shouted. "Let him alone! Get up, Joe!"

"Mind your own bisney, D'Arcy minor," said Fane undauntedly. "We're going to make the cad show us his letter!"

"You're not! Let him go!"
 THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,358.

"Ow!" groaned Hobbs, sitting up and rubbing his aching jaw. "Ow! Oh! Ah!"

"Let Joe alone, I tell you!"
 "Rats!"

Wally said no more. He grasped Fane by the shoulders and tore him away from Joe with a terrific wrench. Fane was flung staggering away, and he fell at full length. The other fellows released Joe instinctively.

"Get up, Joe!"
 Joe staggered to his feet.

"Now, if you chaps want any more trouble, just come on!" said Wally cheerfully. "Joe and I could wipe up the ground with the lot of you, and you know it! And we're quite ready to do it, my sons! Come on—one at a time, or all at once—and I should prefer to start with Hobbs! Come on, Hobbs! I'll see if I can add to the beauty of your nose, Hobbs! Do come on."

But Hobbs declined. He thrust his hands into his pockets and walked away, and the other ragers followed him. Ragging Joe Frayne was one matter, but ragging Wally, the terror of the Third Form, was quite another. The ragers stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once.

"Are you much hurt, Joe?" asked Wally.
 "Oh, no, Master Wally!"

"Here's your letter."
 "Thank you! They were going to read it."

"Cads!" said Wally. "Did you put up a good fight?"
 "I did my best!"

"Good! Then I won't lick you!"
 Joe grinned, and looked at his letter. Wally put his hands into his pockets, and whistled while he waited.

But his whistle suddenly died away, and he started towards Joe with a sharp exclamation:

"Joe, old chap, what's the matter?"
 Joe made no reply. He had reeled against the tree, with his face as white as death, his eyes staring wildly at the letter clenched in his hand.

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry's "Terror"!

"WALLY, Tom Mewwy—"
 "My dear Gussy—"
 "Undah the circs—"
 "Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy—"
 "I do!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "And many of 'em!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the elegant junior who was the ornament of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's and the glass of fashion in the School House, pushed back his spotless white cuffs.

"I am sowwy," he said. "But, undah the circs, I am afraid I have no wescoure but to give you a feahful thwash-in', Tom Mewwy! Will you have the extweme goodness to step out into the quad, so that I can thwash you?"

"Not at all!"
 "Weally—"

"Go and lie down for a bit, Gussy, and sleep it off."
 The swell of St. Jim's gazed at Tom Merry with scornful eyes. He jammed his eyeglass into his right eye, and gazed at him again.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were standing in the doorway of the School House in footer rig.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been pointing out things to Tom Merry.

In the opinion of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, there was really only one fellow whose claims could be considered for the job of junior cricket captain next season, and that fellow, of course, was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself.

This seemed so clear to D'Arcy that he marvelled at the dullness of other fellows in not being able to see it; in fact, he couldn't help suspecting that they were only pretending.

He had always found Tom Merry a sensible sort of chap, and yet Tom Merry utterly failed to see this.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked at D'Arcy, and D'Arcy looked at them. The Terrible Three were grinning, and D'Arcy was frowning.

"I have wequested you, Tom Mewwy, to step out of the House, so that I can thwash you!" said the swell of St. Jim's, in measured tones.

Tom Merry laughed.
 "No fear!" he said.

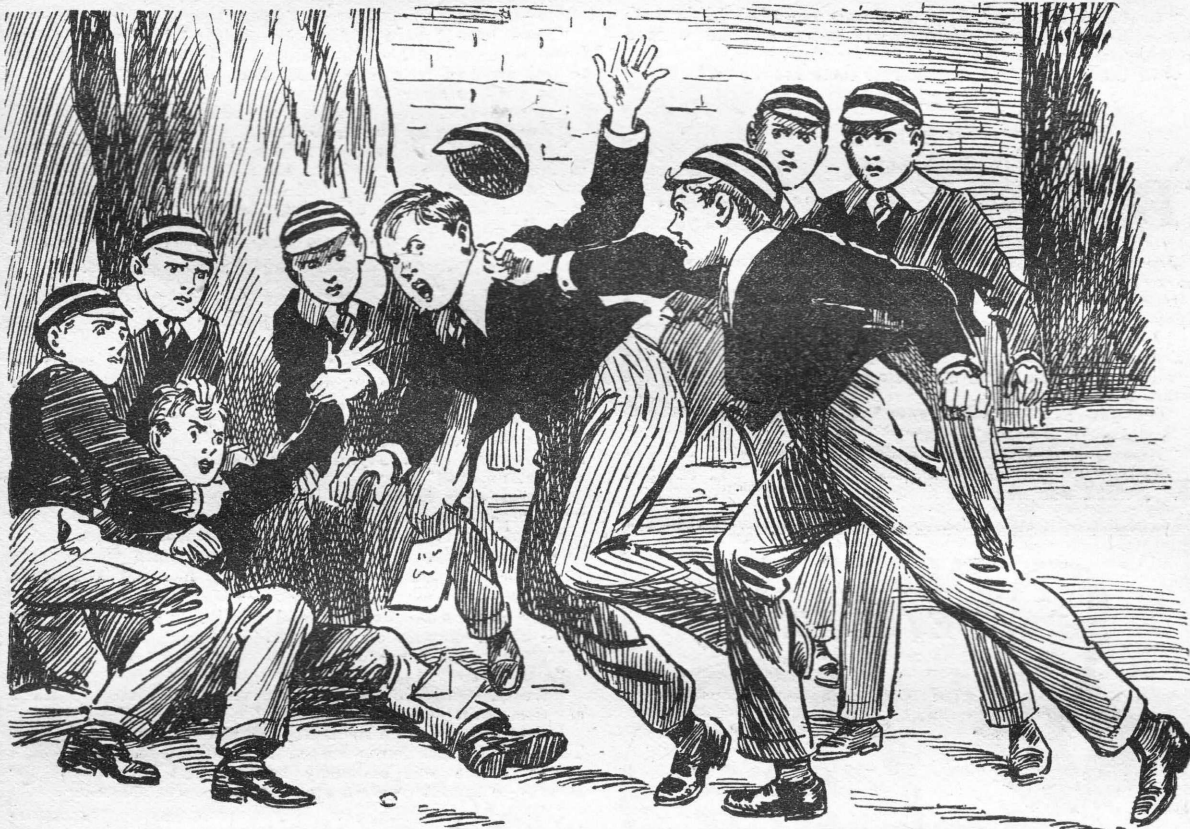
"I twust you will not wefuse, Tom Mewwy!"
 "But I do! I'm quite comfy here!"

"But I cannot thwash you in a public place like this, where we may be intewwupted by a mastah or a pwefect at any moment!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Mr. Waitton may come out of his study any minute."

"Exactly!"
 "Pway step wound the chapel with me!"

"Rats!"
 "I shall begin to think that you are afraid, Tom Mewwy!"
 Tom Merry nodded with perfect coolness.
 "That's just it," he explained; "I'm in fear and trembling! You don't notice me tremble, because it's internal—but I'm really more afraid than if I were trembling outwardly. Inwardly, I'm quivering like a giddy jelly."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Lowther.
 D'Arcy glared at them indignantly.
 "I wegard you as thwee sillay asses!" he exclaimed.
 "Thank you! You're only one silly ass, but you're as silly as three," said Monty Lowther, "so that really makes it even!"
 "Weally, Lowthah—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I insist upon your steppin' wound the chapel with me, Tom Mewwy; othahwise I shall bwand you as a coward!"

He might have been overcome with terror; but D'Arcy was not taken in. The fellows about were roaring with laughter, and the swell of St. Jim's was crimson with indignation.
 "Help me away!" moaned Tom Merry. "Help me away, before he slays me with the terror of his glance!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Cling to me, old chap, and close your eyes," said Monty Lowther kindly.
 "This way," said Manners gently.
 And they led Tom Merry upstairs, the hero of the Shell clinging to them like a man of ninety-five at least.
 There was a roar of laughter from the fellows in the Hall. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came out of his study, and stared at the Terrible Three in amazement.
 "What on earth are you fellows doing?" he exclaimed.
 "Helping Tom Merry away," said Manners stoutly. "He's frightened."
 "Frightened?"



"Ow!" gasped Joe, helpless in the grasp of his tormentors. "Elp!" There was a sound of rapid footsteps, and as Hobbs was about to read out Joe's letter, a fist smote him under the jaw, knocking him sprawling. "You cads!" exclaimed Wally D'Arcy. "Let him alone!"

"Bwand away!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You fwabjous ass!"
 "Hear, hear!"
 "You uttah wottah—"
 "Hurrah!"
 "Unless you are simply pwetendin' to be a sillay ass, you know vewy well that I ought to be cwicket captain next season."
 "Bravo!"
 "You—you—"
 "Wind yourself up, and put a new record on," suggested Manners.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 The swell of St. Jim's was speechless with wrath. The chums of the Shell made a motion to depart. D'Arcy stepped forward.
 "Tom Mewwy, you feahful boundah, I am goin' to lick you!"
 "Help!" said Tom Merry faintly.
 "I wegard you—"
 "Help!"
 Tom Merry threw one arm round Lowther's neck, and the other round Manners' neck, and clung to them for support.

"Yes. Gussy has struck terror to his soul."
 "You young duffer! Ha, ha, ha!"
 Tom Merry, clinging to his chums, disappeared up the staircase.
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his nose very high in the air, walked out of the School House. Outside, in the sunny quad two juniors of the Fourth Form were engaged in a warm argument. They were Jack Blake of the School House and Figgins of the New House—rival leaders of the juniors of St. Jim's.
 "Now, Figgy, don't be a silly ass!" Blake was saying, in an imploring tone.
 "Well, don't be a frabjous dummy, then!" said Figgins.
 "Weally, deah boys, I twust you are not wowin'?" said D'Arcy.
 Both turned to look at him.
 "I'm not rowing," said Blake. "I'm only explaining to Figgins—"
 "I'm not rowing," said Figgins. "I'm only explaining to Blake—"
 "Weally, you know—"
 "Figgins has a rotten idea that a New House chap ought to be the next junior cricket captain—"
 THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,358.

"Of course!" said Figgins. "As for your silly idea that a School House chap ought to be captain, I can only say that it's worthy of your dotty brain!"

"I coddah that Blake is wight," said D'Arcy.

"Ass!"

"Of course I am," said Blake. "It naturally belongs to the School House. I agree with Figgins that a Fourth Form chap ought to have it, that's all. I'm the man!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'm glad you agree with me there, Gussy."

"But I don't, deah boy. What is wanted as juniah gwicket captain is a fellow of tact and judgment, and I was thinkin' of acceptin' the post."

"You!" roared Blake and Figgins together.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ass!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally—"

"Chump!"

"I wufuse to entahh into a discuss cawwied on in such terms!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; and he walked away with his nose higher in the air than ever.

And Blake and Figgins resumed their argument.

CHAPTER 4.

Black News!

"**B**AI JOVE!"

D'Arcy paused under the old elm-trees as he came in sight of two fags of the Third—his younger brother Wally and Joe Frayne.

Joe stood with the letter in his hand, his face as white as chalk, and Wally was staring at him. Wally was puzzled and alarmed. D'Arcy stopped, and jammed his eyeglass yet more tightly into his eye.

"Joe, deah boy—" he began.

Joe did not answer. He turned a dazed glance upon the swell of St. Jim's. His hand closed more tightly upon the letter he held.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah with him, Wally?"

Wally gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"Blessed if I know!" he replied. "Some of the Third have just been ragging him, and I came up and chipped in. I think Joe had bad news in that letter."

"Bai Jove! I'm sowwy, Joe!"

"It—it—it's all right, Master D'Arcy!" stammered Joe.

"Bad news, deah boy?"

"No—yes!"

"My deah chap," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy kindly, "I don't want to pwy into your affairs, and I'm sure Wally doesn't want to, eithah."

"Not much!" said Wally.

"But I feel vevy concerned about you, and I am sure Wally does, too."

"You bet!" said Wally.

"That is a howwibly vulgair expvession, Wally."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"What's in the letter, Joe?" asked Wally. "If it's bad news you can tell us, I suppose?"

"That is what I was about to say, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If there is anythin' wong, I twust we shall be able to help you."

Joe shook his head.

"It—it's all right, Master D'Arcy."

"Look here!" said D'Arcy seriously. "If that lettah is fwom that howwd boundah called the Weasel, you're bound to tell us, Joe, so that we can deal with him."

"It isn't, Master D'Arcy."

"It isn't fwom the Weasel, Joe—honah bwight?"

"Honour bright, Master D'Arcy."

"Vevy well. Of course, it would be wotten bad form to inqulah into your pwivate affairs, and I shall certainly not do so," said D'Arcy. "Of course, I shall not allow my minah to do anything of the sort, eithah."

Wally snorted.

"Your minor doesn't want to do it," he said. "But if he did, you jolly well couldn't stop him, Gussy, my son."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Wally—"

"More rats!"

"You diswepctful young boundah! I wegard you as a disgwice to the family, Wally!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "Your collah is not clean!"

"Blow my collah!"

"Blowin' your collah would not blow the dust off, Wally, and I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wufuse to be cackled at by my minah!" said D'Arcy, with great indignation. "You do not seem to have any ideah of the wespct due fwom a minah to his eldah bwothah, Wally. You seem to have no more wespct for your eldahs than Hewwies' bulldog has for a fellow's twousahs!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "You're like the little brook—you go on for ever!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, I'm off!"

"Wally, I ordah you, as your majah, to stop while I cowwect your howwid mannahs!"

Wally did not seem to hear. He walked away, whistling. The swell of St. Jim's looked round for Joe, but he had gone. There was evidently nothing left for it but for D'Arcy to depart as well, and that he proceeded to do.

Joe had gone quietly, while Arthur Augustus was lecturing his brother. Kind as both D'Arcy and Wally were to him, Joe wanted to be alone just then. He did not want to show anyone the letter; he wanted to think it over, to decide what to do.

He went quietly away, and stopped when he was on the quiet little green behind the chapel. Then he sank on a seat under a tree, and took the letter out of his pocket.

He read it with breathless anxiety again. The scrawling, ill-spelt epistle ran:

"Deer Joe,—I am cumming to see you. I have 'eard from a friend where you are, and I know you will be glad to see your father again. I shall be down at the skool on Tuesday night, and I shall expect you at the same place where you met the Weasel. I ain't going to do you any arm in the skool. I only want to see you afore I go away. I'm going to Canada.

"Your loving father,

"B. FRAYNE."


Joe's lips trembled.

The ruffian, the Weasel, had evidently told Bill Frayne of his discovery of Joe at St. Jim's. That had set the convict on the track.


What did he want to see Joe for?

That the man was telling the truth, that he really wanted to see Joe before he made his departure to Canada, the little waif could not believe.

That was too good to be true.



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But what did Bill Frayne want? To extort money, perhaps, under threats of disgracing him at the school. But he could hardly disgrace him more than the Weasel had already done. There was nothing more to tell.

What did he want?

If Joe refused him money, he would not dare to come to St. Jim's either—the police were looking for him. He would not venture to be seen in public. Joe felt that the man must have hesitated, even before he ventured to write this letter. The postmark on the envelope was Rylcombe, the village near the school. Bill Frayne was evidently close at hand. Joe guessed that he had been hanging about the school in the hope of meeting him. Joe had been keeping carefully within bounds of late, in case he should meet the Weasel again; and Bill Frayne had had no chance of seeing him. He had been driven to writing a letter. Joe turned sick at heart at the thought of what might have happened if the fags had read it. They would have been delighted with the chance of betraying Joe's father to the police.

Not that Bill Frayne did not deserve all that the authorities had in store for him. He was a ruffian, whose cruel marks were yet on Joe's body; whether he was Joe's father or not, he seemed to be a brute without any redeeming quality.

But however wicked he might be, it was not his son's place to judge him. It was not his son's place to wish to see him punished.

Why was he coming?

That was the question that was beating like a hammer in Joe's heart and brain. Why was the man coming to St. Jim's?

What if he should be found and arrested? Arrested, perhaps, close to the school! The college ringing with it; the papers full of the news. Convict arrested near the famous Public School where his son was a pupil! Joe turned sick at the thought. Could even Dr. Holmes, kind and good as he was, suffer him to remain in the school after causing such a terrible disgrace to St. Jim's?

Joe groaned aloud at the thought.

He crumpled the letter in his hand, and thrust it into his pocket.

One thing was certain—he must meet the man! Meet him, and beg of him to go away—to cause no more misery to one whose life he had already made miserable enough. And if he wanted anything that Joe could not give honestly, to refuse him and take the consequences, whatever they were. That was the determination of the waif of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

Looking for Joe!

"JOE! Joe! Where's that blessed bounder, Joe?"

Wally was calling everywhere. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came downstairs and stopped his minor by tapping him on the shoulder.

"Are you inquisin' for Joe, Wally?"

Wally sniffed.

"Well, as I'm yelling for him at the top of my voice, very likely I am," he replied.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Have you seen him?"

"Yaas, wathah! He passed my study a short time ago, goin' towards the box-wooms."

"Good!"

Wally tore upstairs. He raced along the Fourth Form passage and arrived at the lower box-room. He kicked the door open and ran in. The room was in darkness.

"Joe!" he shouted. "You're not here, surely, in the dark? Joe!"

There was a sound in the gloomy room. A shadow crossed the glimmering square of the window.

"Joe!"

"Yes, Master Wally?" said a faint and uneasy voice.

"Hallo!" said Wally. "So it's you, Joe?" He groped in the dark and caught the waif of St. Jim's by the arm. "Joe, you young ass, come on!"

"I—I—"

"What have you got the window open for?"

"I—I—"

"Jolly queer idea," said Wally, "taking an airing by the open window in the dark! But, come on! Selby's just taking the Third at prep, and you know what he's like when a chap's late."

"I—I—"

"Oh, chuck your blessed I—I!" said Wally impatiently, and dragging his chum towards the door. "Come on, and don't play the giddy goat!"

Joe resisted a little, but Wally took no notice. He dragged Joe away from the banisters and rushed him downstairs.

Joe was unable to make a stop till they reached the stairs. There he clutched at the banisters and clung.

Wally stopped, panting breathlessly.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "We've got only a minute to get in to prep! Selby will be like a wild bull! Come on, kid! What the dickens is the matter with you?"

"Master Wally—"

"Come on, you ass!"

"I—I want to miss prep!" said Joe, faltering.

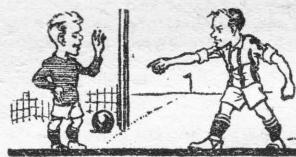
Wally stared at him blankly.

"Miss prep!" he gasped.

"Yes, Master Wally."

"You silly young ass!" said Wally scornfully. "Why, old Selby would be like a raging lion! You remember what he was like when you missed evening prep before. Don't be a duffer! Come on!"

THIRTEEN FOR LUCK!



Captain: "That's the thirteenth goal you've let in!"
Goalie: "That's all right—I'm not superstitious!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. McArdle, 5, Corona Road, Waterloo, Liverpool, 22.

"I—I must! I—"

"Rats!"

"But I tell you—"

Wally did not answer—he did not even listen. He dragged Joe away from the banisters and rushed him downstairs.

They reached the lower passage, and Wally tore on to the Third Form Room and reached the door in a breathless state.

But the door was closed, and the voice of Mr. Selby could be heard within.

"Late!" gasped Wally.

"Lemme go!"

"May be able to dodge in yet, if old Selby's in a good temper."

"But, I say—"

Wally threw open the Form-room door and ran in with Joe. Mr. Selby's keen eye was upon them at once.

"Frayne! D'Arcy minor!"

"Ye-es?" stammered Wally.

"You are late! You will take twenty lines, and you will do the same, Frayne!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Now go to your places."

The fags went to their places. There was no escape for Joe now. Wally had released him, but he could not quit the Form-room under the master's eye.

He sat down in his place, with a deep gloom upon his rugged little face. The heart of the waif of St. Jim's was heavy. He had wanted to hurry out of the school as soon as darkness fell, but there was no chance of that now. Wally had meant well in forcing him to turn up for prep, but Joe could not help wondering whether Bill Frayne was waiting in the shadow of the school wall, and whether he would grow impatient, and, if so, what he would do.

But there was no help for it now.

Third Form preparation in the evening lasted an hour and a half, and was always conducted in the presence of a master. The Fourth Form and the Shell had a chance of "cutting prep" if they chose to risk it—not so the fags. The Third Form had to turn up in the Form-room for it, and Mr. Selby was not likely to fail to note down any absence.

Joe went through it now like one in a dream.

How he got through he hardly knew. But he was unconscious of the fact that the Third were dismissed, when Wally came behind his form and jerked him up.

"Come on, kid!" said Wally. "Time's up! Gone to sleep?"

"N-no!" stammered Joe.

"Wake up, then!"

"I—I'm coming!"

Joe followed Wally out of the Form-room. In the passage Wally turned upon him and stared at him.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"N-n-nothing!"

"Glad I fetched you into the room for prep—eh?"

"Yes—no!"

"You would be jolly well smarting now, if I hadn't!" said Wally. "Look here, I'm getting up a good tea this evening with Jimmy and Curly. We've got herrings and

cake and bloater-paste. You turn up in the Form-room in a quarter of an hour and we'll feed you to the chin."

Wally hurried away without waiting for a reply.

Joe went quietly to the kitchen.
Ten minutes later Wally was looking for his chum. The feed was ready in the Form-room. Jameson was finishing cooking the herrings, and the smell of them was keenly appetising—to a fag, at least.

"Anybody seen Frayne?" demanded Wally of all the fags he met in the passage.

"Missed anything?" asked Picke, with a sneer.

Wally glared at him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Oh, I thought you might have missed a watch, or something, as you're inquiring for Frayne," sneered Picke.

And Picke's friends sniggered gaily.

"I haven't missed anything," said Wally—"and I'm not going to miss you, Picke!"

Picke backed away, but not in time to escape Wally's left-hander. He sat down with a bump on the linoleum, and Wally hurried on in search of Frayne.

He ran up the Fourth Form passage and looked into Study No. 6. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy were there, all talking football. D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon his minor as the latter burst in unceremoniously.

"Weally, Wally, that is not the way to entah a gentleman's quartahs!" he exclaimed.

"Seen Joe?"

"Certainly not! Undah the circs—"

But Wally was gone, slamming the door after him. He hurried along to Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage.

"Joe here?" he asked, putting his head in at the door.

The Terrible Three were at a late tea. They looked round cheerfully enough at Wally, and Monty Lowther held up a cake.

"No," said Tom Merry, "I haven't seen Joe."

"Cake, Wally?" asked Lowther, with a grin.

"No, thanks; I'm looking for Joe."

"But—"

Wally banged the door and fled. He was getting really anxious about Joe. He ran off to the box-room where he had found the waif of St. Jim's just before prep.

The room was very dark, and the cold wind told that the window was open. Wally ran into the room, stumbling in the dark.

"Joe!" he shouted. "Joe!"

There was no reply save the dull echoes of his voice. Wally groped in his pocket for a match, and fortunately found one, and lighted the gas.

Joe was not there. Wally ran to the window. Outside, in the faint glimmer of the starlight, he saw the rainpipe that ran beside the window to the ground, and he knew what the window was open for.

Joe was gone!

Where was he gone? Was it another mysterious excursion outside the walls of St. Jim's? Wally remembered the letter Joe had received.

He was deeply uneasy.

But it was useless to follow down the rainpipe; he did not know where Joe had gone. But he did not leave the box-room. He sat on the window-seat in the darkness and waited, with grim countenance. He meant to have an explanation from Joe as soon as the waif of St. Jim's came in.

In the Third Form Room the herrings were done, and Jameson and Curly Gibson were waiting impatiently for Wally. They did not wait long. They were hungry, and the herrings were tempting. They had their tea, and as Wally and Joe weren't there, Jameson and Gibson ate their share of the repast. Nothing was left. But even by that time Wally had not returned.

CHAPTER 6.

Joe Frayne's Father!

"FATHER!"

A low, trembling voice uttered the words from the darkness that enshrouded the spot.

Joe, the little waif of the slums, was crouching on the school wall under the thick shadow of the old oak, and looking down into the darkness of the road outside.

Was the man there whom he had come to see? Had he lost patience and gone? There seemed to be a blacker shadow in the gloom of the tree.

"Father!"

That sacred word—the tenderest but one of the language—came in trembling tones from the lips of the little waif.

"Father, are you there?"

"Joe!"

It was a deep, husky voice that came back, and Joe's heart beat painfully.

The man was there!

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Joe slipped down from the wall and stood in the road. The black shadow loomed up now more bulkily than before, and he made out dimly the form of a man.

"It's you, father?"

"Yes, Joe, my boy."

"What have you come here for?"

The ruffian chuckled hoarsely.

"To see my boy," he replied. "Ain't a father allowed to see 'is boy—the pride of 'is 'eart—especially when they're makin' a gentleman of 'im? You do me proud, Joe! To think of old Bill Frayne's boy 'eivin' took to a big school to be made a gentleman of! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet, father; they may hear us!"

"I forgot, Joe! We'd better move a bit farther off."

"Cross the road; we can step into the wood on the other side. I know where we can get through the fence."

"Good enough, Joe!"

They moved in the darkness, Joe leading his father with a hand on his sleeve. In a few minutes they stood under the trees.

"Safe here, Joe?"

"Quite safe!"

"Good! The cops are looking for me now, but they don't know I'm 'ere," said Bill Frayne. "They don't know I've got my boy at a swell school, you see."

"How did you know, father?"

"The Weasel told me."

"I thought he would," said Joe heavily. "But what do you want? You don't want to see me, father. What is it you want?"

"Can't a kid's own father see 'im if he wants to?" asked Frayne. "Ow do you know I ain't fond of you, Joe—my own flesh and blood?"

"You didn't seem so at Blucher's Buildings, father."

"Maybe I 'ad too much to drink sometimes."

"Drunk or sober, you walloped me, all the same," said Joe bitterly.

"Well, I was brought up 'ard myself," said Frayne. "My father used to welt me with 'is belt—I could show you the marks now. 'E took part of my ear orf with the buckle once. But never mind that, Joe. That's all over."

"Yes, yes, it's all over now—I don't bear no malice," said Joe. "I've got some money, too, father. Master Tom's uncle gives me pocket-money. The Weasel had most of it, but I've got a pound now, and you can 'ave it."

"I don't want your money, Joe."

"You don't want it?"

"No."

"Then what 'ave you come for?"

It was a question that might have sent a thrill of shame to any man's heart. Joe asked it in all innocence. He could not imagine any reason why Bill Frayne should want to see him, unless it was to get something from him.

"I wanted to see you, Joe."

"To see me!" Joe repeated.

"Yes."

"But what for?"

"You ain't old enough to understand a father's 'eart," said Frayne. "You don't know! I did lick you when I came out of chokey, Joe, but you don't know what I went through there—enough to make any man savage, I think."

Joe's face softened.

"I never thought of that, father."

"But after you left me, Joe, I thought a lot about it. I remembered that you was my son, and I was sorry."

"Father!"

"And I wanted to see you again, Joe. When the Weasel told me you was 'ere, I jumped with joy, I did. Why, Joe, 'e told me because 'e thought I would come arter you, to get you into trouble. But that wasn't my sort. I came to see you, Joe, and I've been 'angin' round the school to see you, but I ain't 'ad a chance, so I wrote. Now I've seen you, I can go away."

"Father!"

"Only I wanted to see 'ow you are fixed before I go to Canady," said Bill Frayne.

Joe's heart beat.

"You are goin' to Canada, father?"

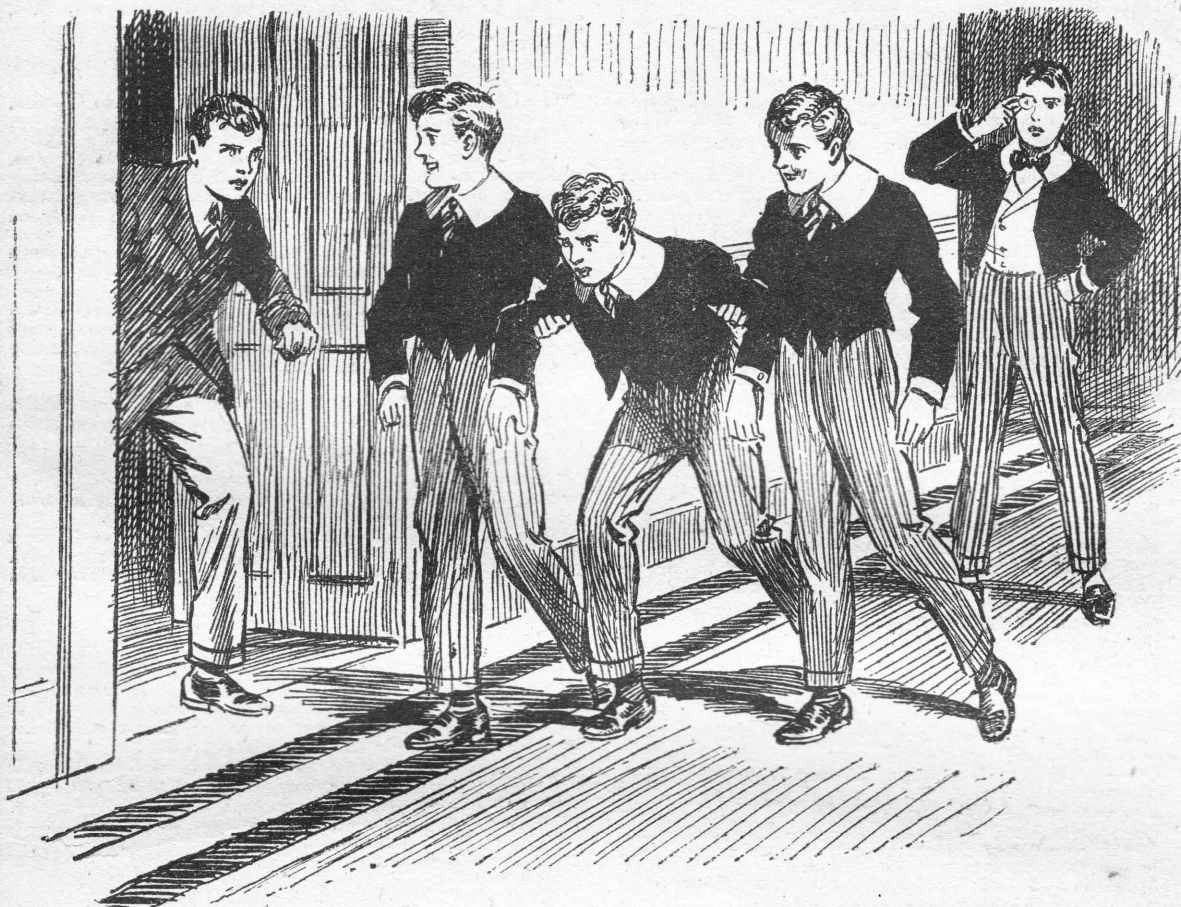
"England ain't safe for me," said Bill Frayne, in a hoarse whisper. "The cops are arter me; but I've got some money, and I can get away from Liverpool. I wanted to say good-bye to you afore I went, Joe, and to see 'ow you was fixed up 'ere. I want to see where you live—your room, you know, and the rest of it."

"I don't 'ave a room," said Joe. "I learn my lessons in the Form-room, and sleep in the dormitory with the rest of the Form. They don't 'ave studies to themselves below the Fourth Form at St. Jim's."

"But I want to see the place," said Frayne eagerly. "S'pose I was to come in? Of course, the boys would all wonder—"

Joe caught his breath.

"Of course they would!"



"What on earth are you fellows doing?" asked Kildare, as he stared in amazement at Manners and Lowther supporting Tom Merry along the passage. "Helping Tom away!" said Manners. "He's frightened. Gussy has struck terror to his soul!"

"But s'pose I come in when they're all in bed, then?" said Frayne. "You could let me in, Joe, just to see the place, 'ow you are fixed up."

Joe hesitated.

It seemed little enough for his father to ask, and surely such a wish could only be dictated by paternal affection. Joe felt a doubt; but he was ashamed of the doubt, and strove to crush it. Arthur Augustus had told him it was rotten to doubt a fellow's word, and Joe had learned his lesson. Alas! D'Arcy had never had to do with a man like Bill Frayne.

"Is that all you want, father?"

"That's all, Joe."

Joe drew a deep breath.

"I'll do that for you, father. There can't be no 'arm in it, surely!"

"Of course not, Joe. 'Ow can there be any 'arm in a kid doin' as 'is father tells 'im?" said Frayne. "Besides, it will be only for a minute. When I live in Canady, I want to be able to remember 'ow my boy was livin' when I left. I shan't never come back again, Joe. I shan't ever be safe in England."

"Oh!"

"I'm off to-night for good."

"To-night?"

"Yes. I'm trampin' to Liverpool," said Frayne. "You won't never see your father again, but you'll try not to think too 'ard of 'im. I was brought up 'ard."

Joe felt a choking in his throat.

"I—I couldn't bear malice agin' you, father," he said. "You used me bad, but it's all over now. I'll do as you wish."

"You're a good boy, Joe. You'll grow up to be a better man than your dad."

"Come 'ere at, say, twelve o'clock," said Joe; "the whole place will be asleep, then. I'll give you the griffin from the top of the wall, and 'elp you up, and show you round. Is that all right?"

"That's all right, Joe!"

"Then I'll get back now."

"Don't forget, Joe—midnight, under the wall where I met you."

"That's it, father."

Joe went back to the school wall and climbed over it. He returned to the School House like one in a dream. His heart was light. He had seen his father, and Frayne had been the very reverse of what he had expected. Instead of violence and threats, he had found repentance—affection—a farewell! His father was not so black as he had thought him—two good reasons why the waif of St. Jim's should rejoice.

Joe's heart was light as he climbed into the box-room. He clambered through the window and shut it behind him. He was crossing the shadowy room towards the door when a voice came out of the gloom, and he started:

"Joe!"

"Wally!"

CHAPTER 7.

Joe Explains.

WALLY was quite invisible in the darkness of the box-room. But his hand was on Joe's shoulder, and the waif of St. Jim's stopped, his heart beating.

"Master Wally!" he murmured.

"Joe, you young rascal!" said Wally. "You've been out!"

"I—I 'ad to go."

"To meet somebody, I suppose?" demanded Wally angrily. "You're beginning your old tricks again, you young sweep!"

"No, no!" said Joe eagerly. "It isn't the Weasel, Master Wally. It's all right. It's a friend."

"What kind of a friend?"

"I—I can't tell you exactly, but—but it's all right, Master Wally. I—I was afraid it wouldn't be, but it is—it's all right."

Wally was heard to sniff in the darkness.

"Look here," he said, "I missed you after prep, and guessed you were gone. I've been waiting here for you for dog's ages!"

"I'm sorry."

"I should jolly well think so. Look here, you've missed tea in the Form-room, and, what's worse than that, you've made me miss it! There were herrings," said Wally wrathfully, "and bloater-paste!"

"Oh dear!" said Joe.

But it is to be feared that he was not thinking very much about the loss of the herrings and the bloater-paste.

"Ain't you hungry?" demanded Wally.

"Ye-es!"

"So am I. What are we going to do?" grumbled the hero of the Third.

"I've got some money."

"The tuckshop's closed."

"Oh dear!" said Joe again.

"I've a jolly good mind to punch your head," said Wally, "and I'll jolly well do it, too, if you don't make the matter clear! I've had enough of your blessed mystifications. Besides, I can see how it is. That letter you had this morning was to fix an appointment with somebody."

"Ye-es."

"And you've met the chap now?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"I'd rather not tell you, Master Wally," said the waif of St. Jim. "I—I'd rather not tell you. You—you see—"

"You've got to tell me," said Wally. "I've told you that I've had enough of your blessed mysteries. You seem to live in 'em."

"Oh, Master Wally!"

"Decent people don't have secrets or go about in a mysterious way," said Wally. "Only bounders have secrets. I licked you for it the other day. Do you want another round or two to-morrow?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then explain."

Joe hesitated.

"You—you'll keep it a secret, Master Wally, if I do?" he faltered.

"I suppose so."

"It's jolly serious," said Joe. "It doesn't matter about me, but it's somebody else. I know I can trust you if you won't jaw."

"Of course you can," said Wally indignantly. "Besides, you've got to tell me, anyway. I promise, honour bright."

"Then I'll tell you, Master Wally."

"Good! Who was it you went out to see?"

"My father!" said Joe, in a low and unsteady voice.

Wally started violently.

"Your father?" he breathed.

"Yes."

"But—but I don't catch on!" faltered Wally, quite taken aback. "Isn't your father a—a—a—"

Wally paused. He did not like to say the word.

Joe smiled bitterly in the darkness.

"A convict," he said. "Yes, you may as well say it out! My father's a burglar and a convict—a ticket-of-leave man!"

"The police are looking for him, aren't they?" said Wally.

"That's right."

"Then how dare he come here?" Wally exclaimed. "It's a chap's duty to give information to the police, so that he can be arrested."

"Not my own father, Wally."

"Well, I suppose not, as far as you're concerned," said Wally. "But I—"

"But you've promised."

"My only Aunt Jane! That settles it for me!" said Wally, with a breath of relief. "I can't say a word, of course. Look here, was it your father that wrote that letter to you?"

"Yes."

"It was awfully risky, under the circumstances."

"I know it was."

"What did he do it for—money?"

"No; he wanted to see me before 'e went away."

"Did he?" said Wally doubtfully. "What did he want to see you for?"

"I—I don't know—because I'm his son, I suppose," said Joe uneasily.

Wally snorted.

"From what I hear of your father, he doesn't strike me as being a very affectionate parent," he said. "Tom Merry took you away from him when he was wetting you with a belt, didn't he?"

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"Well, yes."

"Did he ever treat you decently while you were with him?"

"N-no."

"Yet he wants to run all this fearful risk to say good-bye to you?"

"I—I suppose he feels it a bit, now he's going to Canada, and won't see me any more," said poor Joe.

"H'm!" said Wally.

"Don't you believe him, Master Wally?" asked Joe, making a mental resolve not to tell the unbelieving fag anything about the proposed visit of Bill Frayne that night. It was no use having an argument with Wally on that subject, too.

"Blessed if I do!" said Wally. "Of course, I don't want to say anything against a chap's governor. A chap's governor is a chap's governor, and he's sacred—you can't get away from that. But in this case it's different—he's a brute, and he's always treated you badly, and so I can't help thinking that he's got an axe to grind, especially as you're not sure that he's your governor at all."

Joe was silent.

"Well, come and let's get something to eat," said Wally. "Look here, suppose we ask Tom Merry his opinion about it?"

"I—I don't want to mention it to anybody."

"You ought to ask Tom Merry, as he's a sort of guardian to you, and I should like an older chap's opinion myself."

"I don't mind, then."

"Besides, we may be able to get some tea in Tom Merry's study," said Wally. "I know they have been having a feed, and I think there's very likely something left. They had jam and cake, I know."

Joe grinned.

"All right, Master Wally; I'll come."

"Come on, then," said Wally.

He led the way from the box-room to the Shell passage. The door of Tom Merry's study was wide open, and the light streamed out and voices could be heard. Clearest of all were the aristocratic tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, raised a trifle above their accustomed pitch.

"Oh, rats! That's my blessed major!" said Wally, with a grunt.

Joe plucked at his sleeve.

"P'raps we'd better leave it a bit," he whispered.

Wally dragged him on.

"Impossible, kid!"

"But why?"

"I'm hungry."

"But, I say—"

"Oh rats! Come on!"

And Wally dragged the waif of St. Jim's into Tom Merry's study before he had time to say anything further.

CHAPTER 8.

Wally Helps Himself!

"W EALLY, you Shell boundahs—" Tom Merry held up his hand. He held it up for silence, but silence was the last thing that was likely to be had in his study just then.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had finished their prep, which was fortunate, for they would not have had much chance of getting anything done otherwise. For the chums of Study No. 6 in the Fourth were paying them a visit, and as they were all talking at once, work was quite out of the question.

The Terrible Three were doing their fair share of talk also, and the noise in the study was growing audible to the very end of the Shell passage.

"Of all the chumps—" said Blake.

"Fatheads, I should say!" Digby remarked.

"Blessed asses!" said Herries, after a moment's reflection, to be sure of hitting upon the correct expression.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry waved his hand in the air. He might have waved it for hours without its having any effect upon the conversational powers of the chums of the Fourth. They were in earnest, and D'Arcy in particular was in possession of a very fine flow of language.

"Order!" said Monty Lowther, yawning, and stretching out his long legs. "Chuck it, you juniors!"

"Juniahs!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Yes; you fags!"

"You uttah asses—"

"Order!"

"You fwabjous chump—" "I like Gussy chiefly for his nice manners," said Monty Lowther. "When he visits a chap in his study he's so nice and particular about the expressions he uses."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" said Blake. "Enough talking—"
 "More than enough," said Tom Merry blandly.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Nuff said!" roared Blake. "The question is, are you going to step out gracefully and leave the cricket captaincy next term in its proper place, the Fourth?"
 "That's the question, Tom Mewwy!"
 "No fear!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.
 "I've explained to you—"
 "Yaas, wathah, and I—"
 "We've all explained—"
 "You have!" said Manners. "You'd argue the hind legs off a giddy mule. Why don't you go and explain things to somebody else, or else shut yourselves up in your own study and explain to one another?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Bai Jove—"
 "Shut that row in there!" bawled Gore, from along the passage. Gore was in the next study, trying to work.
 "How can I get anything done when you're jawing away like a whole set of rotten gramophones?"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "Is that a conundrum, Gore?" asked Monty Lowther.
 "Look here, you Shell chaps—" roared Herries.
 "I don't want you chaps to think you're unwelcome," yawned Lowther, "but would you mind telling us at what time you've ordered your carriages?"
 "Weally, Lowthah—"
 It was at that moment Wally dragged Joe Frayne into the study.
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused.
 "Weally, Wally—"
 "Any grub going?" asked Wally.
 "No," said Lowther; "it's gone."
 "Oh, don't be funny! Look here! We haven't had tea," said Wally. "Besides, Joe has something important to tell you."
 Joe flushed.
 "Bai Jove! If Joe is in any need of advice, I'm quite willin' to point out to him the wight and pwopah thing to do."
 "Go hon!" said Wally.
 "Weally, you young wascal—"
 "But we're hungry now," said Wally. "Suppose you Fourth Form chaps clear out while Tom Merry gives us some tea?"
 The Fourth Formers stared blankly at the hero of the Third. They were undecided whether to laugh, or whether to bump Wally on the carpet.
 "That is hardly a respectful way of addressin' your eldahs, Wally," said Arthur Augustus reprovingly.
 "Oh, don't you begin, Gussy!"
 "You young boundah—"
 "Oh, I'll get along!" said Blake, with a sniff. "I've explained how the matter stands to you Shell bounders. If you don't like to look at it in a sensible way, Tom Merry, there will be an election."
 "But I am looking at it in a sensible way," said Tom Merry. "That's the trouble."
 "Oh, rats!"
 And Blake tramped out of the study, followed by Herries and Digby. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remained behind.
 He screwed his monocle into his eye, and looked earnestly at Joe.
 "My deah kid," he remarked, "I do not wish to appeah unduly inquisitive, but I feel that I am the pwopah person to advise you if you are in need of advice. What a chap wequiah at such a time is a fellow of tact and judgment."
 "Yes, Master D'Arcy."
 "You have come here to get Tom Mewwy's advice?"
 "Yes, Master D'Arcy. I'll be glad to tell you about it, too, if you care to listen," said Joe Frayne.
 "Vewy good, deah boy! I shall be vewy pleased to give you the benefit of my age and expewience."
 "Grub first," said Wally.
 "Wally, I wufuse to allow you to use that disgustin' word! Why cannot you say suppah, or food, or pwovisions, or somethin' respectable, at all events?"
 "Oh, rats!"
 "If you say wats to me—"
 "Bosh, then!"
 "Undah the circs—"
 "I don't know about grub," said Tom Merry. "I believe there's some jam—"
 "You are intewwuptin' me, Tom Mewwy—"
 "Exactly. And there's some cake—"
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
 "And bread-and-butter, of course," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Get them out of the cupboard, Monty, and let them begin."
 "Good!" said Wally. "I'll help myself, if you don't mind."

(Continued on next page.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Fine footballs are awarded every week for the two best jokes received and a half-a-crown is paid for every other joke that appears in this column.

WOUND UP.

Hopkins: "Well, old man, how's business going?"
 Robinson: "Like clockwork."
 Hopkins: "But I've heard a rumour that your firm had failed."
 Robinson: "So it has. It is being wound up!"
 A football has been awarded to C. Roberts, 31, Green Walks, Prestwich, Manchester.

NO COMFORT.

Nervous Passenger: "Is this plane safe, pilot?"
 Pilot (confidentially): "Safest on earth, ma'am!"
 A football has been awarded to W. Morris, 18, South Eastern Avenue, Edmonton, London, N.9.

THAT CAPPED IT!

Tom: "Where's my cap?"
 Ted: "Hanging on that lamp over there."
 Tom: "Huh! What crazy place will I find it next, I wonder?"
 Ted: "On your head, I suppose!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Goulden, 6, Whalley Road, Lancaster, Lancs.

WORTH KNOWING.

Voice on Telephone: "Police speaking. We've caught the man who stole your car."
 Motorist: "Good! I'll be round in five minutes. Don't let him go until he has shown me how he started it!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Brooks, 10, Ondine Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

AN OVERSIGHT!

Mother: "I left two pieces of cake in the cupboard, and now there's only one piece. Can you explain, Tommy?"
 Tommy: "Well, it was so dark when I went there that I didn't see the other piece!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Ingham, 66, Wood Street, Middleton, Manchester.

CAUGHT!

Son: "I say, dad, I bet that I have had as many birthdays as you."
 Father: "Nonsense, my boy! I am years older than you."
 Son: "I know that, dad; but we have only had one birthday. You see, all the rest are anniversaries!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Wahlstrom, Porirua, New Zealand.

PROOF!

Foreman: "I could give you a job, but do you think you are suited to hard labour?"
 Applicant: "Well, guv'nor, some o' the best judges in the country have thought so!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Harrison, 126, Norfolk Road, Byker, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

WHISTLERS!

First Business Man: "I've got a very good office-boy now, but the little beggar will whistle while he works."
 Second Business Man: "You're lucky—mine only whistles!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Gibney, 132, Stockport Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancs.

Lowther is a very handsome chap, but he can't move for nuts!"

"You cheeky young rascal——"

"Oh dear, don't you begin like Gus!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"It's like being among a set of gramophones, all going at once," Wally remarked. "Never mind, so long as the grub is good."

And Wally threw open the cupboard door, and began to drag out the provisions.

"Mind!" roared Manners. "Don't shove the jampot on my blessed foolscap, you blessed idiot!"

"Move your blessed foolscap, then, you blessed ass, off the blessed table, if you don't want the blessed jam on the blessed thing!"

"You young ass——"

Words failed Manners. Wally helped himself and Joe to bread-and-butter and jam, and grinned genially at the chums of the Shell, and his indignant major, as he began to eat. The Terrible Three watched him silently. They were equal to most things, and were seldom taken aback. But they had acknowledged long ago that they were not quite equal to dealing with Wally of the Third.

"Well, this is jolly good prog," said Wally.

"What a howwid word, Wally."

"Well, grub, then," said Wally.

"That is almost as bad, you young wuffian."

"There's no satisfying some people," said Wally. "Most chaps would feel proud of having a nice minor like me."

"I should certainly be unable to compwehend their fwame of mind, then."

"You see——"

"I wegard you as a feahful young wuffian. Your collah is howwidly soiled, and your hands are far fwom clean. I considah——"

"When Gussy's finished, if he ever is, Joe's going to tell you about something that's happened," said Wally. "He wants to have your opinion. But if Gussy wishes to hold the floor, of course, Joe will have to wait."

D'Arcy turned crimson, and the chums of the Shell chuckled.

"I have finished, you young wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Hurrah!"

"Go ahead, Joe," said Tom Merry, laughing. "What's happened?"

And the waif of St. Jim's explained.

CHAPTER 9.

The Lost Letter!

JOE blurted out the story, with a red face and a confused tongue.

Once it had not seemed to the waif of St. Jim's so disgraceful as it seemed now. When he had been a denizen of Blucher's Buildings, in London, the associate of beggars and thieves, he had looked upon Bill Frayne's profession as a matter of course. His father was not unlike the fathers of other boys he knew. But the new surroundings at St. Jim's had made a far-reaching difference. Joe coloured and faltered now as he spoke.

The Terrible Three and D'Arcy listened in silence.

Joe finished, his voice dying away.

"I don't like to tell you," he said. "I know how 'orrid it is. I know how good it is of you to speak to me at all."

"Rats!" said Wally.

"Yaas, wathah! I agwee with Wally in sayin' wats for once!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "My deah boy, it is not for us to visit the sins of the fathahs on the children. That is not the place of anybody on earth, my deah kid."

"It's rough on you, Joe," said Tom Merry. "We're sorry. I dare say your father would have been a better man, too, if he'd had a chance."

"Yes, sir," said Joe eagerly; "an' he ain't so bad at 'eart, sir! E's goin' to Canada, and 'e's come down 'ere to say good-bye to me first."

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as weally wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It is awfully decent of Fwayne, you chaps."

The Terrible Three were silent.

It was so decent of Frayne that, knowing as much as they did about the man, they were astonished, and could not help feeling doubtful, as Wally did.

But D'Arcy had no doubts.

His face was beaming cheerfully, and he was evidently delighted at this proof of one touch of decency left in an old and hardened criminal.

He patted Joe affectionately on the shoulder.

"Your governah is not such a bad sort, kid," he said.

"You wemembah what Shakespeare says about sermons in things and good in stones?"

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"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Sermons in stones, you ass, and good in everything!"

"I fail to see much difference! But, as I was sayin', there is some good in ewevy chap, if it is only bwrought to light."

"I shouldn't have though of looking for much good in Bill Frayne," Manners remarked.

"That's where you make your mistake, deah boy," said D'Arcy loftily. "When you have had my expewience——"

"Eh?"

"When you are as expewienced as I am——"

"My hat!"

"When you have weached my expewience and knowledge of the world," repeated D'Arcy, with emphasis, "you will compwehend that it is quite imposs for any chap to be all bad. Nobody is as black as he is painted, as a mattah of fact, and nobody at all is all black."

"About this matter," said Tom Merry. "You say your father didn't want any money, Joe?"

"No, Master Tom!"

"He never asked you for any?" Manners asked.

"No!"

"Did he know you had any?" Manners asked.

"No. I told him I had a pound, and wanted him to take it," said Joe.

"Didn't he take it?"

"No, sir!"

"He refused the pound?" asked Wally, in surprise.

"Yes, Master Wally."

Wally rubbed his chin thoughtfully—thereby transferring to it a considerable portion of the jam he had collected upon his fingers.

"Well, I'm blessed if I catch on to this, that's all!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Wally, it seems quite plain to me!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wemembah now that Shakespeare also says, 'There is some soul of goodness in things evil, would men observingly distil it out.' I am a great believah in Shakespeare—he wote a lot of clevah things that I could nevah have witten myself."

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther.

"It is a fact, Lowthah!"

"Well, I don't savvy," said Wally. "My belief is that the man's on the make, though I don't see how, so far. Sorry, Joe, but that's my belief."

Joe coloured painfully. D'Arcy gave his minor a reproving glance.

"Wally, you are a young wuffian!" he exclaimed. "It is all perfectly cleah to me. The man has been a wogue and a wascal, but on decidin' to go abwoad he thought of his only son, whom he would nevah see again. Natuwallly he felt that he could not go without seein' him."

"Thank you, Master D'Arcy," said Joe, with tears in his eyes. "That's how I feel about it myself, sir."

"It's all cleah enough to me, deah boy. I am shocked and disgusted to find that Wally is cynical at his age. It's howwid!"

"I'm not cynical, you ass!" said Wally, flushing. "Only I don't believe that Frayne has turned over a new leaf."

"It is quite likely; in fact, quite certain, Wally. The fathah's heart yearns for his boy, in spite of a life of cwime!" said D'Arcy. "I've often wead of such things in books. It fwequently happens in novels."

"Not often in real life, though!"

"Oh, you are a young wuffian!"

Joe turned an anxious glance upon Tom Merry.

"What do you think, Master Tom?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I don't know what to think, Joe, and that's the truth," he said honestly. "I hope it's as Gussy believes; and I don't see what Frayne has to gain by telling lies."

"It's perfectly clear——"

"Suppose you let us see the letter," said Lowther.

"Oh, yes; I've got it here!"

Joe felt in his pocket.

He drew his hand out, empty.

"Haven't you got it about you, young 'un?"

Joe changed colour.

"I must 'ave—'ave dropped it!" he muttered. "It's gone!"

"In another pocket, perhaps," said Tom Merry.

Joe shook his head.

"I put it in that pocket, sir," he said.

"Well, try the other pockets, you young chump," said Wally.

Joe went through his other pockets, but the result was the same. The letter was gone.

"I've lost it," he said.

"Young ass!" said Wally.

(Continued on page 14.)

MORE NEWS AND VIEWS FROM—



Let the Editor be your pal! Write to him to-day, addressing your letters to: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, CHUMS!—It is some little time since we had one of those very lively stories of the warfare between the St. Jim's juniors and their friendly rivals, the Grammarians. But in next week's sparkling yarn,

"RIVAL RAGGERS!"

all the old rivalry is renewed with undiminished keenness and vigour. The Grammar School boys start the ball rolling when they rag Marmaduke Smythe, a millionaire's son, who has been to St. Jim's before, and is returning for a time. Poor old Marmaduke gets it right in the neck!

The St. Jim's chums, however, soon get on the warpath. They have formed a Co. to deal with their rivals, and each member is to take the lead in turn. When the Co. suffers a defeat, a new leader is elected. How they fare under this new system is extremely funny, and their lively adventures against the Grammarians will grip and hold your interest throughout this ripping story.

"TREASURE ISLE!"

Our powerful serial of Pacific adventure is beating all other serials for popularity. Letters are reaching me every day praising, in flattering terms, Mr. Brooks' latest effort. In next week's gripping instalment there are surprising and exciting developments on Tao-Tao Island, in which Handforth and his chums, and Nelson Lee & Co., play big parts. Don't miss the next great chapters.

To complete our next grand programme

there will be another snappy issue of "Tom Merry's Weekly" that will give you hundred per cent amusement and interest, while our laughs column, with another batch of readers' prize-winning jokes, is well up to standard. Finally, yours truly will be in his place as usual with more news for you.

THIRTEEN MILES HIGH!

John Williams, of Inverness, wants to know what is the greatest height ever reached by man. He says that he believes that the record made by Professor Piccard has since been broken. John is quite right; it has been. Last September, the Russian balloon, U.S.S.R., went up to a height of 62,320 feet, thus establishing a record, but at the moment of writing a new record is claimed by another Russian balloon, which is reported to have reached a height of 67,580 feet, or twelve and three-quarter miles!

SOME BIRTHDAY PARTY!

When President Roosevelt of the United States recently celebrated his fifty-second birthday, he had what is claimed to be the biggest birthday party on record. It is estimated that no less than four million people celebrated his birthday. Soon after eleven o'clock on the night of his birthday, the President spoke, by means of wireless, to six thousand balls and other social events given in his honour. These functions varied from enormous affairs attended by several thousand people, down to a little dance attended by thirty

people in the village of Cherry Valley, Illinois. Nor was his mailbag forgotten. No, sir! He received no less than one hundred and sixty thousand letters and telegrams, including one birthday card of pure gold newly mined in California!

THE DEATH RAY.

Once again it is claimed that a death ray has been invented. The inventor is a young man, Mr. C. R. Chadfield, who is a lecturer on electrical subjects. So far he has been using only a fairly weak form of the ray which has killed moths and flies, but now he is to produce the ray in much stronger form, and test its powers further. His idea is that this ray might be beneficial to man, both as a destroyer of vermin and also as a cure for diseases. When he was asked if he thought that it might be possible to develop the ray to kill human beings, he said that if he found that that was possible, and that there was any suggestion of using the ray in warfare, he would destroy the whole apparatus.

PITY THE POOR PET!

Perhaps this little story should be headed "Believe It or Not," but it is said to be quite true. A family adopted a calf as a pet, and the calf lived in their cottage with them. They became quite used to seeing the calf about the place, and didn't think about its growing up, until one day they suddenly realised that it had grown into a full-sized cow, and could not get out of the cottage! In the end they had to have it killed so that it could be removed in pieces!

A GREAT AIR RACE.

Fred Turner, of High Wycombe, writes to ask me if I can tell him who else besides the Mollisons will be flying in the great air race from England to Australia in the autumn of this year. This race is in connection with the celebrations of the Victoria Centenary. Well, Fred, I can tell you that among others there will be Captain Neville Stack, Captain Percival, Flight-Lieutenant J. I. T. Jones, Mr. Nelson, Mr. Cathcart, and Mr. Marcendale, all of whom will be representing Britain. Australia will be represented by Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, while Mr. Wiley Post, Mr. Weddell James, and others will represent the United States. Altogether it looks like being a wonderful race with most of the greatest airmen in the world competing.

THE EDITOR.

Norman Treece, 114, Francis Street, Derby, wants a correspondent in the Dominions; interested in natural history.

G. F. West, 60, Seventh Avenue, St. Peter's, Adelaide, South Australia, wants to hear from readers who are keen on the old stories.

Miss Joyce Lee, 24, Cholmeley Crescent, Highgate, London, N.6, wants girl correspondents in Spain, South Africa, and Egypt; ages 13-15; interested in films.

Miss E. May Brown, Dunelm Farm, Lake Grace (North), Western Australia, wants a girl correspondent; age 16-18; interested in books, the companion papers, etc.

Patrick Wright, 36, Harewood Avenue, Northolt, Middlesex, wants correspondents anywhere; any topic; all letters answered.

M. S. Sadi, c/o Haji Bagh, Contractor, Camp Ferozepore, India-North, wants to hear from London stamp collectors; age 16; also from those interested in journalism and mechanics.

Lawrence F. Woodrow, Brasted Chart, near Sevenoaks, Kent, wants correspondents; interested in snaps; ages 11-13.

J. Bett, 211, Clethorpes Road, Grimsby, Lines, wants pen pals, especially in U.S.A. and France; interested in films and cycling; age 14.

Miss Nan McKeown, 49, Percy Street, Belfast, Ireland, wants a girl pen pal in Canada and France; age 13-16.

J. R. Howard and A. Howard, Merton, 21, Sandy Lane, Stretford, Manchester, want correspondents in Australia and New Zealand; interested in cricket and Rugby league football ages 15-17.

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A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal post your notice to The GEM LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Brian H. Welch, 51, Brynton Road, Longsight, Manchester 13, wants pen pal in U.S.A., Canada, or Australia; interested in sports.

M. J. Cox, 8, Lidney Road, Bedford, wants correspondents interested in Nature and hiking; ages 15-16.

Leslie Stone, 16, Bancroft Road, Mile End, London, E.1, wants a correspondent in Africa, Canada, or Australia; age 13-14; interested in films, camping, and Meccano.

Kenneth Lockwood, 33, Lees Street, Higher Openshaw, Manchester, 11, wants correspondents interested in amateur theatricals or plays.

Peter Spice, 1, Flint Cottages, Tunstall, Sittingbourne, Kent, wants a correspondent interested in football and cricket; age 11-14.

Brian H. Kaenel, 62, Westminster Avenue, Thornton Heath, Surrey, wants correspondents interested in old churches; ages 13-15.

THE CRACKSMAN'S DUPE!

(Continued from page 12.)

"Weally, Wally—"

"I suppose you dropped it climbing in or out the box-room window," said Wally. "We'll go and look for it, if you like. I've got an electric lamp; it's Glyn's really, but I've borrowed it."

"Better," said Tom Merry. "If one of the fags finds it he might read it, and that would make fresh trouble."

"I—I'll go," said Joe.

He left the study with Wally. The Terrible Three and the swell of the Fourth looked at one another dubiously.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Monty Lowther. "The chap was an utter ruffian, and I don't believe in him for a second."

"But why should he come down here and stuff Joe up for nothing?" asked Tom Merry.

"That's a giddy mystery."

"It was jolly risky for him, too," said Manners.

"I know—it's a mystery."

D'Arcy rose to his feet. He adjusted his eyeglass in his eye and surveyed the Terrible Three with considerable scorn.

"I wegard you as uttah asses!" he said in measured tones. "It is all perfectly cleah to me."

"Oh, rats!"

"The man was a wuffian and a wascal, but he has wepented. Wascols often do wepent; there is Gore, for instance."

"Gore wasn't a burglar."

"Well, no, but he was a bully and a liah—and a liah isn't much bettah than a burghlar, as a mattah of fact. Gore wepented."

"He keeps on having lapses, though," grinned Lowther.

"Pewwaps; but he wepents ewevy time. It's the same with Bill Fwayne. It is perfectly cleah to me that he intends to do the same."

"To have relapses?" said Lowther.

"No, you ass; to lead a new and bettah life, as they do in the last chaptahs of novels," said D'Arcy. "I wegard you three as cynecal beasts! It is all perfectly cleah to me."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strode from the Shell study.

CHAPTER 10.

Too Late!

WALLY tramped along the passage to the box-room with a frowning brow.

Joe was looking deeply troubled, and that was the only reason why Wally did not "go" for him. Wally was of opinion that Joe had been a careless ass, but he would not say so, under the circumstances—Joe was worried enough.

"My only Aunt Jane!" Wally muttered savagely.

Joe turned to him.

"There's somebody in the box-room," said Wally.

"Oh!"

"Quiet!"

Wally stepped on with noiseless feet. Joe followed him with equal caution. The sound of voices came from the half-open door of the box-room, and they recognised the tones of the fags. Hobbs & Co. were in the room.

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No. 2, Vol. 1 (New Series.)

Flying Squad Reports

ANTI-FLYING SQUAD ROUTED!

Patrol plane brought warning of approach of enemy formation. Reconnaissance revealed Crooke and his Anti-Flying Squad hoping to achieve surprise raid on studies. Crooke under impression Flying Squad absent from hangars. Flying Squad took the air in battle array. Engagement short but fierce. Crooke tail-spun down main staircase. Most of his supporters crashed. Flying Squad circled high to attics to avoid observation by Kildare, who zoomed on scene. Crooke severely admonished. Flying Squad reached base safely—in triumph!

A NIGHT RAID!

School House Flying Squad completely surprised by night attack led by Figgins, of the New House section. Alarm given by Chief Air-Marshall Merry. Flying Squad found difficulty in leaving ground owing to enemy pillow-cases. By dexterous handling Merry got into the air and engaged Figgins in great duel. Merry's supporters meanwhile executed frantic manoeuvres underneath raiders to gain altitude. Blinded by feathers from pillow-cases, Merry nevertheless outflow Figgins. Merry finally leaped aboard, engaging Figgins in hand-to-hand struggle. Merry's supporters followed suit, with success. Many crashes, but School House Flying Squad repulsed New House section, latter hobbling off with much damage. Piles of pillow-case ammunition left behind!



Cut out the Flying Squad badge and mount it on cardboard. This makes you a full member of Tom Merry's Flying Squad, and entitles you to carry out flights and organise a squadron.

When you have got three of your chums to become members of the Flying Squad, you rank as a Squadron-Commander, and to signify it you are entitled to colour the centre of the badge yellow.

When you have got four chums to join, you rank as an Air Commodore, and you are entitled to wear the badge with the centre coloured green.

When you have got five of your chums to join, you rank as an Air Vice-Marshal, wearing the badge with the centre coloured blue.

When you have got six chums to join, you rank as a full-fledged Air Marshal, and you are entitled to colour the centre of the badge red.

All members of the Flying Squad greet each other with this salute: Raise the right arm, bent, so that the hand comes level with the head. The hand should be presented edgewise to your fellow member, parallel with the side of your head, and should be brought into position smartly. Try it!

The unbreakable rule of the Flying Squad is:

Be ever ready to fly to the assistance of your friends.

(Signed) TOM MERRY
(Air Marshal in Chief).

Tom Merry



MONTY LOWTHER CALLING

Hallo, everybody! The plot thickens, as the gardener said when he sowed more grass

seed. Skimpole has been saying that some plants are carnivorous. When the housekeeper questioned the cat about the disappearance of the cold chicken it referred her to the aspidistra. Talking of plants, a correspondent asks how he can distinguish the young plants from the weeds. It's quite simple. The weeds will be the ones that come up again. Surprising what some fellows will do. Mr. Linton had been instructing the Shell in the elementary principles of book-keeping. He left the Form for a while and told them to balance their books. When he returned, Skimpole was walking round and round the Form-room balancing a pile of books on his head. Taking it literally, as it were! Talking of taking things literally, a hiker writes: "One of the most awkward things about a walking tour is taking a bath." Personally, I should leave the thing behind. Herries, as you know, goes in for music—on his cornet! Now he tells me he has written a piano concerto, to be played with one hand. The other hand, presumably, is to ward off the missiles! Digby rather unexpectedly won a five-mile run held the other day. He attributed his success to wearing a red running vest. Scarlet runners are usually full of beans, of course! As one landlady said to the other: "What do you do for a living?" The other answered: "Boarders!" Listen: A nigger went home to his wife with a lantern. He greeted her with "de-light." See it? All right, don't go away. A reader asks: "Do Drum-majors beat their boys with drum sticks?" It must be a "lively tattoo" if they do! Buck Finn boasts that America is so vast that you can get into a train in Texas and still be in Texas twenty-four hours later. Oh, yeah? We've got a local train like that, too!

Remember, you fellows, you have to keep your eyes open nowadays. You look so jolly silly if you go about with them shut!

I'll be seeing you!

St. Jim's News Reel

It was reported that Taggles, the school porter, saw active service in the Crimean War. Taggles indignantly refutes the libel on his age, though he admits fighting against the Boers!

Jack Blake comes from Yorkshire, but cannot do a Yorkshire clog dance! He does, however, lead his opponents a high old dance on the football field!

Herbert Skimpole has a collection of 389 hefty tomes on various abstruse subjects, most of which would give other fellows a headache! Skimmy is very careful to lock them away from possible "raggers"!

Herr Schneider is the most unpopular master at St. Jim's, though Messrs. Ratchiff and Selby run him close. Schneider's

Merry's Weekly



Week Ending February 24th, 1934

SAINTS DEFEAT REDCLYFFE

GOALS GALORE

For their home match with Redclyffe, St. Jim's fielded an extremely capable team: Wynn; Figgins, Kerr; Manners, Noble, Herries; Digby, Lowther, Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy.

Redclyffe came over with a new captain, Archer, who had just come to the school and was reputed to be making quite a stir. Certainly Archer led off in brilliant fashion. His hurricane dashes down the middle of the field almost unnerved the St. Jim's defence at the start, and before they had settled down Archer had netted twice!

Inspired by his example, Judd netted a third and Smith added a fourth! Archer, a long-legged youth of terrific energy, was grinning from ear to ear—but his grin did not stay put! The Saints buckled to in grim manner, and as the game wore on Archer's energy fizzled, and against the stern play of the home eleven his "fireworks" were like damp squibs. Redclyffe had previously overwhelmed weaker sides with their dashing start, but they failed lamentably to stay the pace against a strong side like St. Jim's. Tom Merry threaded his way through and scored with a smashing drive. A few minutes later he added a second from close-in. Blake netted a third, and D'Arcy leaped up in a mêlée in front of goal and levelled the scores with number four—off his noble head!

Half-time found the scores level, 4-4. The second half began with a minor tragedy, Herries ricking his ankle and being advised to go off. Redclyffe tried to press the advantage, but Archer's brilliance by now had faded completely, and the Saints, even with ten men, held the mastery. The high scoring of the opening half was not repeated, but towards the finish St. Jim's were in the ascendant, and Tom Merry crashed the leather almost through the back of the net to score the winning goal. It was a gallant victory for Tom Merry's men in the face of big odds.

unpleasant temper is mainly due to chronic indigestion—and the Saints can't "digest" him, either!

Gerald Crooke says his pater made his money in "big business." Monty Lowther suggests it was most probably "funny business"!

Monty Lowther says Figgins' long legs are the main "props" of the New House defence at footer. Certainly they resemble props for skinniness—but they play a redoubtable game!

Harry Manners can play six games of chess at once. George Gore says he can do the same. We don't doubt it—and lose them all!

Wally D'Arcy says Mr. Selby, the Third Form master, is so bad tempered he would quarrel with his own right hand! He frequently pains the right hands of his pupils—with a cane!



LOOK THROUGH OUR TELEVISOR TOM MERRY SPEAKING

How do you do, you fellows?

It's a great pleasure, and an honour, too, to be able to address you personally like this, just when we're beginning a new era, as it were, in fun and frolic!

Of course, you've heard of the Flying Squad? Who hasn't? I want you all to join—to come with us in spirit in our adventures, and to go out in search of adventures of your own.

I think the adventurous spirit is the keynote of the modern world. There's so much to do, so many exciting things to attract attention, that it makes me at least feel it's great to be alive!

I can never understand a fellow who comes along and mumbles and grumbles at life. Of course, we don't always get what we want straight away, but perhaps it wouldn't be good for us if we did! It hardens us to have to scrap a bit to get the things we'd like. Develops resource, and so on. Even if you're really hard hit—and we sometimes are—there's always brighter times to look forward to, and the fellow with a strong right hand is the fellow who comes out on top!

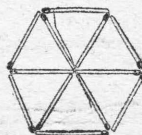
Lots of readers ask me what it feels like to be junior captain and to be in the lead all the time. Well, perhaps it looks jolly nice from a distance. It is, too. But it's never easy—often difficult, and frequently trying. Imagine having to explain to a fellow like Gore—hefty and dense—why you haven't picked him for the footer team! I get lots of things like that to do. But, on the whole, it's a great life!

CALIBAN'S PUZZLE CORNER

In ancient times a king of Sussex wished to build ten forts near St. Jim's, connecting each fort with a straight wall and arranging the ten forts in five lines with four forts in each. He could have arranged them as in the diagram, but he wanted to arrange them so that the greatest possible number of forts would be completely protected from outside attack. As you can see, any of the forts could have been attacked from outside as arranged below, but they can be arranged so that they are not all exposed.



Solution of last week's puzzle.



"I saw them come out of here," Hobbs' voice was saying, and the words came quite clearly along the quiet passage. "They had been up to something—breaking bounds most likely."

"The window was shut, Hobby," said Fane.

"Well, they'd shut it after them, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"It's been opened, though," said Picke, with a chuckle.

"How do you know?"

"The dust is wiped off it where they took hold. Look here! You can see the finger-marks in the dust."

"My hat! Picke's right!"

"I wonder what they went out for?" said Colley. "Wally wouldn't go with Frayne to meet any of his criminal friends."

"Hallo! Look here!"

"What is it?"

"Look!"

Wally had reached the door of the box-room. He could not see to what the excited exclamation of the fags referred. But he could guess. The fags had the light full on, and if the note had been dropped in the box-room they could not fail to see it. They had found Joe's letter.

Joe understood it, too. He pressed Wally's arm tightly in his hand.

"They've found it, Master Wally," he whispered.

"Right!"

"I must 'ave dropped it getting into the window."

"Yes, you ass!"

"They—they've got it!" faltered Joe.

"I—I say, Master Wally, what shall we do?"

Wally snorted.

"Do? Get it away, of course! Come on!"

Wally ran to the box-room. There was a rush of the fags to close and lock the door the instant they heard footsteps. But Wally had his foot in the opening already.

"It's Wally!" roared Fane.

"Get out!"

"You can't come in!"

Wally shoved hard on the door. Seven or eight fags were in the room, and they were all pressing from the inside. Wally's foot was crushed between the door and the jamb, and had not his boot been thick and strong he would certainly have been hurt.

"Get your hoof out, Wally!" shouted Fane.

"Rats! I'm coming in!"

"You're not!"

"No admittance except on business," grinned Colley. "And you've got no business here, D'Arcy minor!"

"Let me in!"

"No fear!"

"Kick his ankle, some of you!" said Hobbs. "He'll jolly soon get his hoof out then!"

"Oh, don't be a cad!" said Fane.

"Stamp on his toes, then!"

"Open this door!" roared Wally.

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Outside, D'Arcy minor!"

Wally shoved hard at the door.

"Buck up, Joe!" he gasped.

"Yes, Master Wally!" panted Joe.

The two comrades exerted themselves frantically at the shoving of the door. If the fags within succeeded in getting it shut they could turn the key in the lock, and then there would be no chance of recovering the letter.

"Shove again, Joe!"

"Yes, Master Wally."

"Not so much 'Master Wally' and more beef!" growled Wally, exerting himself frantically at the door.

"Keep your hoof against it, Picke," said Fane's voice within. "You've got that letter, Hobby, haven't you?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, we can keep the door shut while you read it out."

"Good egg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you read that letter!" shouted Joe. "It's mean! Don't be cads! Gimme my letter!"

"He's afraid of us hearing what his people have been up to!" grinned Colley. "Listen for the latest news from Portland and Pentonville!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally and Joe made one more tremendous effort to push open the door. But it was lined with feet inside, and the feet held it firm. And, as they struggled and shoved in vain, Hobbs' voice was heard reading out the letter.

From beginning to end he read it.

Joe groaned and receded from the door.

"It's all up, Master Wally!"

Wally snorted.

"Never mind! You can lick Hobbs when he comes out."

Joe shook his head.

Licking Hobbs would be small comfort to him. The letter was read out now, and the Third Form knew that his father—Bill Frayne, the outcast, who was wanted by the police—was in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's.

Joe plunged his hands deep into his pockets and tramped away. Wally waited in the passage for the fags to come out of the box-room, and there was a very grim expression in Wally's face.

Inside the box-room the fags were chuckling gleefully.

"His father!" said Hobbs.

"The convict!"

"The ticket-of-leave man!"

"The police are looking for him now!" said Colley.

Fane pushed the door shut. There was no pressure from outside now. There was a very cautious expression upon Fane's face.

"Look here," he said in a low voice "look here, this is jolly serious! The man must be dotty to write to young Frayne, and young Frayne must be dotty to keep his letters. Do you know what this means?"

"It means that Frayne's pater is hanging about the school to see his precious son," said Hobbs. "Nothing else that I know of!"

"He's seen him by this time."

"True!"

"The police want to see Frayne major," said Fane; "and it's our jolly duty to send them information where he may be found."

"Phew!"

"That's my idea," said Fane firmly. "The man's a criminal; and, for all we know, he may be intending to burgle St. Jim's!"

"My hat!"

"It's jolly well likely!" said Picke.

"Perhaps his son is going to help him?" Hobbs suggested.

"I shouldn't wonder."

Fane frowned.

"Well, no, it's no good being too rough on the kid," he said. "I don't believe young Frayne's that sort. But the old chap may intend to burgle without consulting him. There are thousands of pounds' worth of plate in the safe in the library—there have been attempts to burgle it before."

"Yes, rather!"

"The police ought to have that letter," Hobbs remarked.

"And they're going to!" said Fane. "My idea is that it should be sent to them at once, in case old Frayne begins any of his little games to-night."

"How are you going to get it there? We don't want to show up in the matter ourselves," Hobbs said rather nervously.

"No fear!"

The fags quitted the box-room.

Wally was waiting in the passage. Wally said not a word.

But he rushed at the Third Formers, hitting out right and left; and, with howls and yells, they scattered and ran. But Fane had Joe's letter safely in his possession.

CHAPTER 11.

D'Arcy Means to Help!

WHEN Joe Frayne turned up in the Third Form Room that evening the fags looked at him very curiously.

They expected him to cut up rusty, and they expressed it, over the loss of his letter and over the fact that it had been read out aloud.

But he did not.

He did not say a word to Hobbs & Co. on the subject. He knew that it was useless. He knew that whatever he said

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or did it would not undo the fact that they had read the letter, and that they would not give it up for the asking. To say anything more on the subject was to make it more notorious than ever.

It was already the talk of the Third Form Room. Joe did not want it to become the talk of St. Jim's if he could help it.

Joe was deeply troubled in his mind, and that fact showed very plainly in his pale, harassed face.

What to do he did not know.

That his letter had been sent to the police he never suspected. All he was afraid of was the fact becoming known that his father was near St. Jim's.

That Frayne ought to be arrested, that he was a criminal and should be in prison, was perfectly true.

But Joe could not be expected to see it in that light.

The man, criminal or not, was his father; and, to Joe, that fact made him sacred.

How was he to warn Bill Frayne?

He would not see his father again till the latter came to keep the appointment at midnight to hold Joe to his promise of showing him his quarters in the school. But then it might be too late to warn him of his danger.

But Joe had to run the risk.

He could only wait, with what patience he could muster, for the time of the appointment to arrive and hope that the chatter of the Third Form Room would not get further till Bill Frayne had come and gone.

But it was a weight upon his mind, and it showed in his looks—as was very apparent to the fags when they watched him.

Hobbs chuckled over it very much.

"Young Sikes is feeling anxious for his noble parent," he confided to Fane. "He's in a state of stew over it, not knowing whether the old gentleman would be arrested or not. Jolly, ain't it?"

"Well, wouldn't you be anxious in his place?" said Fane somewhat unexpectedly. "Don't be a pig, Hobby!"

Hobbs looked sulky.

"I suppose a blessed burglar ought to be put in prison?" he growled.

"Yes, and I've had the letter sent to the police station," replied Fane. "Now we can feel sorry for young Frayne, I should think."

"Well, you're a rum beggar!" said Hobbs, staring.

"Oh, rats!"

Fane might feel sorry for Joe Frayne, but that did not make him sorry for what he had done. He considered that he had done his duty. Perhaps he had; but he had a secret feeling inwardly that he ought never to have known the contents of Joe's letter in the first place.

"Looks as if he's got something on his mind, don't he?"

Hobbs remarked to Picke, a much more sympathetic listener than Fane, a little later, jerking his thumb towards Joe, who was standing staring gloomily into the Form-room fire.

Picke chuckled.

"He does, Hobby! And he'll have something more on his mind when his pa's arrested. I say, young Frayne!"

Joe looked round.

"Yes, Master Picke," he said heavily.

"Your governor's very fond of the prison fashion in clothes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the fags.

Joe did not reply.

He walked quietly out of the Form-room, leaving the fags laughing. The outcast of the Third went down the passage with a heavy heart.

"They're all against me!" he murmured. "I was a fool to think it would ever be any different, I suppose. They'll all be glad if father's taken by the police—and what will the 'Ead say? Won't it be bad for Master Tom?"

That was Joe's most anxious thought.

The Head had been very kind. He had allowed Joe to come to St. Jim's. The fees paid by Tom Merry's uncle for the waif were a very small consideration. The Head had been kind, and had borne patiently more than one awkward result of Joe being at the old school. But could he bear this—if a criminal were arrested in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's, and publicly known to be the father of one of the fellows there? Would not that be asking too much of him?

Yet it is only fair to say that Joe thought much less of his own prospects than of the danger to his father.

The last words Bill Frayne had spoken to him had been kind, and they were still in Joe's heart. The fact that his father had taken the trouble and the risk to come to say good-bye to him before going to Canada moved him strangely.

A light touch fell on Joe's shoulder as he reached the end of the passage, and he stopped and looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I've been looking for you, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy," said Joe.

"Pway sit down," said Arthur Augustus, drawing Joe into a window seat. "I wegard what those Shell boundahs said to you as all wot, Joe, deah boy. They have no faith in human nature, you know. It is a most common thing for a criminal to wepent and turn ovah a new leaf."

"Yes," said Joe.

"Novels are supposed to be the miwwow of weal life," said D'Arcy. "Well, I know it fwequently happens in novels, particularly in the last chaptahs. I wegard your father's case as a case in point. The old gentleman has been touched by the pwospect of leavin' you for evah, and he has wepented."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Master D'Arcy," said Joe eagerly. "I think so myself. But Wally—"

"Wally is a wuff young wascal!"

"And Master Tom—"

"Tom Mewvy is all wight, but he has vevy little expwience and knowledge of human natuah," said D'Arcy, with a lofty air of vision. "What you want to decide in a mattah like this is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"I congwatulate you, Joe, on this change for the bettah in your fathah," said D'Arcy seriously. "I suppose it is impos for you to see him again, and it is a gweat pity, because I think it might have the effect of confirmin' him in his good wresolutions."

Joe looked eager.

The waif of St. Jim's was anxious to have somebody to confide in. He shrank naturally from telling Wally or Tom Merry that he was admitting his father to the school that night. They were unbelieving scoffers, so far as Joe Frayne was concerned, and Joe did not want to tell them more. But he was weighed down with his secret, and his heart yearned for a sympathetic listener. He had found one in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You—you really think that, Master D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then, perhaps—" Joe hesitated.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle, and looked at the waif of St. Jim's.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I should like to tell you something, Master D'Arcy," Joe said slowly. "Of course, you won't say a word?"

"Of course not, deah boy."

"I am goin' to see my father again."

"Bai Jove!"

"He wants to see me, Master D'Arcy."

"Natuwally, undah the cires," said D'Arcy, with a nod. "I suppose you are goin' to see him to say good-bye before he departs for evah?"

"Ye-es!"

"Vevy good—vevy pwopah and wight."

"He wants to see how and where I'm livin' before he goes," said Joe in a hurried whisper. "He thinks it will make him feel more easy in his mind after 'e's gone."

Arthur Augustus was deeply touched.

"This is awfully decent of him," he said.

"Yes, I think so, too, and I'm glad," said Joe. "But I know the—the others wouldn't believe in it."

"But he can't come here," said D'Arcy. "He won't be able to do it, Joe. He can't come here, you know! He is in dangah of bein' awwested."

Joe hesitated.

"Pway confide in me, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with a wave of his hand. "I am your fwiend in this mattah, wight through."

"He is comin' 'ere," said Joe, in a low voice, and with a hurried glance up and down the passage.

D'Arcy started.

"Bai Jove!"

"It's a secret, of course."

"But when is he comin'?"

"To-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"But—but how?"

"You see, he can't come in the day-time," said Joe. "E must come at night, or not at all. It wouldn't be safe otherwise."

"I suppose not!"

"E wants to see 'ow I'm fixed before he goes," said Joe. "I couldn't refuse him, though I know it's a fearful risk."

"Yaas, wathah! I don't vevy well see how you could, deah boy," assented Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"So I've promised to let him come."

"Vevy good."

"I'm going to let 'im in, and just show 'im round," said Joe Frayne hurriedly. "I suppose it will be all right, Master D'Arcy?"

D'Arcy laid his hand upon Joe's shoulder.

"It is quite wight, Joe, deah boy. I quite approve of your conduct. But how are you goin' to let him in?"

"I'm goin' to meet 'im at the wall and bring 'im 'ere," said Joe.

"It's awfully wisky."

"But he wanted to."

"Quite wight. Look here, deah boy," said D'Arcy generously. "I'll help you. I wegard you as actin' in quite a pwopah spiwit in this mattah, and I am goin' to give you my assistance. It would be awfully wotten for you to get up all alone in the middle of the night. I will get up, too. What time are you meetin' the chap?"

"At twelve."

"Vevy good. At a quartah to twelve I will be waitin' for you outside the door of the Third Form dormitory."

"But—"

"It's all wight, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with a wave of his hand. "I don't mind it in the least. And now let us sepawate. We don't want to give an impwession that we are discussin' secrets, you know. We shall have to be awfully cautious."

And Arthur Augustus patted Joe encouragingly on the shoulder and walked away. He left the waif of St. Jim's in a dubious frame of mind. Joe was glad to have a sympathiser, and he was glad not to have to move about alone at midnight. But he had not so much confidence in D'Arcy's tact and judgment as the elegant junior himself had.

CHAPTER 12.

Keeping the Secret!

JACK BLAKE stared at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy when the Fourth Form were turning in that night. The swell of St. Jim's was putting on his pyjamas—and beautiful pyjamas they were. He was putting them on over his beautiful underclothing, and that was what made Jack Blake stare.



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As a rule, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was most fastidious in these matters.

"Gussy!" Blake rapped out.

Arthur Augustus started. Whenever D'Arcy was keeping a secret, he was given to being startled very easily.

"Yaas, deah boy?" he said.

"Gone off your rocker?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'."

"Sure you're not dotty?" asked Blake, with great solicitude.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Then what are you going to bed in your clothes for?"

"I am not goin' to bed in my clothes. I suppose I need not remove my wemainin' garments unless I choose?" said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Certainly not; but wherefore this thushness?"

"I wefuse to entah into a widiculous discuss," said D'Arcy.

"But why—"

"Good-night, deah boy."

"I suppose you're not getting up to-night to break bounds, are you?" Blake inquired.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You're not going down to the Green Man to play a little game of poker?"

"You uttah ass—"

"Then if you're not going to get up, what are you keeping some of your things on for?" Blake demanded.

"I decline to be catechised," said Arthur Augustus, stepping into bed. "Good-night, you fellows!"

"Oh, he's off his chump, that's all!" said Digby. "What's the good of expecting Gussy to give a reason for anything he does!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"What has he got a pair of shoes out of his box for?" demanded Herries. "What will you want with felt slippers, Gussy?"

D'Arcy turned red, and reached out of bed to push the felt slippers under, so that they would be out of sight.

"Weally, Hewwies—" he murmured.

"Well, my hat!" said Blake.

D'Arcy laid his head on the pillow. He affected not to hear the further comments passed by his chums.

The Fourth Form turned in, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came to see lights out.

When he was gone, D'Arcy's voice was heard in low tones:

"Blake! I say, Blake, deah boy!"

"Yes?" said Blake.

"Pway don't shout."

"Well, what is it?"

"Will you lend me your electwic torch?"

Blake sat up in bed.

"Lend you what?" he exclaimed.

"Your electwic torch."

"Yes, old chap, with pleasure. The only thing is, though, it's exhausted and wants refilling."

"You uttah duffah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway don't cackle, deah boy. I want to go to sleep."

"Mind you don't oversleep yourself," said Blake. "I don't know what time you mean to get up, but if you go to sleep, I don't suppose you'll wake till morning."

"Bai Jove!"

Blake chuckled.

"Of course, if you don't intend to get up in the middle of the night for anything, Gussy, that won't hurt."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why don't you explain what the little game is?" Blake demanded.

"Wats!"

"Confide in your uncle," said Digby indignantly.

"Pway don't be an ass, Dig, deah boy!"

There was silence in the dormitory. Blake stepped quietly out of bed and bent over Digby, and whispered:

"Gussy's getting up to-night."

"Yes, rather!"

"I suppose it's some jape. He's having his noble leg pulled, either by the Shell bounders, or by Figgins & Co., over in the New House."

"I suppose so."

"We're not going to let him down."

"No fear!"

"I'm staying awake," said Blake. "If Gussy gets up I'll call you, and we'll be on in the scene, whatever it is."

"What-ho!" murmured Digby.

D'Arcy's voice was heard again.

"Blake!"

"Hallo!" said Blake, as he climbed back into bed.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,358.

"You were talkin' to Dig?"

"Yes, I believe I was."

"What were you sayin'?"

"I decline to tell you, dear boy, as you refuse to borrow my electric lamp," said Blake courteously. "One good turn deserves another."

"Blake, you ass—"

"Good-night!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Give the chaps a chance, Gussy. They want to go to sleep. And how can they do it with you running on like a gramophone?"

"Weally—"

"Hush!"

"Blake—"

"Shush!"

"You uttah—"

"Hist!"

And Arthur Augustus relapsed at last into indignant silence.

CHAPTER 13.

Wally Wants to Know:

JOE FRAYNE did not sleep that night.

He was too uneasy and excited to think of it. But he turned in in the ordinary way with the rest of the Third Form. He intended to be up again at a late hour, but he was a little more careful than D'Arcy to keep up appearances. There was nothing in his manner to indicate to the fags of the Third that he meant to leave his bed before the rising-bell sounded in the morning.

But Joe's head lay sleepless on the pillow.

The thought of his father was continually in his mind, and the later the hour grew, and the closer the time came for keeping the appointment with Bill Frayne, the more excited and unquiet the lad felt.

After all, he reflected, there was nothing to be uneasy about. He would admit his father to the school, and in ten minutes he would be gone. Then he would creep back to bed, with the knowledge that he had done all that he could to perform his duty to his father before he parted with him for ever.

What was there to be so deeply troubled in his mind about?

He hardly knew.

But troubled and excited he was, and his heart was beating painfully, and more than once he found himself starting and listening to the slightest sounds.

There was one other in the dormitory who did not sleep, and that was Wally. Wally was anxious about his friend.

Wally woke up in fits and starts. The thought of Bill Frayne was in his mind, and with that there was a thought—a dark suspicion—that the man's presence near St. Jim's meant mischief.

The story of Frayne's repentance did not impose upon Wally for a moment. He was only puzzled to know what the man wanted at St. Jim's.

What did he want?

Not money from his son—such money as his son could give him. He had refused that. Had he some lawless plan in view in which Joe could be of assistance to him, either ignorantly or by force? Wally suspected it.

But Wally was but a lad, and though the suspicion was in his mind, it was not strong enough to make him think of watching in the night instead of sleeping.

But it was heavy enough on his consciousness to cause him to sleep uneasily, and to wake more than he slept.

It was in a fit of wakefulness that Wally lay and listened to three-quarters chiming out from the tower.

A quarter to twelve!

Nearly midnight!

Wally moved drowsily in his bed, and, as he did so, he became aware of a sound of someone else moving in the dormitory.

The thought of Bill Frayne was like a weight on his mind, and Wally started up in bed immediately, with every nerve quivering.

He tried to penetrate the darkness of the room with his eyes.

"Who's that?" he called out.

There was no reply.

But a faint sound from the direction of the door warned Wally that it had been opened and shut with great caution.

Wally jumped out of bed.

He struck a match and looked quickly round the dormitory. His heart was beating fast, and he hardly knew what he expected to see. He saw nothing for the moment; but as his glance turned upon Joe's bed, by the last glimmer of the match, he saw that the bed was empty.

As Mr. Railton and the prefects closed upon Frayne, the crackman had a moment in which to act. With a desperate bound he hurled himself at the window and crashed his way through it! Smash! Clink! "After him!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.



Joe was gone.
The match went out.
Wally threw it down and ran to the door. He opened it quietly, and, as he did so, he heard a sound of voices.
"Joe, deah boy, I am here, you see."
"Yes, Master D'Arcy."
"Bai Jove! What's that?"
Wally could see them dimly in the gloom of the corridor. He went out of the dorm, shivering in his pyjamas.
"Joe, what are you doing out here?"
"I—I—"
"Come back to bed!"
"Weally, Wally—"
"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" said Wally. "You ought to have more sense than to be out of bed yourself at this time."
"You diswepctful young wascal—"
"Rats! Come in, Joe!"
"I—I can't, Master Wally."
"Why can't you?"
"I—I can't!"
"Oh, rats!"
"Weally, Wally, I insist upon your leavin' Fwayne to do as he likes!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "He is actin' in a vewy wight and pwopah mannah, and he has my complete appwoval."
"And that is enough, of course?" Wally said sarcastically.
"I twust so," replied Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.
"Rats!"
"You say wats to me, Wally—"
"Rats!"
"Pway wait a minute for me, Fwayne, while I give Wally a feahful thwashin'!"
"Do be quiet," murmured Joe. "The game's up if we're heard, and—remember how I stand, Master D'Arcy."
"Quite wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, cooling down. "It's all sewene! I'll be vewy quiet, indeed! Wun on, and leave Wally to me! I'll explain to him."
"But—"
"It's all wight! I won't say too much!"
"Very well, Master D'Arcy!"

Wally made a grasp at Joe, but the waif of St. Jim's eluded him, and ran down the passage. Wally was following when Arthur Augustus grasped him by the shoulder.
"Pway stop, Wally—"
Wally paused, breathing hard.
"Where has Joe gone?" he demanded.
"Downstairs."
"I mean, what for?"
"It's all wight, Wally."
"What do you mean, you ass?"
"I wefuse to be called an ass! And what I mean is that it is all wight," said D'Arcy. "I quite appwove of Joe's action, and that is all wight. You had bettah go back to bed, and—"
"I'm jolly well not going to do anything of the sort, you ass!"
"As your majah I command you—"
"And as a silly ass you can go and eat coke!"
"Weally, Wally—"
"What is Joe up to? What are you helping him for? What is the little game, anyway?" demanded the exasperated Wally.
"It is imposs to explain, as I am undah a pwomise to Joe; but you can take my word for it that it is all wight."
"Is it a jape?"
"No," said D'Arcy, with dignity, "it is not a jape!"
"Then what is it?"
"Joe is performin' a filial duty."
Wally jumped.
"What! Something to do with his father?"
"I wefuse to explain furthah!"
"You chump!" breathed Wally. "Do you mean to say he is going out to meet that man at this time of night?"
"I decline to be called a chump!"
Wally grasped his majah by the shoulder and shook him in a decidedly disrespectful manner.
"Look here, you fathead—"
"I wefuse—"
"Is Joe's father hanging about the school now?"
"I decline—"
Wally released his majah. There was evidently no

information to be got out of the swell of St. Jim's. Wally left him and rushed in the direction Joe had taken. D'Arcy called after him cautiously:

"Wally, come back! You young wascal!"

His voice died away.

Wally ran on. At the end of the passage dim figures loomed up, and Wally grasped one of them, with a sharp exclamation:

"Now then, Joe, you young sweep!"

"Let go!" said a voice.

But it was not Joe's voice. It belonged to Jack Blake of the Fourth Form.

CHAPTER 14.

In His True Colours !

JOE listened intently as he crept down the stairs.

There seemed to be no sound in the great building.

At that hour not a light gleamed from the windows at St. Jim's, unless it was a lamp burning in some room where a student was still applying himself to his task. St. Jim's was asleep.

Joe crept down the stairs, and reached the large window opening from the Hall upon the quad and felt for the fastening.

A glimmer of strange light came through the stained glass.

There was starlight in the quadrangle, and dim reflection fell into the House. Joe unfastened the window with a trembling hand. It opened easily and silently.

WOODEN-HEAD!



Recruit: "Please, sergeant, I can't hold my rifle—I've got a splinter in my hand."

Sergeant: "H'm! Been scratching your head?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Savage, 28, Tan Lane, Caister-on-Sea, Norfolk.

A gust of cool air on his face calmed and revived him. He climbed out into the quad and closed the lattice softly.

Then he ran for the school wall. He knew the way in the dark—could have followed it blindfolded if necessary.

He reached the wall, and in a moment or two more he was clinging to it and peering over into the dimness of the road.

"Are you there?"

His voice shook as he asked the question. A black shadow detached itself from the wall and came eagerly along towards Joe.

"Here I am!"

It was Bill Frayne's voice.

Joe's heart beat.

"It's hardly twelve, father."

"I've been waiting ten minutes," said Bill Frayne. "Lend me a 'and in! A policeman passed me five minutes ago. I was in the shadow, and he didn't see me."

"Oh, that's only the local bobby of Rylcombe!" said Joe.

"He wouldn't be dangerous!"

"It was a plain-clothes man."

"Then how did you—"

"Know? Do you think I don't know a plain-clothes man when I see him?" said Frayne savagely. "They've got wind of my bein' down 'ere somehow, I suppose—the dickens knows 'ow—I don't! That man doesn't belong to this district. He may 'ave come over from Wayland perhaps. But I shall be gone to-night—burn them! 'Elp me in!"

"Wouldn't it be safer—"

"'Elp me in!"

"All right, father!"

Joe gave the man a hand up to the wall. Frayne was a heavy man, and he breathed hard as he reached a place beside Joe. The two of them crouched there in the thick shadow of the tree as the sound of footsteps came along the lane.

Frayne's hand closed on Joe's shoulder hard.

"Hush!"

His voice was hardly audible. The footsteps came along! Dimly the crouching pair saw a burly figure stride by. The passer did not look up. But there was something in his appearance and his gait which Joe could not mistake. The man was a plain-clothes constable.

Frayne breathed hard.

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"That was a narrow shave!" he murmured, when the steps had died away in the direction of the school gates.

"Do you think he was looking for you, father?"

"Of course!"

Frayne dropped down inside the school wall. Joe followed, very troubled in his mind. If pursuit was so close as this it was madness for Frayne to linger a moment where he was; yet he had evidently not abandoned his intention of seeing the interior of the School House at St. Jim's.

And yet, at the same time, his manner was anything but that of an affectionate parent. Joe was sorely puzzled.

"Which way?" murmured Frayne.

"There's the School House."

"Lead on, then!"

Joe led the way in silence.

They reached the window on the ground floor which he had left unfastened. Joe pushed it open from the outside, and Frayne's eyes glistened.

"Good!" he murmured.

"This way!" said Joe.

Joe climbed in. The ruffian followed and stepped down quietly into the House. Then he drew on felt shoes over his boots.

Joe saw him, in the dim light from the window, bend his head to listen. No sound came from the House. Joe wondered where D'Arcy and Wally were and what they were doing. In the darkness he could see nothing.

The burglar could see nothing and hear nothing. He seemed to be satisfied, and he raised his head and came nearer to Joe.

"You've done this well, kid!" he murmured. "You couldn't have managed it better if I had trained you to it!"

"Come on, father! You want to see—"

"Wait a moment!"

Joe paused.

"Look 'ere, Joe," said the man in a whisper, "there ain't much time to waste; it ain't safe for me to stay 'ere!"

"You'll be safe in Canada, father."

The man chuckled softly.

"I'm not goin' to Canada!"

Joe drew a deep, quick breath of dismay.

"You're not goin'?" he faltered.

"No!"

"Then you were—were—"

"That was a yarn," said Frayne. "I 'ad to tell you somethin' to get in 'ere! Look 'ere, Joe, will you come with me? You're a likely lad for my business, and I'll do you fair and square if you like to come in with me! We'll go shares, and you shall 'ave a 'and in all the jobs. What do you say?"

Joe gasped.

"D-d-do you mean—become a thief?"

"I mean do as you were born and brought up to do!" said Frayne surlily. "What chance 'ave you got of gettin' on in a place like this? You wasn't born for it! You'll 'ave to come to my business sooner or later."

"Never!"

"Don't be a young fool! Listen to what I say! You must come to it! Make up your mind now!"

"I shall never come to it! I'll starve first—and I won't steal! If you came 'ere to say that to me—"

"'Wot else?" said the burglar savagely. "Do you think I care whether you're comfortable 'ere or not, you young 'ound? Do you think 'ot I said was anythin' but a dodge to get into the school?"

"Father!"

"I'm 'ere to crack the crib," said Bill Frayne, and his grasp closed like iron on the boy he had deceived. "You're goin' to 'elp me!"

"Never!"

Joe strove to drag himself away from the man's grasp; but fingers like iron were upon his throat now.

"You'll show me where the safe is?" said Frayne in a low, hissing voice. "You 'ear me?"

Joe could not speak. But he made a movement of denial.

"You young fool! You'll lead the way, or—"

Frayne did not finish the sentence. But the iron grip on Joe's throat tightened, and the boy knew only too clearly the terrible threat that was implied.

CHAPTER 15.

Fairly Caught!

JOE did not move. He was powerless in the grasp of the ruffian. He knew he could not escape. He knew he could not even call for help so long as that iron grasp was upon his throat. But his resolution never wavered. He would rather die than help this man to rob his benefactors.

Frayne bent over the boy.

"You 'ear me? Nod your 'ead if you understand."

Joe nodded.

"You'll 'elp me?"

Joe shook his head.

"You'll 'elp me, you 'ear? You— Ah! Oh! What's that?"

"That" was a rush of feet, which broke suddenly from the silence, and in a second more the ruffian and his prisoner were whirled apart. Hands were laid upon the burglar, and he was dragged down before he knew what was happening.

"Pile on him!"

It was Jack Blake's voice. And the voice of the swell of St. Jim's replied:

"Yaas, wathah!"

And they piled on him.

Bill Frayne was taken so utterly by surprise that he seemed incapable for some moments of a struggle. But he recovered himself quickly, and began to fight with silent but savage force for his freedom.

"Oh, you young 'ound!" he muttered. "You've sold me!"

Joe gave a cry.

"I haven't! I——"

"Collah the bwute!"

"Pile on him!"

"Help!"

Blake and Digby, Wally and D'Arcy, were fastening upon the ruffian. Frayne was down, and the juniors were on top of him. Blake had seized the ruffian's wrists, and in spite of all his struggles, the ruffian was unable to get them loose. The junior knew only too well that he was seeking to get hold of a weapon.

The shouts of the juniors rang through the building.

"Help!"

"Oh, Master D'Arcy," cried Joe, "don't—don't! Let him go! He's my father!"

"But he was lyin' to you, Joe!"

"He's my father!"

"He came in here to wob the coll, Joe!"

"He's my father!"

"He was twyin' to force you to become a thief!"

"He's my father!"

"Bai Jove! Suppose we let him go, you fellows. It's awfully wuff on Joe to have his governah sent to pwison."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Lend a hand, you ass!"

"But——"

"Yell for help!"

"Weally——"

"Help! Help!"

"What is this disturbance?"

It was the voice of Mr. Railton, the master of the School House. The Housemaster came hurrying upon the scene with his trousers and boots on.

"Burglars, sir!" gasped Blake.

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Railton grasped the situation on the instant, and ran into the tussle. The master of the School House was an athlete, and far more powerful than the crackman. Without the assistance of the juniors, he was able to overcome the resistance of the burglar, and in a few minutes Bill Frayne was panting and helpless in his grasp.

By that time most of the School House had been aroused, and fellows were flocking up from all sides. There was no lack of assistance if the Housemaster had needed it. But he did not need it.

Frayne was a prisoner.

"Who is it, sir?" Kildare asked.

"A burglar!"

"It's Frayne's father!" ran a whisper through the crowd of boys.

And glances were cast upon Joe, many of them glances of pity, some of horror. Frayne's father breaking into the school to rob it!

Joe stood pale and trembling.

The worst had happened. His father, owing to his own treachery, was an arrested prisoner—the convict cell waited for him! There was no escape, and no mercy!

Fully he deserved it. But Joe was not thinking of that. He was not there to judge his father!

"Frayne's father!"

"He'll go to prison."

"Yes, rather!"

"Kindly hold this ruffian, Kildare and Darrell," said Mr. Railton, who was breathing heavily. "I believe he has a weapon, and I wish to search him."

"Certainly, sir."

The two sturdy Sixth Formers grasped the ruffian, and held him fast by the arms while the Housemaster searched for his weapons. A jemmy and a revolver were turned out of his pockets, and the Housemaster smiled grimly.

"So you would have used those, you scoundrel!" he said. "The world will be well rid of you for some years."

Frayne ground his teeth.

"That brat has sold me!" he muttered.

Joe started forward.

"I never did, father!"

Mr. Railton started.

"Frayne!"

"He's my father, sir," he said miserably. "He pretended that he wanted to come to say good-bye to me before he went to Canada. When he got in——"

"You let him in?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You let this dangerous character into the House?" exclaimed the Housemaster sternly.

"Yes, sir!"

"Why?"

"He—he said he wanted to see my quarters here before he went away, and——"

"It's a lie!" said the burglar. "We was hand-in-glove all the time. He let me in to rob the safe, and 'e was goin' to come with me arter I'd done it."

Joe gave a cry.

"Father!"

"And that's the truth," said Frayne.

Jack Blake burst out hotly.

"You utter scoundrel! It's a horrible lie! We heard it all, sir. Gussy knew that Joe was letting his father in to see the school—he believed in the villain being repentant, just as Joe did. We knew there was something on, and got up. We were all close here when Joe let the villain in, and we heard all that was said. He was going to throttle Joe for refusing to show him where the safe was. Look at the marks on the kid's throat, sir."

Mr. Railton looked. There was no mistaking the marks of cruel fingers on the boy's throat—deep, black bruised marks. But even otherwise, Mr. Railton would never have dreamed of doubting the evidence of Jack Blake and his comrades.

"I understand," he said quietly. "You have acted in a foolish manner, Frayne—very foolish and reckless. You had no right to admit this man to the school without permission, whatever he may have told you."

"I—I know it, sir."

"Under the circumstances, I excuse you. But it is very fortunate for you that you have witnesses to the truth," said Mr. Railton. "I tell you frankly that otherwise I should have been forced to the belief that you were acting as the burglar's confederate."

"Oh, sir!"

"As it is," said Mr. Railton, "will you kindly take that scoundrel to my study, Kildare, while I telephone for the police?"

"Yes, sir."

Joe started forward with a cry.

"Can't you let him go, sir?"

Mr. Railton gave him a stern glance.

"Let him go! What do you mean?"

"He's my father!"

The Housemaster's face softened somewhat, but it was still determined. There was no possibility of acceding to Joe's wish, and Joe himself knew it only too well.

"What you ask is impossible, Frayne. The man must face the consequences of his own acts. Besides," went on Mr. Railton, "it will be better for you to be rid of such a father. If only for the sake of preventing him from shadowing your life, Frayne, I would do my best to get him the longest term possible."

"But, sir——"

Mr. Railton waved his hand to the stairs.

"You juniors can go back to bed!" he exclaimed.

Unwillingly enough, the boys returned to their dormitories. There was little chance of more sleep that night.

Joe lingered.

Bill Frayne cast a haggard look at the boy. He knew now that Joe had not betrayed him—as he had suspected at first.

But, betrayed or not, he was a prisoner.

"I—I say, guv'nor!" he muttered. "I—I've got somethin' to tell you."

Mr. Railton paused.

"It can wait till I have telephoned," he said. "Keep him in my study, Kildare and Darrell—you, too, Rushden, in case you are needed, and don't let him go for a moment."

"Rather not, sir."


(Continued on the next page.)

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The three seniors marched the burglar into the Housemaster's study. Joe followed him in, and they did not say him nay. They understood the misery that was in the boy's heart, and they respected his sorrow.

CHAPTER 16. Great News!

MR. RAILTON returned in a few minutes. He had his dressing-gown on now, and a muffler round his neck.

Bill Frayne was sitting in the study, and the three seniors were still holding him. The burglar's glances were seeking an avenue of escape. His glance rested on the window for a moment. But the strong grasp upon him made it impossible for him to attempt a dash for liberty. He looked at Mr. Railton as the Housemaster came in.

"Well?" said the master of the School House crisply.

"You wanted to speak to me?"

"Have you telephoned, sir?"

"Yes."

Frayne's face grew more grim and lined.

"Then the perlice are comin', sir?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"What have you got to say?" the Housemaster asked sharply.

Frayne looked at Joe.

"Look at that boy," he said. "You seem to be thinking a lot about him; you want to send me to prison to keep me away from 'im."

"Certainly. I hope you will get the longest possible sentence. Nothing is too bad for a man who seeks to lead a lad into crime."

"Look 'ere—"

"The fact that he is your son only makes the matter the worse!" said the Housemaster sternly. "There is no excuse for you. You need not ask for anything at my hands. I should be harder on you as Frayne's father than if you were a stranger to him."

"You think he'd be better off without me for a father?"

"I suppose so."

"You care whether it is so or not?"

"Naturally, as I take an interest in the lad," said Mr. Railton wonderingly. "But what do you mean? You cannot alter the fact."

"Suppose I ain't his father?"

"But you are!"

"But suppose I ain't," persisted Frayne. "What then?"

"I should be glad to hear it. But you are lying—you are his father!" said the master of the School House.

"I ain't!"

"What!"

"Joe belonged to me," said the ruffian. "He belonged to others in turn. Slum brats like Joe don't 'ave no people."

"E ain't my son!"

"Is that true, Joe?"

Joe shook his head.

"I don't know, sir. I hope it's true; I've hoped it ever since I came to the school, sir. I never cared before then. But he's such a liar, you can't believe him."

"I hope it is true, certainly!" said Mr. Railton. "But, as you say, it is impossible to take the word of such a man."

"I can prove it!" exclaimed Frayne eagerly.

"I do not believe you!"

"But there's proof—proof!" cried Frayne, eager now that he imagined there was a chance of softening the heart of the Housemaster. "I'll prove it! Joe ain't my son any more than 'e is yours!"

"How can you prove it?"

"Joe's thirteen years old, I reckon—"

Mr. Railton glanced at Joe.

"He might be anything from twelve to fourteen," he said.

"But, in any case, what does that prove?"

"Sixteen years ago I was sent to Portland Prison, and I stayed there seven years at a stretch," said Frayne. "I can prove it by looking out the records."

Mr. Railton started.

"If what you say is true—"

"The records will prove it."

"I shall certainly have the matter inquired into, and if the fact can be established that you are not Frayne's father, no one will be more pleased than I," said Mr. Railton.

"I'll swear it's true!"

"You may save your breath. If it is true, I shall discover it to be so—and I may say that I think it very probable. But it makes no difference to you. You do not hope, I suppose, that I shall not hand you over to the police because you have made this statement to me?"

"Let me go, and take my chance," said Frayne huskily. "They're arter me already. They are watchin' the school, I believe. Give me a chance."

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"You must be mad to ask it."

"I've told you the truth about the boy—"

"Be it so, it is not in my power to release you, and you are too dangerous a character to be let loose."

Frayne did not reply.

His head sunk on his breast, and he seemed to be utterly and abjectly under the weight of despair.

But the wily ruffian was playing a part. For five or six minutes he remained so, and unconsciously Kildare and Darrell relaxed their hold upon him. Rushden was standing with his back to the door in case of an attempt to escape. Joe had left the study, ordered back to bed by Mr. Railton. Suddenly Bill Frayne awoke from his lethargy with a sudden, tremendous wrench that tore him from the grasp of the two Sixth Formers.

He leaped to his feet, hurling Kildare and Darrell back.

Mr. Railton reached forward; Rushden came on; Kildare and Darrell closed upon the ruffian again. But Frayne had a single second, and he made the most of it. With a desperate bound he hurled himself at the window.

Crash!

Smash! Clink!

Fragments of broken glass and sash clinked down into the quad, and among them went the burglar.

Frayne rolled on the ground, bruised, cut, bleeding, gasping.

But only for a second did he remain there.

Then he was upon his feet, and running for life.

"After him!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster sprang to the window, and leaped out into the quadrangle. The sound of the burglar's footsteps rang clear through the silent night. The Housemaster ran at top speed in pursuit.

But fear lent the ruffian wings. He ran desperately on and leaped up at the school wall; caught it in his hands, and dragged himself breathlessly over.

Mr. Railton set his teeth and leaped at the wall. He was climbing over in another moment, and the sounds of a desperate struggle reached his ears. He looked down into the darkness of the road.

Bill Frayne was struggling furiously in the grasp of a plain-clothes constable and two other policemen, who seemed to have appeared from nowhere.

His resistance lasted only a few moments.

The handcuffs clicked on his wrists, and the grasp of three stalwart constables held him a helpless prisoner.

Mr. Railton looked down into the road.

"You have him?" he exclaimed.

The plain-clothes man looked up.

"Yes, sir. Has he robbed the school?"

"He has attempted to do so. We had him, but he broke away," said the Housemaster. "You are very luckily upon the spot."

"Yes, sir. We had a letter sent to us, and we've been watching the school ever since," said the constable. "We've got him now. We needn't trouble you any more to-night, sir. We'll take him to the station now."

And Bill Frayne walked heavily away with handcuffs upon his wrists, and a strong grasp upon either arm.

There was no escape for him now.

Joe Frayne was the cynosure of all eyes in the morning.

The son of the burglar who had attempted to rob the school was naturally a notable character.

And if it made Joe appear a kind and distinguished person in the eyes of the very young fags, the majority of fellows at St. Jim's felt that it would not "do."

Gore of the Shell remarked that a line would have to be drawn somewhere, and Mellish of the Fourth backed him up.

But more decent fellows than Mellish or Gore felt, too, that Joe could not remain at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry felt it, miserably enough.

"It won't do," he said to Manners and Lowther. "Joe will never get over this. He can't live down a thing like that."

And the chums of the Shell concurred. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had to admit that it was beastly awkward.

In the midst of the rejoicing of Joe's enemies and the sorrow of his friends came a startling announcement.

It was made by the Head to the whole school assembled in Hall.

The boys, wondering why they were called together—Hobbs & Co. hoping to hear that it was to see Frayne expelled—gathered in Hall, and interest was breathless as Dr. Holmes rustled in.

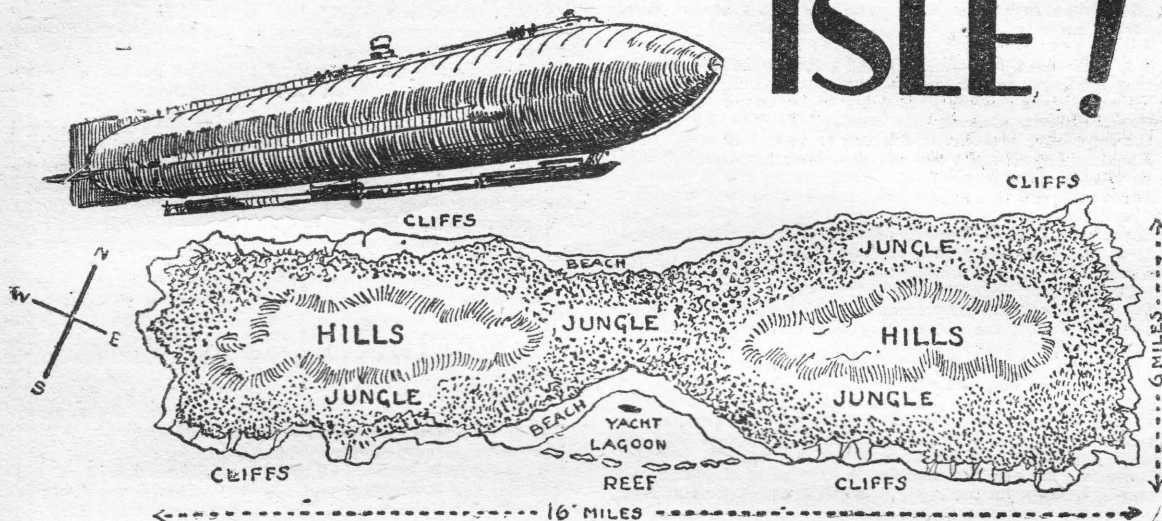
The Head's words were brief.

"I have called the whole school together to make a most important statement," he said. "There is a boy here who

(Continued on page 23.)

NELSON LEE & CO. CAUGHT IN THE GRIP OF A WHIRLPOOL!

TREASURE ISLE!



THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

The Sky Wanderer, the airship school of the St. Frank's chums, lands on Tao-Tao Island, in the Pacific, in response to a message for help from Mr. Beverton, an explorer treasure-seeking on the island. It transpires that Doc Haynes and most of the crew of the explorer's yacht have mutinied to seek the treasure. To ensure his own safety from the airship school, Haynes, who is friendly with the cannibals, captures twelve of the St. Frank's boys. But Handforth and his two chums escape and hide in a secret cave.

Handy & Co. in Hiding!

HANDFORTH, incurable optimist that he was, seemed to find great satisfaction in the situation. But Church and McClure, being more matter-of-fact, were gloomy.

"It's all very well saying that we're free, Handy," growled Church, after a while, "but if you call being poked in a hole like this freedom, then I'm cockeyed!"

"Well, we're not prisoners in Haynes' hands, are we?" demanded Handforth.

"No; but—"

"Then don't grouse," interrupted Edward Oswald. "I've already formed a plan of campaign."

He paused, expecting his chums to question him eagerly; but they were silent. Perhaps they were a bit stunned. How anybody in Handforth's position could plan out a campaign was beyond their comprehension. He seemed to overlook the fact that they were in the very centre of a hornets' nest. The only escape from this hiding-place, it seemed, was through the pool, and Haynes' camp was within fifty yards of the pool. In the other direction there was the jungle, teeming with warlike savages. It was not surprising that Church and McClure found it impossible to share the enthusiasm of their leader.

"Well?" demanded Handforth, at length. "Have you chaps been struck dumb, or something?"

"Is there anything worth saying?" asked McClure.

"Don't you want to hear my plan of campaign?"

"Be reasonable, Handy—"

"You chaps make me sick!" broke in Handforth impatiently. "What's the good of worrying about the odds? They're against us, I know, but all the more credit for us if we do Haynes in the eye."

"All right, we'll buy it," said Church. "What's the plan of campaign?"

"It's a cert that Haynes and his men are searching for us now," replied Handforth. "They won't find us in this queer cave, or whatever it is."

"They may know about it, and fish us out," said Mac.

"A couple of nice, cheery pals to have when a chap is in a mess!" said Handforth bitterly. "All you can do is to think of difficulties. How do you know that Haynes knows

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

of this place? I only found it by accident. There's not one chance in a thousand that Haynes, or the blacks, either, know anything about this underwater cave."

"So what?" asked Church.

"All you've got to do is to lie low for an hour or two, until Haynes has given up the hunt as a bad job," said Handforth. "Then, when everything is quiet, we'll swim out of here and climb out of the pool."

"How?"

"Eh?"

"How are we going to climb out of the pool?"

"If you're trying to be funny—"

"Don't be an ass!" said Church. "There's nothing funny in this situation. The sides of the pool are of rock, and they're sheer."

"Well, we'll get out somehow!" growled Handforth. "When we're out we'll prow about and locate the other chaps and set 'em free. Can't go back through the jungle, of course."

"Why not?"

"Too risky."

"Do you think so?" asked Church. "Does it matter about a few hundred cannibalistic savages?"

"The odds are, the ugly beggars are searching for us," replied Handforth, on whom the sarcasm was entirely lost. "No; once we've rescued the other chaps, we'd better swim out to the lagoon and bag Mr. Beverton's yacht."

This time there was no sarcasm, for Church and McClure were speechless with wonder. Handforth really meant it. He was apt to be absent-minded at such times, and such trifling details as sharks never entered into his calculations. He also overlooked the fact that he and his chums were unarmed. They, for their part, thought it better not to remind him of any of these things. They unselfishly came to the conclusion that if they themselves could not feel hopeful, there was no reason why Handforth shouldn't be.

Mr. Peter Immanuel Haynes—for thus he had been christened—sat finishing his supper in the big central apartment of his bungalow. Crudely constructed though the building was, this room possessed many comforts.

On the rough floor there was a rich carpet, the furniture was of solid mahogany, and against one wall stood a book-case, filled with books. All those refinements had once adorned the lounge of Mr. Beverton's private yacht, and Haynes, knowing that his stay on Tao-Tao Island would be a long one, had brought them ashore.

Overhead, from a rafter, hung a petrol vapour lantern which gave a brilliant illumination. Round it fluttered

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moths by the dozen, and insects of other kinds were humming and buzzing. Watchful lizards, half hidden in the shadows overhead, occasionally made darting attacks at the insects—their natural prey.

As Haynes was lighting one of his enormously long cigars a murmur of voices sounded outside, and a heavy footsteps crossed the veranda. The man who came in wore nothing but a pair of soiled drill trousers. The upper part of his body was bare, and bronzed to the colour of mahogany. His face was crinkled like old leather, and if he had worn a handkerchief over his head, and a cutlass at his side, he would have exactly resembled a seventeenth century pirate.

"Well, Button?" asked Haynes, pausing in the act of lighting the cigar to ask the question.

"No good, boss; them kids ain't to be found nowhere," said Bill Button, shaking his head. "They've gone. Me an' the boys have searched the beach from end to end."

"I reckon I shall have to come and look for myself," said Haynes, as he ropt to his feet. "The young swabs must be somewhere around this beach. Stands to reason they wouldn't bolt back into the jungle after they've had one taste of it. They've got to be found, and no man in this camp is going to have any sleep until they are found."

Haynes had been thinking during his supper, and his thoughts had not been pleasant. The "butting in" of the airship party had already hindered his activities, and, by the look of things, those activities would yet be hindered a whole lot more.

The escape of the three schoolboys was particularly exasperating. If they were hiding somewhere on the beach no harm would be done, for they could be imprisoned with their nine companions. But if the blacks had spirited the boys away, the result might be serious. Haynes had no illusions regarding his mastery over the island's rightful inhabitants. He was the uncrowned king of Tao-Tao just so long as he kept on the right side of the natives. But they were a tricky, treacherous lot. They were quite capable of taking the three schoolboys and using them for the purpose of some hideous heathen sacrifice. If that happened the blacks would work themselves up into one of their rare conditions of mad, hysterical fanaticism. And that would mean trouble with a capital T. Very definitely Doc Haynes desired no such trouble.

"We've got to do this thing proper," he said, when he had reached the spot near the jungle edge, where he had first encountered the fugitive boys. "Let's have a light here, Button! You, too, Red."

Electric torches were flashed on by Haynes' men. There were several about him now, and they were not in the best of tempers.

"Tain't no good, Doc," said Red Harker. "We've looked here—"

"Well, look again," interrupted Haynes. "I've questioned the other kids, and it seems pretty certain that the whole twelve of 'em was here when they broke out of the jungle. Then the blacks came rushin' out, and there was confusion. That was when them three boys slipped away."

"Sounds reasonable, Doc," nodded Red. "They slipped away, then, just about here," continued Haynes, flashing his own torchlight about. "Is it likely they bolted back into the jungle? Not on your life! But, by thunder, they might have slipped in between these rocks!" he added, as he flashed his light about. "That's it! See how the rocks come up close? There's a sort of passage, too. Easy enough for the kids to slip into it—"

"But there's nothing through there but the fresh water pool," interrupted Button. "We've looked there, boss. If the kids dived into that pool, they dived to death, becous there's no way out. The sides are as smooth as glass, and steep, too. Have a look for yourself."

"I'm half-way there," retorted Haynes grimly. He strode through the frowning rocks to the pool's edge, and flashed his torchlight down upon the water's placid surface.

The pool looked black and mysterious, twelve or fifteen feet below. It was, indeed, something like a natural well, and at the first glance Doc Haynes realised that if any living creature had dived into this water there was no possible way out. Roughly circular the pool was bordered on

all sides by the sheer, smooth, rock walls. The camp obtained its fresh water from this supply, which was fed evidently by a subterranean spring.

"H'm! Mebbe you're right, boys," admitted Haynes. "Still, we might as well make sure. There's just a chance that the kids dived in and was drowned. Let's have more light."

Button and Harker, on hands and knees, crawled to the rocky edge, and, leaning over, they flashed their torches upon the pool's surface.

"Can't see nothing, Doc," said Red. "We don't want no dead boys in this pool, seem' as we get our drinking water from it. If they was dead they'd float, wouldn't they?"

"Not at first," said Button. "It might be hours before they float up. Hi! What are you trying to do, Red—push me in?"

He grabbed at the rocks for support, for he had received a sudden shock which had nearly overbalanced him. The electric torch jerked out of his hand, splashed upon the pool's surface, and sank. It was fully switched on, and a glow of light could be seen for some seconds, fading away to a greenish-bluish haze. Then it vanished altogether.

"Couldn't help it, boss," said Button, struggling to his feet. "It slipped out of my fingers—"

"Forget it," interrupted Doc Haynes. "There's plenty more torches on the yacht. Well, seems as if we'll have to leave this till the morning. If the kids is here, they'll be floatin' by then."

They went back to the sandy beach, and carried the search elsewhere.

"They've gone!" muttered Church tensely.

The three juniors in their strange hiding-place had spent some anxious minutes. Vaguely, mysteriously, they had heard the voices of men, and the sounds had been distorted and muffled by the water. Yet it had been plain that the men were near at hand—that they were, in fact, giving the pool a careful examination. The object of that examination was obvious. And for some moments Handforth & Co. had been beset with the dread that their place of concealment was discovered.

Then the absolute darkness of their bolt-hole had undergone a change. The darkness was not quite so intense. It was still impossible for the boys to see one another, yet they knew that there was a difference.

"They've got lights up there," Handforth had muttered. "We're getting about one per cent of the reflection."

Soon after that they had been intrigued by a strange greenish spot, looking like the eye of some sea creature, showing itself deep in the water at their feet. They were crouching on the ledge, above the water's level, and they could still see that queer, unwinking, greenish eye.

Absolute silence came again, and with it a return of the complete darkness, except for that motionless "eye" in the depths of the water.

"Yes, they've gone," said Handforth, with satisfaction. "My sons, what did I tell you?"

"What did you tell us?" asked McClure. "Haynes and his men don't know anything of this cave," replied Handforth. "If they did they would have searched it, wouldn't they? No. They came to the pool's edge, flashed their lights on it, saw that the pool was empty, and went away. We're safe. They've searched the pool, and they're satisfied that we're not in it."

"It doesn't make any difference to us, does it?" asked Church. "We shall have to get out sooner or later, or we'll starve."

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth, with sudden excitement.

Before his chums could question him they felt him wriggling away; then they heard a dull splash as he descended into the water. He had dived for some reason, and they heard the water splashing and gurgling against the inner sides of the rock cave.

"Has he gone mad?" asked Church anxiously. "What did he dive in for?"

"Look!" muttered McClure. Strangely, rapidly, the darkness of the cave was being dissipated. Church and McClure could even see themselves. A greenish glow was becoming stronger and stronger in the water; then in a moment it changed from green to white, and Handforth broke surface, gurgling and gasping. As he did so a dazzling, white beam shot upwards into the faces of the others.

"I knew it!" gloated Handforth breathlessly. "That green spot was an electric torch! One of Haynes' men must have dropped it by accident. And we've got it, my sons!"

They helped him up to the ledge, and, with water dripping from him, Handforth fingered the big, powerful, waterproof electric torch affectionately.

"You must have been born lucky, Handy," said Church,

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C. Payne. J. Little. G. Fullerton.

(Three more portraits next week.)



Round and round the whirlpool at a dizzy speed swept Nelson Lee and his companions—being drawn nearer and nearer to the vortex! Suddenly, Beverton, with a hoarse cry, was swirled into the funnel-like centre, and in a moment he was sucked under!

his eyes glowing. "Ye gods and little fishes! We've got a light now, and—"

"Look!" almost shouted Handforth.

He was flashing the light away from them—against the rocks, as they had supposed, which formed the end of the underwater cave. But there was no end in sight.

Instead, they found themselves gazing down a narrow fissure of the rocks—a great cleft which seemed to penetrate for miles.

An Amazing Discovery!

THE powerful unsuspected current at the western headland, which had caught the pneumatic boat in its grip, was far stronger than Nelson Lee and his companions had at first realised.

When they first felt its influence they paddled hard, striving to take the featherlight boat farther out towards the open sea. Umlosi was paddling with all his skill, and all his strength. Lord Dorrimore was nearly as effective. But in spite of their efforts they knew that the inflated rubber boat was being dragged from its course; it was being taken in a circular movement.

"It's like a whirlpool!" panted Dorrie, at length. "By glory! This is an unexpected snag, Lee! What are we goin' to do?"

"We must keep on striving," replied Lee urgently. "Don't relax your efforts for a second, Dorrie."

"This is dreadful!" muttered Beverton.

They were all paddling hard; and they noticed that the frowning rocks of the headland, at first on their right, were now on their left. Proof positive that the boat, in spite of all their efforts, had made a half turn. They were nearer to the cliffs, too. Yet there was no foam upon the water—no indication of surf. From the cliff base, not so far distant, they could hear the dull roar of the breaking seas; and Nelson Lee, at least, thought he could hear another sound. It was a vague, ominous roar, and it seemed to come from the very sea itself, and from somewhere deep below.

"We're losin' ground, Lee!" exclaimed Dorrie, at length. "This infernal current has got us fairly in its grip!"

Gamely they fought, but each man knew that there was no hope. For by now the boat was completely out of hand. The exertion expended upon the paddling was a mere waste. The boat was sweeping round in a perceptible circle, and it was increasing its speed until it was skimming through

the water at a dizzy pace. Round and round, and with every circle the radius was narrowed. Soon it commenced rocking ominously, and even paddling became difficult, if not impossible.

"So much for our plans, Dorrie," said Lee, almost bitterly.

"You were right, old man," grunted Dorrie. "Only a fool counts his chickens before they're hatched. I'm a fool, I suppose. Whoa! Nearly over that time! I say! Look! Good glory! It is a whirlpool!"

They were now at close quarters to the dreadful danger, and even in the dimness of the starlight they could see something which caused their hearts to thud with increased rapidity.

As the boat swept round in its narrowing circles, they saw that the sea seemed to shelve towards the whirlpool's centre. The boat was shooting round out of all control, and the sea was as smooth as oily glass. And at the vortex of this maelstrom, there was a funnel-like hole, and from it came the ominous roaring which Lee had heard some minutes earlier.

It was a staggering horror. What was the cause of the whirlpool? Where did the water go to, so close to the shore? The four men were allowed no time to ponder over this enigma; for suddenly the frail boat pitched up on its end, and the four occupants were flung out, to plunge in all directions into the whirling sea. The boat itself, like a cork, tossed into the air, turned upside down, and was whirled away.

Lee himself found that he was side by side with Dorrie. Umlosi and Mr. Beverton were not three yards away. Already they were dizzy. For they were being swept round and round at a speed which was now terrific.

It was the end.

"Well, we tried, Lee, old man!" yelled Dorrie, urbane to the last. "So-long!"

Even as he shouted he saw Beverton vanish. The explorer gave a last hoarse cry, and then the waters had sucked him under. It was as though a giant hand had caught his feet. One second he was there, and the next second he had gone—drawn down into the very centre of the funnel-like vortex. Dorrie was reminded of a speck of soapsuds shooting into a bath plug-hole.

Within two seconds Dorrie himself followed. He felt a bump, and he knew that he was in collision with Lee and Umlosi. All three vanished in the same breathless moment. Down they went—down—down—down!

Into the vortex of death! Roaring filled their ears, foam surged about them, and they felt themselves being carried

at incredible, horrifying speed into the very depths of the ocean.

Nelson Lee found himself wondering how long it would be before death encompassed him. In spite of the dread sensation of suffocation, he still retained all his wits. He knew that he was being carried irresistibly onwards—for, strangely enough, he had lost the sensation of diving down. He was being buffeted and battered by a force of water, by a current which was like the enveloping grip of a monstrous hand.

Dizzy, bewildered, a new sensation then assailed the detective. He felt that he was shooting upwards, and no longer did he feel that his lungs were bursting. He inhaled deeply, knowing that it was death to do so.

And in that second his head broke through foaming water, and into his lungs he drew air! Pure, life-giving air! He felt himself being tossed about, but he was breathing again. His ears were filled with a deafening roar of surging waters; and when he opened his eyes they met nothing but absolute blackness.

He struggled desperately. Was this death, after all? For one tense second he had believed that he had come to the surface of the sea again. But that was impossible. There were no stars overhead. There was nothing. He was in a world of stygian darkness, a world of roaring commotion.

Something touched him, collided heavily, and then a strong hand gripped his shoulder; he felt the fingers take a firm hold. It seemed impossible, and yet—

"Wau!" came a familiar voice in a watery gurgle.

"Umlosi!" croaked Nelson Lee.

"Umtagati, my master!" came Umlosi's prompt reply.

"Thou art alive, then, like myself?"

"Hey!" came a voice out of the darkness, and apparently from a great distance. "Am I mad, or dead, or what? Did I hear your voice, Umlosi?"

It was Lord Dorrmore, and in the same second a gasping shout came from Mr. Mitchell Beverton. All these sounds were vague and only half-heard, amid the tumultuous voice of the cataract.

The bewildering confusion had left Nelson Lee by now, and he knew that he was, indeed, alive. He and his companions had been drawn down into that vortex, but they still lived. Lee, ever practical, succeeded in getting the electric torch from his pocket, and switching it on.

The white beam of light shot across a vista of tumbling, foaming waters. Near at hand, Umlosi was swimming; and almost within arm's reach were the heads of Dorrie and Beverton. Lee had believed them to be many yards off, but such was not the case. Drawn into the vortex almost in the same second, the four men were still together.

"Swim!" shouted Lee. "This way, Dorrie—this way! The waters are less disturbed over here."

They obeyed without question. They swam strongly, for they were all powerful men. Beverton was soon in difficulties, however, for he had swallowed a good deal of water, and was little more than half-conscious. It was Umlosi who went to his aid, and half-dragged him along.

Presently the waters were less disturbed, and swimming was easier. Lee, in advance, occasionally flashed his torch. He was amazed to see, soon, rocks jutting up not ten yards ahead. They were shelving rocks, about which the water foamed and hissed. Lee clutched at a projecting crag, and

held on. He was able to pull himself out, and he had the satisfaction of seeing his companions follow his example. With numbed limbs and reeling brains they dragged themselves quite clear of the water, and lay sprawling on the rocks.

Thus, many minutes elapsed. They lay motionless, almost exhausted, gulping in life-giving air.

Nelson Lee allowed himself to relax completely. At last, however, he fancied that the thunderous noise was subsiding. Yet it was quite likely that his ears, growing accustomed to the sound, conveyed a lessening impression to his brain. He found it impossible to remain inactive longer; and he rose unsteadily to his feet and again switched on his powerful torch. The white rays splashed across a mass of foaming, disturbed water. It was like a lake, and the light-beam failed to penetrate to the farther side. Lee directed his torch upwards, and he fancied that he saw, far above, a rocky roof, with stalactites descending grotesquely.

"Put that light out for a minute, old man," came Lord Dorrmore's calm voice.

Lee turned and found that his lordship was sitting up. "I suppose we're still alive?" asked Dorrie, struggling to his feet. "Ye gods! What an experience! Where are we, anyway?"

"Why do you want me to put the light out?" asked Lee. "Oh, yes! Look up there," said Dorrie, pointing. "I spotted it as I was lyin' flat on my back. I'm a bit bewildered. I don't know whether we are out in the open, or—or what. But I'll swear there's a star shinin' far above us."

Lee extinguished the torch, and, sure enough, he could see the bright twinkle of a star in the heavens overhead. There were two or three smaller stars close at hand—but, beyond this, nothing but blackness. Lee moved across the rocks, still staring upwards. And one of the stars was suddenly blotted out.

"This is a cavern, Dorrie," he said. "There's a hole in the rocky roof, however—that's why we can see the stars. It means that when daylight comes, the cavern will be fairly well lighted."

"Never mind that," said Dorrie bluntly. "Can you tell me why we're still alive?"

"I think I have the explanation," replied Lee, staring out across the disturbed waters. "Have you noticed that the tumult is now much less?"

"I thought it was fancy," said Dorrie.

"I did at first, but during the past few minutes the thunder has died down to less than half," went on Lee. "From that fact I judge that the danger at the western headland is only at its worst when the tide is high."

"The tide?" repeated Dorrie, staring. "What has the tide to do with it?"

"The whirlpool out there is obviously caused by some curious formation of the rocks," explained Nelson Lee. "At high tide the sea is sucked straight down, and then through into this cavern in the very heart of the rocky island. Don't you see, Dorrie? It pours in at high tide, and probably finds its outlet at some other spot along the coast. Meanwhile, it forms this subterranean lake on the floor of the cavern. It's obvious enough what happened to us. We were drawn in. We came to the surface in the lake, and so swift was the process that we were not drowned. Perhaps the tide was already on the ebb—and that, no doubt, saved us."

"An' here we are in a mysterious cavern, and probably bottled up for life," said Dorrie, with a whistle. "That's cheerful! Do you think there'll be an outlet at low tide?"

"There might be; we can't tell," said Lee. "In fact, we can't do anything yet, Dorrie. The situation might be desperate, or it might be very much in our favour. Anyhow, we are fully armed, and I don't think our guns or ammunition have suffered from the immersion."

"What do you think we ought to do?"

"Sleep," replied Lee calmly.

"What!"

"We're more exhausted than you will admit, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "In any case, we can do very little in this darkness—and it might be of vital importance for us to husband the electricity in our torch batteries. Soon daylight will come, and until then we had better rest."

"You're dead right," said Dorrie, as he sank wearily down. "There's no argument about it, old man. If it comes to that, you always are right."

The Four Figures!

IT was a night of stirring events and amazing discoveries. Nipper and his eight companions, locked in the store hut in Haynes' camp, were perhaps the least lucky. They were left entirely alone, and as they were weary after their long and arduous race through the jungle they slept.

FOR NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"RIVAL RAGGERS!"

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Some distance away Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, and Mr. Beverton slept.

But there were three who remained intensely awake. Handforth and his chums in their curious hiding-place were breathless with surprise and new hope. Even Church and McClure, so depressed a minute earlier, were inclined to share their leader's optimism. Reviewing the situation, they had deemed it inevitable that they must give themselves up into Doc Haynes' hands.

But now, thanks to the Heaven-sent electric torch, they saw that their prison was not the tiny rock cave they had believed. Moreover, the very fact that there had been no searching in the pool by native divers proved that neither Haynes nor the blacks knew anything of the underwater fissure.

The ledge upon which the three juniors were crouching went deeply back into the rocks, and the waters of the pool, some feet below, vanished into the mysterious blackness, too.

"It must be an underground river," said Church, his eyes gleaming.

"That's impossible!" grunted Handforth. "If it was a river it would be flowing. And this water's still. It's only an overflow from the outside pool, and I don't suppose it penetrates far. By George! Let's crawl along the crevice and see where it leads to."

"Good egg!"

Church and McClure were keen enough for any adventure now. They even had hopes of escaping from Doc Haynes altogether, and perhaps getting back to their own party. There was no telling where this fissure led. The air was

the rocks—back into the island's centre, where the hills rose mountainously in the direction of the western headland. At the back of the lagoon, in that direction, the crags were enormously high, raising their jagged summits menacingly towards the heavens.

"Easy now—easy!" said Handforth warningly.

The tunnel shelved abruptly, and it took a steep descent for a considerable distance; then suddenly it widened out into a kind of cavern. Throwing the torchlight upwards the boys could not see the roof; they only knew that the fissure was on the slant, and that the rock walls closed towards one another some twenty or thirty feet above their heads. Under foot the rocks were solid, and now they walked on confidently. They felt strangely free after being confined to the narrowness of the tunnel.

"Hold on!" gasped Church abruptly. "Am I dotty, or what? Look up there, you chaps! There's something shining—a light of some kind!"

They all halted, and Handforth switched off his torch. Just like Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore they saw a star twinkling far overhead, shining through a little opening in the rocks.

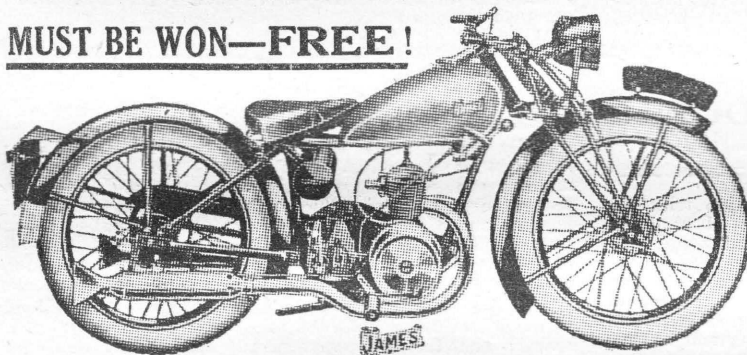
"Eureka!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "Don't you understand, you chaps! It's a star. That means that there's an outlet up there."

"But we can't get to it," said Church.

"Who said we could?" went on Handforth. "But if there's one outlet there might be another. We've only got to explore, and we'll probably find—well, how should I know what we'll find?"

He was far too excited to think clearly. Even his chums,

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pure enough, and that seemed to indicate that there was an outlet somewhere.

Handforth led the way, torch in hand, and after the first few yards the crevice resolved itself into a narrow tunnel. The rocks closed in, so that the pool water was no longer visible. The boys edged their way along the tunnel in single file. At the bottom it was no more than eighteen inches wide, and it was uneven in formation. At first they were able to walk upright, but then abruptly the rocks descended, so that they had to get on their hands and knees in order to progress. Once, indeed, Handforth believed that they could go no farther. Only by getting down on his stomach, and wriggling like a snake, did he get through. Beyond, the tunnel opened out again. It became three or four feet wide, and the roof was a foot overhead when the boys were standing.

"This is better," panted Handforth. "Look! It twists to the left along here. Whoa! Go easy, you chaps! There's a whacking great hole in the floor!"

Only in the nick of time had he pulled up. At his feet yawned a black chasm. Directing the torchlight downwards, he failed to see any bottom. But the chasm was no more than three feet across, and Handforth jumped it with ease. He was warned, however, to progress cautiously. It was likely enough that there would be more of these pitfalls.

He held the light whilst his chums crossed over; then they progressed once more.

They lost all count of time and distance. They only knew that they kept on, forcing their way through narrow spaces, sometimes almost running, and at other times crouching on hands and knees, with the rocks brushing against their shoulders as they forced their way through.

They gave no thought to the matter, but it was obvious enough that this fissure led right through the heart of

cautious though they usually were, did not propose a halt until daylight, so that the torch battery would be saved. They were as eager as Handforth himself to push on.

About twenty yards farther on the cavern-like formation suddenly ceased, and the boys were once again in the tunnel; but now it was different. Although no more than four feet across, with a solid rock floor, the sides rose sheerly into the dizzy darkness overhead. They were, in fact, walking along the base of the great slanting fissure, which seemed to slice the very mountains in twain.

By this time they had left the low hills behind, and they were going through the very heart of the island, where the mountains rose in all their majesty. More than once they saw stars twinkling overhead, but always there was only a fleeting glimpse. Proof positive that the outlets above were small. On they went, caring nothing for time, giving no thought to their exertions. They were amazed at the extent of this great cleft, which undoubtedly split the island for miles.

Church was the first to become aware of the fact that the darkness was not so intense. The dawn had come, and, somehow, the rapidly increasing daylight was penetrating into the fissure.

"We're miles from Haynes' camp by now," said Handforth. "We were the first human beings to ever walk these roads, my sons. Think of that! We've made a terrific discovery, and, as long as we keep it to ourselves, it'll be valuable. Have you thought of the possibilities? A hundred armed men could go along this fissure, and get to Haynes' camp in secret—"

"Go easy, old man!" interrupted McClure. "There's no certainty that we can get out yet. That water hole near the pool might be the only exit. Look up there!"

Far, far above they saw a narrow slit, and it was showing bluishly golden. It was the sky, ruddy with the dawn

light. And the slit was no more than a few inches across, although it extended for ten or fifteen yards.

"This island, like most of the other islands in the South Seas, is of volcanic origin," said Handforth. "Millions of years ago there must have been a terrific upheaval, and the mountains were split in two. This fissure was left, and it's probably been like it ever since."

They pressed on, hoping always to discover an opening in the rocks above which would prove big enough to admit of their escaping. Even so they could not have escaped, for they had no ropes, no climbing materials. And the summit of the fissure was hundreds of feet above them, and the slanting walls of rock were smooth.

Full daylight came rapidly, and it was no longer necessary to use the electric torch. In places where the overhead vents were of some length the light in the fissure was considerable. In other places a black gloom enveloped the boys. Then unexpectedly the fissure came to an end. The rocks closed in overhead, the walls narrowed, and when Handforth flashed the torch on he saw that there was no possibility of advancing, except through a narrow tunnel which was no more than fourteen or fifteen inches from floor to roof. It was even impossible to see any distance along it, for the tunnel took a sharp turn, seven or eight yards in.

"Crumbs!" muttered Handforth, in dismay. "This looks bad, you chaps."

"We've got to the end of the fissure, have we?" asked Church. "I was afraid of it, Handy. It was too good to hope for. The idea of escaping, I mean. We'll never get out of here."

"We'll never get out if we don't try," retorted Handforth gruffly. "Follow me, you fatheads! This is going to be a squeeze, but we'll get through all right."

He wormed his way in, and more than once during that terrible journey he feared that he was doomed to a dread-

ful end. For at times so narrow was the tunnel he became jammed, and the awful fear came to him that he would become so wedged that he could move neither forwards nor backwards. It was Church, immediately behind him, who helped. More than once Church shoved, and thus the most difficult spots were overcome. Church and McClure, being less bulkily built, were able to pass through with more ease.

It seemed to them that this nightmare tunnel went on for something like a mile, but actually the distance was not more than a hundred yards. Progress was so slow, so arduous, that minutes were almost like hours.

But at last the worst was over. Handforth was able to crawl on his hands and knees, and the tunnel widened out so considerably that Church and McClure advanced with him, side by side. Then they found themselves at the exit. Abruptly the rock roof and the rock walls fell away, and they saw before them a vast cavern, its roof so high that it stretched away vaguely. Far overhead there were openings in the rocks, through which the daylight streamed. Even here the slantwise effect was just the same, for the cavern was lopsided in shape.

The floor of it glistened wetly, and in one part there was a pool of still water.

"Handy," muttered Church, clutching at Edward Oswald's arm, "look over there! Am I going out of my senses?"

He pointed with a quivering finger, and Handforth and McClure jumped. What they saw was something which filled them with blank amazement, for reclining on the rocks, some distance from the pool's edge, were four human figures.

(Who are the four figures Handforth & Co. have spotted? Are they Nelson Lee and his companions? Follow the further exciting adventures of the St. Frank's party for thrills.)

THE CRACKSMAN'S DUPE!

(Continued from page 22.)

is supposed to have an unfortunate connection with the ruffian who broke into the school last night. I need not say that I refer to Frayne of the Third Form."

There was a breathless hush.

"It has now been proved by the man's own confession, and by undeniable proofs, that Frayne is not the son of that criminal," went on the Head. "So far as is known there is no relationship at all between them; and Frayne of the Third is certainly not his son as has been supposed. The ruffian allowed the unfortunate lad to remain in that belief for his own base ends—ends which, I am glad to say, have been frustrated. I am making this announcement publicly in order that no one may remain ignorant of the fact that Frayne is not the son of Frayne the burglar, and in order"—here the Head's voice took on a deeper and sterner note—"that no one may pretend to be ignorant of this fact having been established."

And the school was dismissed.

There were crowds of congratulating fellows round Joe Frayne as he walked out of the School Hall.

Wally linked arms with him on one side and Arthur Augustus on the other. Tom Merry's face was like the midday sun with sheer delight. Blake and Dig and Kangaroo were slapping Joe on the back till he was aching. Figgins and Kerr and Fatty Wynn shook his hand till it seemed surprising that he had any fingers left. Crowds of fellows slapped, and thumped, and congratulated him, and Joe was breathless with delight and fatigue.

And Joe Frayne, happy and beaming, was marched off to the school tuckshop in the midst of a wildly enthusiastic crowd; and the destructive wrath of Achilles, of which old Homer sings, was a mere nothing compared with the destructive attack of the juniors upon the jam tarts.

THE END.

(The fun and frolic of the keen rivalry between St. Jim's and the Grammar School are the star features of "RIVAL RAGGERS!"—next week's lively yarn. Don't miss it.)



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