

LOOKING FOR THE BEST SCHOOL STORY? THEN LOOK IN THE "GEM"!

The GEM

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The
MYSTERY
of the
VAULTS!



Unmasked by the mystery men he seeks to outwit, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, of St. Jim's, yet proves more than equal to the cunning of his sinister enemies! This smashing story of mystery and thrill-packed school adventure will grip and hold your interest throughout.

CHAPTER 1. Mysterious!

"**B**AI Jove, who's that?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's uttered the words in startled tones. It was dark in the Fourth Form dormitory—very dark. It was not yet bed-time; the long rows of white beds, as yet empty, stood out in the gloom of the lofty room. Arthur Augustus had come up to fetch a book he had left there, and he had come up without a light. He knew his way about the School House of St. Jim's as well in the dark as in the light. He had entered the dormitory without hesitation, his hands held out before him to feel the way, in case he should run into something.

And all of a sudden, in the deep gloom of the dormitory, his hands did come into contact with something—with the cold, smooth surface of a human face!

The face jerked back instantly from D'Arcy's touch, but he had felt it, and the sudden and unexpected contact sent a shiver through him.

"Who's that? Who is it?"

There was no reply.

"Pway answah, you uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy. "You have thrown me into quite a fluttah. Who are you?"

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Faintly through the darkness came a slight sound. D'Arcy could hardly tell what it was, and it was gone in an instant. Then deep silence.

The junior shivered a little. There was something strange and uncanny about this. He had imagined that he had run into some other junior who, like himself, had come up to the dormitory in the dark. But unless the fellow was japing him, it could not be that.

"Who are you, you uttah wottah?" demanded Arthur Augustus, his tones rising in anger. "I know you are here. Where are you?"

His voice echoed faintly in the long, lofty room, and that was all. Arthur Augustus backed away towards the door. It was not likely that a burglar would enter St. Jim's before the school had retired to bed. But certainly this looked as if the person he had touched was a person who had no right there. D'Arcy backed into the doorway, and shouted.

"Blake! Tom Mewwy! Wescue!"

There was a shout from below immediately.

The School House juniors were always ready for a raid from the fellows belonging to the New House at St. Jim's, and D'Arcy's shout roused them at once.

Half a dozen fellows came tearing up the stairs at once to the dormitory passage. Arthur Augustus was fumbling in his pockets, but he could not find a match.

the VAULTS!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD**

The juniors rushed up the passage and bumped into him in the darkness, and there was a yell from D'Arcy.

"Ow! Yawooh!"

"Hallo, Gussy!"

"Curious thing he always must get in the way," remarked Jack Blake. "Where are the New House cads, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I guess Gussy was only pulling our leg," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, the millionaire's son, who had recently been known as the Outsider of St. Jim's. But he had now reformed. "There are no New House fellows here. There is nobody in the dorm at all."

"You are quite wong, deah boy—"

"Who is it, then?"

"I don't know. I was goin' in, and I wan into somebody in the dark," said Arthur Augustus. "It was vevy starlin', and it thwew me into quite a fluttah. I don't know who the wottah is, but he's still in the dorm, and I should not be surprised if it was a burglah."

"Rats!"

"Well, he is still in the dorm!"

"How do you know?" asked Tom Merry, the leader of the Shell.

"Because I kept at the door, and he couldn't have passed me, deah boy."

"Let's get a light and look for the bounder," said Jack Blake. "I expect Gussy is talking out of the back of his head, as usual."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I've got a light," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

The Outsider of St. Jim's produced an electric lamp from his pocket and pressed the switch. A bright ray flashed into the darkness of the dormitory. Two or three of the juniors found candles, and a general search commenced.

A dozen or more fellows had collected upon the scene now, and two or three of them stood guard at the dormitory door, while the rest of them searched the room.

Up and down they went, looking under all the beds, and into all the corners.

But they found nothing.

The old dormitory, with its walls panelled to a height of seven feet from the oaken floor, was one of the oldest parts of St. Jim's, and it had been slept in by old monks hundreds of years before St. Jim's became a school.

Some of the juniors examined the panels in the wall suspiciously.

Secret passages were known to exist at St. Jim's, and there was a movable panel in Blake's study in the Fourth Form passage that gave access to a whole series of hidden passages.

But there was no trace of anything of the sort, so far as could be discovered, in the Fourth Form dormitory, which was on the floor above that upon which the junior studies were situated.

After ten minutes' search the juniors collected at the door again. They were in a somewhat exasperated frame of mind.

"I guess there's nobody here," Jerrold Lumley-Lumley remarked.

"It's Gussy's imagination," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Let's get out," said Manners.

"Look here, my deah fellows, I touched the chap, woveah he was, with my fingah-tips, in the dark," D'Arcy protested.

"Bosh!"

"But I assure you that I did, deah boy. It thwew me into quite a fluttah."

"Where's the chap gone to, then?" demanded Blake.

"I weally don't know."

Tom Merry yawned.

"Well, whether there was someone here or not, he isn't here now, and I'm not going to stay here, either," he said. "If you see or touch any strange chivvies again, Gussy, you can give me a call. But you oughtn't to go about doing these mysterious things, you know."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry walked out of the dormitory. The rest of the juniors followed him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hesitated a few moments, looking up and down the dormitory, and then he followed the others.

But there was a very worried expression upon the aristocratic face of the swell of St. Jim's.

That he had touched somebody's face in the darkness of the Fourth Form dormitory he was quite certain. That the unknown had been unable to pass him at the door and get out of the dormitory unseen he was almost equally certain.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was looking very puzzled as he followed the other fellows downstairs and into the Common-room.

The other fellows had settled the matter for themselves by deciding that D'Arcy's active imagination was at the bottom of the whole incident, but the swell of St. Jim's could not settle it in that way.

He knew that someone had been in the dormitory when he had entered it in the dark, but it was in vain that he tried to impress the fact on the others.

"There was weally somebody there, Tom Mewwy," he decided.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Blake, deah boy, there was weally—"

"More rats!"

"Lowthah—"

"Many more rats!" said Lowther.

And Arthur Augustus gave it up.

CHAPTER 2.

Written In Red!

KILDARE of the Sixth looked into the Junior Common-room.

"Bed-time, you kids!"

"Yaas, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I'm quite weady. By the way, Kildare, deah boy, I think I ought to tell you—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Blake. "No good telling Kildare ghost stories."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I guess Kildare ought to be told," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley abruptly. "Gussy is so certain about it, you know."

"It's all rot!" said Kangaroo of the Shell decidedly.

"Weally, Kangawoo—"

"What for goodness' sake are you talking about?" Kildare asked, in amazement. "If you have anything to tell me, D'Arcy, buck up with it!"

"Certainly, deah boy! There was someone in the Fourth Form dormitory this evenin' when I went in there in the dark. I touched him, you see, and he vanished. When the fellows came up with lights he was gone."

"Didn't you see him again?" asked the captain of St. Jim's.

"Wathah not."

"One of the kids playing a joke, I suppose."

"But how did he get out of the dorm?" said Arthur Augustus. "You see, I stood near the door all the time, and he couldn't have passed me."

"I expect he did, all the same," said Kildare, laughing.

"Yes, rather!" said George Gore.

"My opinion is that it was a burglah or somethin'—"

"Well, if you see anything more of him let me know," said Kildare, still smiling. "Suppose it was one of the New House fellows on a jape, and that he shinned down the ivy from the window—"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

The juniors burst into a laugh. It was a very simple and probable explanation of the mystery of the Fourth Form dormitory.

"Now buzz off to bed," said the St. Jim's captain.

And the juniors went upstairs. The Terrible Three were not in the Common-room, but they joined the Shell in the dormitory passage. The Shell fellows went on to their own dormitory, while the Fourth entered the room in which D'Arcy had had such a startling experience earlier in the evening.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his

eye and took a careful survey of the dormitory. Blake & Co. grinned and went along the room elaborately looking under the beds. Then Blake made a progress through the dormitory looking into all the jugs on the washstands, amid chuckles from the other fellows.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass indignantly upon Blake.

"Weally, Blake, you ass——"

"I'm only making sure that there are no burglars here, my son," said Jack Blake blandly. "It would be dangerous to go to bed with perhaps a couple of dozen burglars hiding in the soap-dishes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as an uttah ass, Blake. Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look here!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye. Upon the white cover of his pillow were traced, in red, the following words:

"Beware! At midnight's hour thou diest! By order!"

D'Arcy stared at the menacing words, and then jammed his eyeglass afresh into his eye and stared again.

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors gathered round the bed. They stared, too, at the threatening inscription. Then most of them grinned. It was evidently a jape—evident to everybody excepting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove! I knew that there was some feahful villainy on foot!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, looking round excitedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no weason whatever for wibald mewwiment. I wegard this as a vevy sewious mattah!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Blake. "It's only half-past nine now, so you've got two hours and a half to live. That's heaps of time to make your will, and I'm sure Kildare wouldn't mind leaving the light on a few minutes longer on an occasion like this."

"Weally, you ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're going to make your will," said Digby seriously, "you might leave me your bike, Gussy. I should like that."

"Weally, Dig——"

"And you can leave your clothes to a charitable institution for clothing the poor," Blake remarked. "There would be enough to clothe pretty nearly all the poor in England."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to have this mattah tweated in a wibald spiwit. I wefuse to be murdahed in my bed at twelve o'clock to-night!"

"Time you were in bed, you youngsters," said Kildare, coming into the dormitory.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter there?"

"Look here, Kildare——"

"Great Scott!"

Kildare stared at the strange inscription upon D'Arcy's pillow. But he did not seem to be startled. He laughed.

"There is nothin' comic, deah boy, in a murderous message like that, witten in blood!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly.

Kildare roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! That's not blood, you ass! It's red ink!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy bent his head and scanned the threatening notice more closely. On a closer inspection it was indeed red ink, and not blood, as he had first supposed in his agitation. The juniors watched him, with grinning faces.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy at last.

"You had better turn the pillow over for to-night," said Kildare.

"Yaas, wathah!"

D'Arcy turned the pillow over. There was a yell of laughter from the Fourth Formers as the underside came into view. For there was an inscription on that, too, in black ink.

"Spoofed!—(Signed) TOM MERRY."

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The uttah wottah! Bai Jove! I'll go to the Shell dorm and give the uttah boundah a feahful thwashin'!"

"No, you won't," said Kildare, laughing. "It's time to go to bed. You can leave Tom Merry until to-morrow."

"Weally, Kildare!"

"Tumble in, D'Arcy!"

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"Oh, vevy well, but I wegard this as vevy in-considewate!"

Kildare's word was law. The juniors turned in, and Arthur Augustus had to nurse his wrath on the subject of the Terrible Three's little jape. But he did not nurse it long. He fell asleep, and was soon quite unconscious of wrath, or japes either.

But there was one fellow in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House of St. Jim's who did not go to sleep.

That one was Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

But a short while ago Lumley-Lumley had often stayed awake after the other fellows had gone to sleep, for the purpose of stealing out of the school to pay night visits to the Green Man in Rylcombe.

But that was all past now.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had changed, and his habits had changed with him, and he was becoming to be regarded as a decent fellow by the other juniors of St. Jim's.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley sat up in bed with a pillow behind his head, and his eyes fixed wide and unwinking upon the darkness before him. He did not mean to sleep.

Coolly and calmly he sat there, silent, watching, while the slow hours rolled past. He heard the last door close below, and silence fell upon the whole of the great building of the School House.

Twelve boomed out from the clock-tower.

Then there was a sound in the dormitory.

Lumley-Lumley started a little, and his eyes gleamed. A soft, low voice was audible in the tense silence.

"You fellows asleep?"

It was the voice of Ernest Levison, the cad of the Fourth, who had recently been ill.

Lumley-Lumley breathed hard.

CHAPTER 3.

The Danger of the Night!

THERE was silence in the Fourth Form dormitory. Lumley-Lumley, leaning back on his pillow in the darkness, was more alert and watchful.

Five minutes elapsed.

Why had Levison spoken? Was it that he had awakened with some thought in his mind of D'Arcy's experience in the dormitory, and in sudden uneasiness had called out?

Lumley-Lumley wondered.

Five long slow minutes, and then the cautious voice came again, more cautiously than before:

"Any of you fellows awake?"

If any of the fellows had been awake, naturally they would have answered, with the exception of Lumley-Lumley. With the Outsider it was different. Lumley-Lumley had stayed awake purposely to watch for any unusual development in the dormitory that night.

For Lumley-Lumley, alone of the Fourth, believed in the strange story told by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And he was very suspicious of the cad of the Fourth. Levison was secretive by nature, and always ready to serve anyone an ill-turn. If there was anything underhand going on in the School House, it was only too probable that Levison of the Fourth had a finger in it.

"I say, you chaps!"

It was Levison's voice again, louder than before.

But again there was no response. Only the Outsider of St. Jim's was listening with intent ears for what should come next.

What came next was a sound of someone getting quietly out of bed. Then faint, scarcely distinguishable sounds, as the unseen junior dressed himself. Lumley-Lumley did not need telling who it was.

Where was Levison going? What was he about to do? Lumley-Lumley strained his ears. He dared make no sound, fearing he should alarm the cad of the Fourth, and lead him to put off his purpose, whatever it was.

Click!

The sound was so faint and so sudden that Lumley-Lumley doubted if he had really heard it. It was a faint sound as of a door softly closing.

Was Levison gone?

Lumley-Lumley waited a long ten minutes, listening with strained ears. But there was no sound in the dormitory, save the regular breathing of the sleepers. Levison was either gone, or he had gone back to bed, and that, Lumley-Lumley was certain, was not the case.

The Outsider of St. Jim's rose at last. Half-past twelve sounded dully from the clock-tower.

Lumley-Lumley stepped in the direction of Levison's bed, and turned on the light of his electric lamp.

The bed was empty. Levison was gone.

That he had not gone by the window was certain, and that he had gone by the door was very improbable. Was

there, then, some secret opening in the dormitory by which it was possible to come and go?

If so, Levison was just the fellow to find it out. There were few things within any distance of Levison that he did not contrive to get to the bottom of.

But if he had left the dormitory by a secret panel in the wall, similar to the one in Blake's study—where had he gone, and why?

Was it on a visit to the Green Man? Lumley-Lumley remembered well enough his own experiences there, and that Levison had been with him—Levison and his chum, Mellish, the two black sheep of the Fourth Form. They had been close associates of the Outsider of St. Jim's, though since Lumley-Lumley's reform their friendship had changed to bitter hatred.

Lumley-Lumley's character was determined, either for good or evil. When he was the Outsider of St. Jim's he had gone far beyond either Levison or Mellish in recklessness. Now that he was reformed he was resolute in following his new path.

Levison and Mellish realised that, and their spite against Lumley-Lumley was stronger than it had ever been against Tom Merry, or anyone else.

Had it been Levison who was so strangely encountered in the dormitory by Arthur Augustus? No; for Lumley-Lumley remembered seeing him in the crowd that had come up to the dormitory.

But had he known who the unseen was?

Had he been the cause of introducing him into the School House? Lumley-Lumley wondered. Levison knew something of the matter; he was certain of that much, at all events.

He shut the light off.

But he did not go back to bed. He sat on the edge of Levison's bed, and waited. He did not intend to sleep until the cad of the Fourth returned.

It was a long vigil.

One boomed out from the clock-tower, and still there was no sound of the return of the cad of the Fourth Form.

Lumley-Lumley waited patiently.

Mellish, he had seen, was in bed, and Levison was gone alone upon this mysterious expedition. Where was he gone?

If to the Green Man, he must be home soon. Mr. Joliffe and his set did not keep up to this hour. If Levison had been going to the public-house, he would have started much earlier.

Lumley-Lumley decided that he had not gone there.

But where, then?

It was a mystery—a mystery that the Outsider of St. Jim's meant to solve. There was a dark suspicion at the back of his mind.

Click!

The faint sound again—and so faint, and so sudden, that Lumley-Lumley was unprepared for it, and he could not tell from which direction it came.

He started to his feet noiselessly.

Levison had returned.

Lumley-Lumley stood silent, quivering with eagerness, his eyes striving to penetrate the gloom of the dormitory, his ears strained for a slight sound.

A thrill ran through him as he caught a faint whisper.

Levison had not returned alone, then.

Listening intently, Lumley-Lumley heard a sound from his own bed—a sound as if someone had approached it, and was touching the bedclothes.

His heart beat faster.

Who was it? What did it mean? Was it Levison, or—

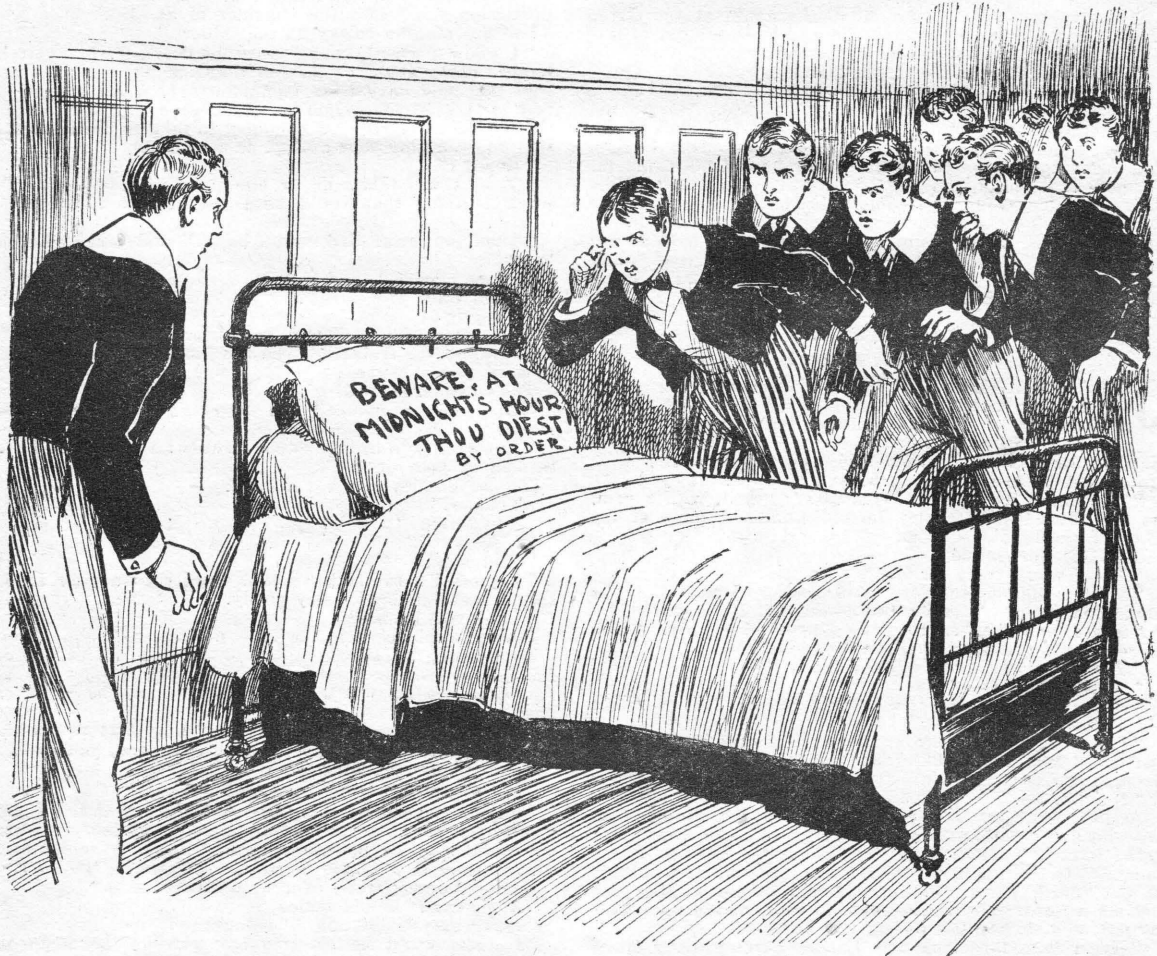
There was a muffled exclamation.

"He's gone!"

That was in Levison's voice.

Lumley-Lumley smiled grimly.

A faint whisper was audible; Lumley-Lumley could not distinguish the words. But it must have occurred to



"Look here!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. He jammed his monocle into his eye and stared in amazement at the menacing words traced in red on his pillow. A crowd of juniors gathered round, staring at the threatening inscription. "Bai Jove!" went on Gussy. "I knew there was some fearful villainy on foot!"

Levison then that if the Outsider was not in bed and asleep, he must be up and awake, and the faint whisper ceased.

Click!

Lumley-Lumley knew that the opening of the secret entrance had closed again.

The Outsider paused a moment, thinking. Then he stepped silently towards the door of the dormitory, and opened it, and closed it again, keeping inside, as if he had just entered from the passage.

Then he groped his way towards his bed.

There was a startled exclamation from Levison, as Lumley-Lumley ran into him close to the bed—purposely.

"What—who—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Lumley-Lumley, grasping him. "Hallo! What are you doing out of bed, Levison?"

"What are you doing out of bed yourself, for that matter?" asked Levison, beginning to recover his nerve.

"That's my bisney!" said Lumley. "I want to know what you have been doing at my bed? Some jape—hey?"

"No!"

"Well, I'll soon see, anyway!"

Lumley-Lumley felt over the bed. Levison stood in the darkness with beating heart. He was glad it was dark, so that Lumley-Lumley could not see the white terror in his face.

"Have you been out?" he asked, with a shake in his voice.

"Find out!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"Look here! I know you've been out!" said Levison savagely.

"How do you know?"

"Because—because I heard you go, and I got out of bed, and looked at your bed," said Levison desperately. "That's how I know. I was just looking again, to see if you'd come back, when you came in and startled me!"

Lumley-Lumley grinned silently as he slipped into bed and drew the bedclothes over him. He preferred to leave Levison in misapprehension.

"You've been up to your old tricks again at the Green Man," said Levison; "but you chose to leave me out of it!"

"Oh, don't jaw!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"Have you been to the Green Man?"

"Oh, go to bed!" yawned the Outsider. "I'm tired!"

Levison gritted his teeth, and went to bed. He did not sleep easily, however. Neither did the Outsider of St. Jim's. Lumley-Lumley did not care to sleep. That Levison had come back alone to the dormitory he did not think for a moment. But whom had he brought with him? Why had they gone to Lumley-Lumley's bed? What dark scheme was the black sheep of the Fourth mixed up in now?

In the midst of his doubt and bewilderment, it stood out quite clearly to Jerrold Lumley-Lumley's mind that, whatever the mystery, it centred round himself. And it could only mean one thing—danger!

CHAPTER 4.

Lumley's Enemy!

JERROLD LUMLEY-LUMLEY showed no trace on the following morning of the vigil he had kept in the Fourth Form dormitory during the night.

The Outsider seemed to be made of iron. It was not the same with Levison. He was looking paler than usual, and there was a haggard expression in his eyes.

"Any alarm last night?" Tom Merry asked, with a grin, as the Terrible Three met Jerrold Lumley-Lumley at the door of the breakfast-room.

The Outsider smiled.

"There was a scare for Gussy," he said.

"Weally, Lumley-Lumley," said Arthur Augustus, as he came downstairs. "I wefuse to admit that I was scared!"

"Just as you like," said Lumley-Lumley cheerfully. "You were scared, whether you admit it or not!"

"Yes, rather!" chimed in Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three. "At midnight thou diest! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to entah into any discush of such a wicidulous mattah!" said the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity. "I wegard you as a set of jokin' wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked into the dining-room with his aristocratic nose held very high in the air.

He left the juniors laughing. The little jape on Gussy appealed to them as being very funny. Of the later episode in the Fourth Form dormitory Jerrold Lumley-Lumley did not say a word. He was keeping his own counsel upon that subject, and so, needless to say, was Levison.

Levison looked curiously at Lumley-Lumley many times that morning. After morning lessons he approached the Outsider as they came out of the Form-room.

"Can I speak to you a minute or two, Lumley?" he asked.

Lumley-Lumley looked at him.

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"I guess you can," he said.

"Come up to my study, then," said Levison.

The Outsider shook his head.

"Thanks! I guess I'd rather not!" he replied. "I don't care to come into a fellow's study unless I like him!"

"And you don't like me?" said Levison, with a sneer.

"I guess not!"

"We pulled together well enough recently."

The Outsider shrugged his shoulders.

"That was when I was as big a fool and rascal as you still are!" he said. "We could be friendly again, I suppose, if you did as I've done."

"Turned goody-goody?"

"I guess you can put it that way, if you like. I call it becoming decent."

"Oh, rats!"

"Is that all you have to say?" asked Lumley-Lumley. "I don't find it very entertaining so far!"

Levison bit his lip.

"Well, step into the window with me, and I'll tell you," he said. "I don't want anybody to hear."

"Oh! All right!"

Lumley-Lumley followed Levison into the window recess. The cad of the Fourth watched him narrowly, but Lumley-Lumley's face gave nothing away. He simply stood and waited for the cad of the Fourth to speak.

"Look here!" said Levison abruptly. "You were out of the dormitory last night!"

"Was I?"

"I know you were!" Levison exclaimed angrily.

"Very well, if you know it, there's no need to ask me any questions upon the subject, is there?" said the Outsider agreeably.

"You went out," said Levison, between his teeth, "to the Green Man, or to some other place of the same sort!"

Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"Did you?" asked Levison.

"You seem to be so certain that I did that it's a pity to disillusion you," said the Outsider of St. Jim's cheerfully. "I've got nothing to say on the subject."

"I know perfectly well," went on Levison, his irritable temper rising at the coolness of the Outsider—"I know very well that you have been gammoning Tom Merry and the rest, and that you've not turned over a new leaf, or any rot of that sort! It's all gammon, to take in the fellows, so that you can play your own game more safely!"

"Really?"

"Yes. I was taken in, or almost—until last night. But when I found that you'd been out, I saw it all pretty clearly."

"Then you're satisfied now, I hope?" said Lumley-Lumley lazily.

Levison clenched his hands.

"What have you to say?"

"Nothing!"

"I suppose you've found new friends, that's all. Now that I know the truth that you are gammoning, I'm willing to give you a chance!"

The Outsider stared.

"Give me a chance?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I'm willing to be on the old terms with you—your friend instead of your enemy," said Levison.

Lumley-Lumley shook his head.

"Thanks!"

"You refuse?"

"I guess so!"

"And why?"

"I guess I'd rather have your enmity than your friendship," said Lumley-Lumley coolly.

"You—you hound!"

Levison could contain his rage no longer.

He sprang at the Outsider of St. Jim's, hitting out furiously. Lumley-Lumley caught a savage blow on the mouth before he was upon his guard, and he staggered back.

"Foul!" exclaimed Tom Merry, stopping as he was passing the window recess. "Play the game, Levison, you cad!"

Lumley-Lumley set his teeth.

"It's all right, I guess," he muttered.

And he returned Levison's attack. The cad of the Fourth was driven back, and a rain of blows descended upon him. He seemed to be powerless against Lumley-Lumley's onslaught, and in a couple of minutes he was on the floor.

Lumley-Lumley stood over him with blazing eyes.

"Any more?" he demanded.

"No!" gasped Levison. "Hang you! No!"

"I guess you'd better give me a wider berth in the future," said Lumley-Lumley; and he walked away.

Levison sat up painfully. His nose was oozing red, and his mouth felt out of shape. He rubbed his face, and muttered fiercely.

"Hang you—hang you! But you will be sorry for it. I

gave you a chance, and you refused it. You'll be sorry for it soon!"
And Levison limped away.

CHAPTER 5.
In the Vaults!

"I DON'T know whether either of you duffers would be much use," said Manners, looking at Tom Merry and Monty Lowther in the Form-room passage. "Either of you know how to hold a lamp?"

"What on earth do you want a lamp held for?"

"Light," said Manners.

"Fathead—"

"I'm going to do some developing," said Manners. "My daylight developer is weak and I haven't a dark-room. So what am I to do?"

"Is that a conundrum?" asked Monty Lowther.

"No, it isn't!" snapped Manners. "How is a chap to develop without a dark-room or a good daylight developer? That's what I want to know. I have been thinking of making a frame to block up the study window, and fixing a red globe on the light; but one of you idiots would come poking in while the developing was going on, as sure as a gun."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Very likely indeed," he assented. "Besides, we don't want the study turned into a dark-room. We get enough of your beastly photography there as it is."

Manners sniffed.

"You'll get some more if I can't use the vaults," he said. "But they would make an ideal place for developing. I should think that the chaps who built St. Jim's had cameras in their minds' eye, and meant those vaults to make dark-rooms for their descendants."

"And I suppose you want somebody to go down into the vaults with you and help you with your chemical muck," said Monty Lowther.

"That's it."

"Go it, Tommy," said Monty Lowther. "I've got another engagement myself this afternoon—"

"It isn't in the afternoon I want it done," said Manners.

"And another engagement this evening—"

"And it's not in the evening, either."

"Oh!" said Lowther. "When is it, then?"

"After lights out," said Manners.

"After lights out?" said Monty Lowther reflectively. "You don't seriously mean to say that you are going to get out of bed and go down into the vaults for the sake of developing some rotten photographs?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to develop some very fine photographs."

"Oh, ass! Are you going down out of bed to develop photographs at all?" roared Lowther.

"Yes."

"Well, of all the silly asses—"

"I want somebody with me," said Manners. "I don't like the vaults on my lonesome, and I want someone, too, who has sense enough to hold a red lamp. I should think either you or Tom Merry could do that by exerting all your mental powers."

"I'm such a jolly sound sleeper," Monty Lowther remarked reflectively. "I doubt if I should wake up, even if you called me."

"And I doubt if I should get out of bed, even if I woke up," Tom Merry remarked.

Manners grunted.

"You can toss up for it," he said.

"You can toss up, Tommy," said Monty Lowther. "Heads you go with Manners; tails, Manners goes with you. Good-bye!"

And Monty Lowther walked away whistling cheerily.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Oh, I'll come, Manners, old man!" he said. "What time are you thinking of doing your giddy developing?"

"Ten to-night!"

"Right you are!"

"And keep it dark," said Manners.

"Didn't you say you wanted me to hold a lamp?" asked Tom Merry innocently.

"Ass! I mean don't say anything about it. We don't want other fellows poking down there out of curiosity, and perhaps spoiling the developing—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at now?" demanded the amateur photographer of the Shell.

"I don't think fellows are likely to leave their beds and follow you down into the vaults at ten to-night to see you developing giddy negatives," grinned Tom Merry.

"Anyway, the silly prefects would stop us if they knew. The vaults are out of bounds."

"All right!" said Tom Merry. "Mum's the word. Don't

forget to take all the muck you will need. Can't go up and down stairs fetching pyro and things, you know."

"I know," grunted Manners.

Manners was not very grateful about it. It was evident that he regarded any assistance in photographic matters simply as a necessary evil. But Tom Merry did not mind. He was always ready to oblige anybody.

"I'm going to pack all the things I shall want in a bag now," said Manners, and he went up to the study.

Tom Merry and Manners only partly undressed when they went to bed that night.

They had to turn out again half an hour after lights out to make the expedition into the vaults for the development of Manners' negatives. Manners was very enthusiastic about it, and Tom Merry was too polite to appear anything else. Monty Lowther had suggested sending the negatives to a firm of photographers in Rylcombe or Wayland to be developed and printed—a suggestion that had been met with a freezing glare from Manners. Manners' negatives were as the apple of his eye, and he would not allow a profane hand to touch them. And he had the feeling, common to all amateurs, that the amateur's hand was more reliable than the professional's.

Kildare saw lights out in the Shell dormitory, after which the Shell settled down to sleep, with some exceptions. Tom Merry nodded off, convinced that Manners would call him as soon as he was wanted. Manners did not close his eyes. Many of the other fellows chatted football, and many of them were still awake when ten o'clock tolled out from the tower, and Manners slipped out of bed.

"Hallo, who's that shifting?" demanded Clifton Dane.

"It is I," said Manners.

"Looking for Gussy's burglar?" asked Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No," said Manners. "I'm looking for my bag. I left it under the bed. Ah, here it is! Tom Merry, you loafing slacker, get up!"

"Groo-oo-oo!"

"Get up!" exclaimed Manners, shaking Tom Merry by the shoulder. "It's turned ten, and it's time we were gone!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Gore, sitting up. "Where are you chaps off to? A little expedition to the Green Man?"

Billy Bunter is Desperate!

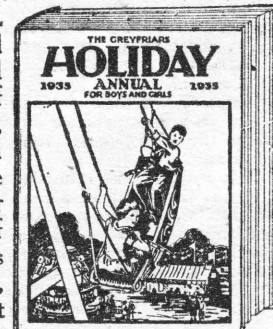


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Manners sniffed.

"We haven't adopted your old habits, Gore."

"Where are you off to, then?"

"Developing."

"Hey?"

"We're going to develop some photographs in the vaults,"

Manners explained. "You can come and look on if you like."

Gore chuckled, and rolled himself up in the bedclothes.

"Thank you for nothing!" he yawned. "When I break bounds after lights out, it will be for something a bit more sensible than that, I reckon!"

"Ass!"

Manners and Tom Merry finished dressing, and left the dormitory, such of the Shell fellows who were still awake chuckling as they went. Manners was generally regarded as an ass for spoiling his night's rest to develop photographs, and Tom Merry was a bigger ass for going with him. But the heroes of the Shell did not mind. They picked their way cautiously down the stairs, and reached the old oaken door which gave admittance to the stone stair leading down into the vaults. The door was deeply set in the stone, and might have been passed unseen by anyone unacquainted with St. Jim's. A chain and a padlock had been put on the door since the time when Levison had explored the vaults and saved Lumley from being buried alive, but the padlock had been broken by some enterprising junior with a fancy for exploring the vaults. It was jammed together and looked all right, but most of the boys knew that it could be opened at will—Manners among them. Manners opened the lock, and swung open the door, and the chums of the Shell stepped through upon the stone stair.

Manners switched on an electric lamp. Then he drew the open door shut behind him, and the two juniors descended the stone stairs, Manners leading the way.

The vaults were very spacious under the old School House and the air was very heavy. The ray of light from the torch cut through the deep gloom. The aspect of the place was chilly and grim. It was no wonder that Manners did not wish to venture into the dark recesses alone.

"Well, here we are," said Tom Merry.

His voice echoed among the stone pillars.

"Yes, here we are," said Manners. "Feels a bit parky, doesn't it? But we shan't be here more than half an hour."

Tom Merry groaned inwardly at the idea of half an hour spent in the dismal place, and thought of his warm and comfortable bed in the Shell dormitory. But he made no remark.

The vault was certainly not a cheerful place.

Manners unpacked his bag close to one of the old stone pillars, while Tom Merry looked up and down the vaults in the light of the torch.

There was a subterranean passage from the vaults under the School House, leading into the vaults of the old ruined castle near Wayland, and some adventurous juniors of St. Jim's had explored it. Tom Merry had once done so, and since that time he had only been down in the gloomy recesses once again—when Levison had saved Lumley.

He looked in the direction of the tunnel, which was at the other end of the long chain of vaults, and gave a sudden start.

From the dimness of the vaults came a strange sound.

"Manners! Did you hear that?"

Manners looked up from his unpacking.

"Yes. What was it?"

"Blessed if I know! There can't be anybody else here, surely. But you had better switch out the light for a tick."

"Right-ho!" muttered Manners. "I don't suppose any silly prefects have followed us down here, but it's just as well to be careful. It means being gated for a half-holiday, at least, if we're caught."

"Yes, rather!"

Manners switched out his torch.

The two juniors drew behind a stone pillar and waited. From the direction of the subterranean tunnel the sound came again.

This time it was unmistakable.

It was the sound of a heavy boot grinding on the stone as someone tramped along the passage in the direction of the vaults. In the dead silence of the subterranean depths every sound was clearly audible.

From the darkness in the distance, a beam of light appeared at the end of the vault.

Tom Merry drew a quick breath.

"It's somebody coming, Manners, with a light, from the underground tunnel! It can't be anybody belonging to St. Jim's, then."

"No fear!"

"Manners!" Tom Merry's voice sank to a low whisper. "What about the chap Gussy thought he found in the

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Fourth Form dorm last night? I thought it was all rot, but—"

"Phew!"

"This looks as if there might be something in it."

"Yes, rather!"

"Hush!"

The gleam of light was approaching the two juniors. Behind the beam of light cast by the torch appeared a dark figure, and it was approaching directly the spot where the two juniors stood.

CHAPTER 6.

Masked Men!

CLOSER and closer came the stranger.

Tom Merry and Manners drew closer to the pillar, their hearts beating hard.

Had the stranger seen them? Had he caught a glimpse of the light before they had extinguished it?

Did he know they were there?

These thoughts chased each other through the startled minds of the juniors. Who was this man? Someone, certainly, who had no right to be there. A burglar, then?

The stranger passed them, shining his torch on the ground as he went.

The two juniors breathed again. The man, whoever he was, did not know that they were there, and had no suspicion that anyone was crouching behind the pillar.

They had caught a glimpse of him as he passed—a burly man, in a dark cloak, with a black mask on his face.

The sight of the mask thrilled the two juniors.

That he was a law-breaker of some kind was certain, or there would be no need for him to conceal his features.

But what did he want in the vaults under the School House of St. Jim's?

He had not gone towards the stairs leading up into the House. The juniors realised that the way was open to him. They had left the door unfastened above. But he did not go towards the stairs. It was evidently not his intention to enter the House. Then what did he want?

It was an amazing mystery.

From behind the pillar, the two juniors watched him breathlessly. He approached the wall at the end of the vaults—a wall seemingly of solid stone—and groped over it with his hand, and knocked.

Knock!

It was not a loud or heavy knock, but it echoed through the deep silence of the vault.

The juniors watched and listened, with thrilling hearts.

It was evident that the knock was a signal to someone on the other side of the wall, and that made it clear that a secret door existed there.

Who was this man who knew so well the secrets of St. Jim's?

A heavy, oblong block of stone rolled away in response to the masked man's knock, and he passed through the aperture.

The stone rolled back into its place with a slight thud.

Darkness and silence!

Tom Merry and Manners stood dumb with wonder. What did it mean? The impenetrable blackness of the vaults surrounded them now. They could hardly believe that what had happened was not a dream.

"My only hat!" muttered Tom Merry. "What do you think of that?"

"Blessed if I can make it out!" muttered Manners.

"There's more than one of them. Someone let that chap through the wall."

"Yes, rather!"

"Who can it be?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Who can the other chap be?"

"Give it up."

"And what do they want?"

"Ask me another!"

"It's a giddy mystery, and no mistake!" muttered Tom Merry. "I thought at first that it was a burglar to rob the school, but he hasn't gone into the House. If he had gone up the steps I should have known what to think. But this looks like a meeting of some sort—as if the chaps had met here for some reason."

"My hat! A—a secret society of some kind, perhaps!" Manners muttered excitedly. "I shouldn't wonder!"

"In that case, there may be others coming—"

"Hush! Look!"

A light appeared in the distance from the direction of the tunnel. Faint sounds that were evidently echoes of voices and footsteps came eerily through the vault.

"More of them!" muttered Tom Merry.

"More than one this time, too!"

"Yes, rather!"

"What on earth can it mean?" said Tom Merry, utterly mystified.

"Hush!"

The light and the muttering voices came nearer. Two dark figures emerged from the subterranean passage. It was clear that they, like the first masked man, must have come from the ruined castle near Wayland. They had followed a course of more than a mile underground. Why? What was the reason of this strange gathering in the dark, dim recesses of the vaults under the School House of St. Jim's?

As they passed the juniors, going in precisely the same direction as the first man, the boys saw them clearly in the light, and saw that both of them were masked. They passed on to the wall and knocked, as the first man had done.

The juniors watched, with bated breath.

The stone opened, and the two men passed through, and the aperture closed after them, as it had done before. Blackness once more lay over the vault.

"Five of them, at least," said Tom Merry in a low voice, breaking the silence at last. "We've seen four, and there was one to let them in. Perhaps he arrived first before we came down here."

"Very likely—and might have run into us if we'd been a little earlier."

"Phew!"

"Or perhaps he belongs to the school!" muttered Manners. "There may be a St. Jim's fellow mixed up in this, you know. If not, why should they meet here at all? They could meet in the old castle just as well, and save that long tramp through the underground passage. Besides, how would an outsider know the secrets of this place in this way?"

"By Jove, you're right, Manners! There's a St. Jim's fellow mixed up in it, for a dead cert!" Tom Merry muttered excitedly.

"I should imagine so. But I don't see what we're to do," Manners said thoughtfully. "This may be a secret society



From his place of concealment Lumley-Lumley watched the three masked figures move silently towards his own bed. Two of the figures bent over it, and then there was a low exclamation. The midnight raiders had discovered that the bed contained only a dummy!

"My hat!"

"Wait!" whispered Manners. "There may be more of them coming!"

"I wonder!"

The juniors waited. Ten minutes passed slowly by, and then a light appeared again, followed by the sound of footsteps in the subterranean tunnel from the old castle.

"Another!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Yes! Quiet!"

Another masked man passed the juniors. As he passed there came to their nostrils a strong scent of spirits. He was admitted by the secret door in the wall, and disappeared.

The chums of the Shell waited again.

But there was no further sound, and no more lights in the passage from the old castle, no footsteps in the dim vaults.

It was pretty clear that the last of the masked men had arrived, and that the number of the mysterious meeting was complete.

of some sort; but it may be all rot, you know—some gang of silly asses, meeting to gamble."

"But why the masks?"

"That might be simply bunkum, or they might put them on so as not to be recognised if they should be caught on the premises. They might be chaps supposed in the neighbourhood to be respectable."

"Well, they can't be burglars, I suppose," Tom Merry muttered, puzzled. "I rather think you're right, Manners, old son, and they come here to keep it up with some of the black sheep of the school—fellows like Knox and Sefton, and perhaps Mellish and Levison of the Fourth."

"It's most likely."

"Let's see if we can find a door. It's safe now to switch on the light," muttered Tom Merry. "I should hardly think there were any more of the rotters coming."

"Good enough!"

Manners switched on his torch. Tom Merry took it and held the light up to the wall through which the masked men had passed, and examined the damp stone carefully.

He found at last a line upon the stone, which indicated the secret door, though there was nothing to show that the detached stone would open like a door.

"That's it, right enough!" murmured Manners.

"Yes, that's it!"

"I suppose it opens from the other side," Tom Merry remarked. "Anyway, it would be hardly safe for us to try to open it now. Look here, what are we going to do about this? Ought we to tell anybody?"

"I should say so. They've no right to come here, whoever they are," said Manners.

"But if there's a St. Jim's chap mixed up in it, and it all came out, he would be pretty certain to be sacked from the school."

"H'm! I suppose so!"

"We don't want to bring about anything like that," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Of course, a blackguard ought to be kicked out of the school; but it's not our bisney to give him away."

"Quite right."

"Look here, we'll wait and see whether they go again, and when they go," said Tom Merry. "If we see them safe off the premises, we can hold our tongues till the morning, anyway, and consult the other chaps about it."

"Good enough! I can get on with my developing—"

"What?"

"You seem to forget that we came down here to develop negatives," said Manners, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"Fathead!"

"Look here—"

"Do you want those blessed chaps in masks to see the blessed red lamp and drop on us when they come out?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Well, no. But—"

"Then don't play the giddy goat!"

And Manners, on reflection, decided that perhaps it would be more judicious not to develop his negatives just then. He repacked his bag rather discontentedly, and then the two juniors waited in the darkness, with what patience they could muster, for the reappearance of the masked men.

CHAPTER 7.

The Dormitory Secret!

JERROLD LUMLEY-LUMLEY raised his head quietly from his pillow in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House.

He had not slept that night.

Quite unconscious as he was of the vigil being kept below the School House in the gloomy vaults by the chums of the Shell, Lumley-Lumley had been keeping just as keen a vigil in the Fourth Form dormitory.

And his patience was rewarded.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when he heard the sound of someone creeping from bed, and detected the sounds as proceeding from Levison's direction.

Levison stepped out of bed and moved noiselessly along the dormitory towards Lumley-Lumley's bed.

The Outsider of St. Jim's understood perfectly well. Levison intended to make sure that he was asleep before he proceeded to anything further. There was a glimmer of moonlight in the high windows of the dormitory, and Levison was visible as he crept towards the Outsider's bed.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley closed his eyes and breathed regularly.

Levison bent over his pillow.

"Lumley-Lumley!" he whispered.

There were marks upon Levison's face of the blows Lumley-Lumley had given him that day—his eye was discoloured, and his mouth was cut. There was hatred and malice in Levison's face as he bent over the supposed sleeper.

Lumley-Lumley made no sign.

Levison appeared to be satisfied at last. He raised his head again and moved back equally silently to his own bed, and there quietly dressed himself.

The Outsider made no sound.

He knew that the cad of the Fourth was about to leave the dormitory again, upon a similar expedition to that which he had made the previous night, when he had not returned alone. And this time Lumley-Lumley meant to follow him if he could. The glimmer of moonlight in the dormitory gave him a chance of watching Levison's movements.

Levison finished dressing himself, putting on some kind of soft slippers, instead of his boots, for his footsteps made no sound when he moved again.

Lumley-Lumley silently watched him feeling his way along the wall of the dormitory, his hand groping along the oaken panels.

Suddenly there was a click

Levison disappeared.

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The next moment Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had sprung from his bed.

He ran along to the place where Levison had disappeared, and put his ear to the wall.

Faintly from the other side of the oaken panels he could hear dim sounds—the sounds of someone stumbling away in the dark.

He was upon the exact location of the secret door—he knew that! His hand groped over the wall, as Levison's had groped. That the cad of the Fourth had discovered the secret of the panel for himself; at some time or other the Outsider was assured. And if he had found it there was no reason why Lumley-Lumley should not do so.

The faint sounds behind the panel died away.

Lumley-Lumley's hand groped and groped. His hand pressed in a slight depression in the oak, where he felt a slight movement under the pressure.

He pressed harder.

Click!

A section of the oaken panelling opened back and a breath of cold air blew upon the face of Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

The junior's eyes gleamed with triumph.

He did not pause to dress. He groped his way through the dark aperture, and closed the secret panel behind him—but did not close it quite shut, lest he should be unable to reopen it on his return.

Then he felt his way forward.

The darkness was as black as pitch, and he guessed that there must be stairs before him, for the secret panel opened into the thickness of the wall of the school.

Very thick and solid were the old walls of St. Jim's—more than nine feet thick in some places, more than six feet in many places—and secret passages and stairs in the thickness of the walls were known to exist.

This was one that was not generally known, evidently, and either Levison had discovered it for himself, or he had learned of its existence by consulting the old sketches and plans of the school that were kept in the School House library.

Lumley-Lumley felt before him carefully with his feet before planting them down; and it was well that he did so, for the third step found no support, and his foot sank down to a step at a lower level.

It was a narrow spiral stair in the thickness of the wall. Lumley-Lumley followed it cautiously, his bare feet making no sound.

There was a glimmer of light ahead now, showing him the bottom of the staircase. He could not go on now without the risk of discovery; but it was useless to come so far and remain without seeing what was passing below. He had followed the spiral stair so far down that he knew he must be below the level of the ground floor of St. Jim's, on the level of the vaults.

He peered round the winding of the spiral stair.

Levison was there.

He had a torch, and was stooping over a bag that lay in the dark corner. From the open bag he took a black cloak and mask and put them on. His aspect was changed strangely as he donned the disguise.

Then he tapped at the solid stone wall before him and extinguished the light. Lumley-Lumley heard a faint sound as of a door opening, but he could see nothing farther in the blackness.

He waited. Not a sound came from below.

There was no doubt in Lumley-Lumley's mind of what had happened. Levison had passed through a door in the stone wall into one of the vaults below St. Jim's.

The Outsider waited a few minutes, and then he cautiously crept down the stairs.

At the bottom he felt over the stone wall; it was cold and thick, and showed no opening. His hand groped over it in vain for any means of opening it.

He took his electric lamp from the pocket of his pyjama jacket and switched on the light. It gleamed upon the damp stone wall, but it did not reveal any trace of the existence of the secret door.

Lumley-Lumley was baffled.

Possibly the door opened only from the other side. At all events there was no means of opening it to be seen. Lumley-Lumley put his ear close to the stone and listened. He could detect a murmur of voices on the other side.

No word clearly reached him. But he knew that talking was going on there. Levison had joined his mysterious companions. The secret door in the stone wall opened directly, then, into the meeting place.

What did it all mean?

Was it a convivial party, such as Levison had been in the habit of frequenting at the Green Man in the village of Rylcombe?

Surely not, for in that case, why the visit to the dormitory on the previous night of Levison and his companions, and the visit, especially, to Lumley-Lumley's bed? Levison

and his unknown associates were engaged in some scheme with which Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was connected.

The Fourth Former extinguished his lamp and stole back to the dormitory. Then he bent over his bed, and arranged the bolster under the bedclothes in the form of a sleeper. This done, he concealed himself in the wardrobe to watch. He had not long to wait.

There was a click as the secret panel opened, and into the dimness of the dormitory three figures in black dominoes and masks stole silently.

Lumley-Lumley, from his place of concealment, saw them very dimly. But he could make out that two were full-grown men, and one evidently a boy. He did not need telling whom the latter was.

The three dark figures stole towards Lumley-Lumley's bed.

The Outsider watched.

He saw two of the figures bend over the bed, and something was pressed down upon the head of the supposed sleeper.

Then there was a low exclamation.

The midnight raiders, whoever they were, whatever their purpose was, had instantly discovered that it was a dummy in the bed.

The low exclamation had been heard. Jack Blake sat up in bed.

"Hallo! Who's awake?" he asked, his voice sounding strange and startling in the silence of the dormitory.

Two dark figures glided instantly out of the dormitory through the secret opening. Levison remained.

Blake blinked round him, rubbing his eyes.

"Who's that?" he said.

"It's all right," said Levison, in a quiet, calm tone. "I've just got out of bed that is all, to see whether Lumley-Lumley's gone out."

"Lumley-Lumley—gone out!"

"Yes," said Levison sourly. "He's at his old tricks again, you see. I found him out last night, and he's gone out again to-night."

"Rats!"

"Look at his bed yourself."

"Looks to me as if there's somebody in it," said Blake, peering through the dimness towards Lumley-Lumley's bed.

"But there isn't. It's a dummy, made up of the bolster."

"By Jove!"

"He's gone to the Green Man, of course!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "Lumley-Lumley has stopped all that. He gave Tom Merry his word of honour on the subject."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had been awakened by the sound of talking. "I trust Lumley-Lumley, and if he has gone out, I dare say he has a good reason. You are a wottah, Levison."

Levison only grunted by way of reply, and returned to his bed. The juniors were soon asleep again. Levison's object, whatever it was, had been foiled for the time. Lumley-Lumley stretched himself on the floor in the roomy old wardrobe, and slept. He did not intend to return to his bed that night. The earliest rays of dawn were stealing in at the dormitory windows when the Outsider of St. Jim's awoke and crept back to his bed, and then Levison was as fast asleep as the rest of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 8.

The Secret Meeting Place!

"HIST!"

Tom Merry muttered the word as there was a slight sound in the silence and darkness of the vaults below the School House.

The chums of the Shell had waited patiently, while the slow minutes crawled by.

But there was a sound at last which told of the return of the masked men. The slight sound of the stone door opening was followed by a beam of light.

Tom Merry and Manners crouched behind the pillar.

Five figures emerged from the stone door, one of them carrying a torch. They had arrived at different times, doubtless coming from different directions; but it was natural that they should depart together. They passed the juniors in a bunch, and were gone in a few moments, their footsteps and the light dying away in the direction of the subterranean tunnel.

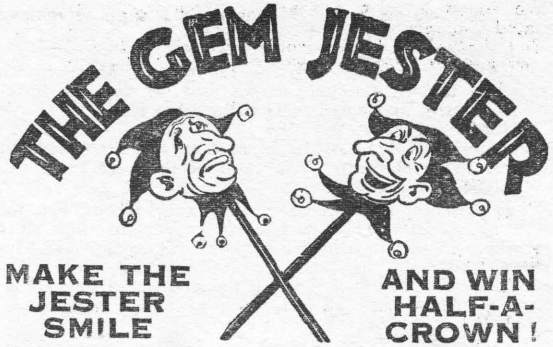
The juniors hardly ventured to breathe until they were gone.

"Five of them!" murmured Manners.

"Yes."

"That's the lot, I suppose—the four we saw and the one

(Continued on the next page.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Half-a-crown is awarded to the sender of every joke that appears in this column.

NOT SO CLEVER!

Father: "How are you getting on at school, John?"
 John: "Fine! I've learned to say 'Thank you,' and 'If you please' in French."
 Father: "Good! That's more than you've learned in English!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to K. Storey, Lansdowne, Wharfe Road, Crowle, Scunthorpe.

NO WATER SHORTAGE.

Milkman: "Good-morning, Mrs. Brown! It looks like rain to-day."
 Mrs. Brown: "Yes, but you're charging threepence a pint for it, all the same!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Morgan, 3, Flawn Road, West Derby, Liverpool 11.

HELPFUL.

Plumber (at phone): "What's that? A leak in the water-pipe? Well, tell yer 'usband to keep 'is 'and over it. And just 'ang on a minute, and I'll tell yer what day I can come."
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Johnson, 104, Marlborough Road, Dagenham, Essex.

PERPETUAL MOTION.

First Professor (at wheel of car): "I say, old chap, I've discovered the secret of perpetual motion."
 Second Professor: "What do you mean?"
 First Professor: "I can't stop this car!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Haywood, 3, Woolleys Road, Canal Street, Nottingham.

RIGHT'S WRONG!

A signwriter had painted Mr. Wright's name over his shop, but he had spelt the name "Right."
 "Oh!" cried Mr. Wright. "You shouldn't spell 'Wright' 'Right.' That's the wrong 'Wright.' Write 'Wright' right, because 'Right's' wrong!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Bradbrook, Ward 11st Back, Central Middlesex Hospital, Acton Lane, Park Royal, London, N.W.10.

IF ONLY—

Jones: "I've a machine in my business that would make me a millionaire if only I could keep it going all day."
 Bones: "What sort of machine is it?"
 Jones: "A cash register."
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to N. R. Dix, 99, Smithfield Road, Wanganui, North Island, New Zealand.

A WORD WANGLE.

Trying to stop hawkers calling, Smith put up a notice on his gate: "Beware the dog."
 His humorous next door neighbour, knowing he hadn't a dog, altered the notice slightly. It read "Warebe the dog!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Park, 18, Sanderstead Road, Leyton, London, E.10.

who let them in," said Manners. "I suppose none are likely to remain behind?"

"I should say not."

"Because we might explore the place," Manners whispered. "If we can get in, we may be able to discover who they are, and what their little game is."

"Good egg!"

"Better wait a bit, though, and see whether there may be any more of them. You can't be too sure."

"Right you are!"

The two juniors waited for ten minutes more. But there was no sound, and they felt pretty certain that all the members of the meeting were gone. They approached the stone wall, and switched on the torch. Tom Merry examined the edges of the moving stone, and pressed it in various places, and at last, with a sudden movement, it yielded.

It rolled back, and a black opening lay before the two juniors.

The darkness was a pretty plain proof that the room was untenanted. The two juniors entered boldly, and Tom Merry flashed the light round him.

The apartment was square, and walled with stone in large blocks, any one of which might have formed another movable door.

That it had recently been occupied was evident. There were a number of cheap stools and a table in the room. There was a chest, locked and padlocked, which the juniors guessed to contain refreshments in bottles—as there were evident signs that drinking and smoking had been going on, but nothing could be seen of a supply of spirits. The chest evidently contained the supplies of that sort which were used at the masked meeting.

Several used glasses and a great deal of tobacco ash ornamented the table. That was all the juniors could discover.

What was the meeting held for?

They could not guess.

If it was merely a convivial meeting, why did the five strangers come so far? If they met in that secret apartment with anybody who belonged to St. Jim's, where were the others gone?

"There may be another way out," Manners muttered, answering the unspoken question.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I shouldn't wonder," he assented.

"They may have been keeping it up with some of the black sheep of the School House," Manners remarked. "There's been drinking and smoking going on, at all events."

"Looks like it."

"That may account for what Gussy saw, or thought he saw, in the Fourth Form dorm last night," said Manners thoughtfully. "Suppose there's another way out of this den, and it leads into the Fourth Form dorm."

"It's possible!"

"In fact, very likely some of the Fourth—like Mellish and Levison—are the chaps who come here to drink and smoke," said Manners. "We know they've been to the Green Man in Rylcombe to do it, so why not here?"

"Likely enough."

Tom Merry took a last look round the room.

"Well, we've seen all that's to be seen here," he said.

"Let's get back. We shan't get much sleep to-night."

"What about developing the negatives?"

"Oh, hang the negatives!"

"But that's what we came down here for," said Manners argumentatively, "and the fellows will ask to-morrow if I managed it all right. We don't want to tell everybody how we've been passing our time here."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I can see you're determined to get the developing done," he said. "I suppose it will be safe enough now. Let's get on with it."

"Good!"

They returned into the vaults, closing the stone door after them. Then Manners lighted the red lamp, and started. It took him considerably more than half an hour before he was finished, but he was finished at last. As Tom Merry remarked, with a sigh of relief, everything comes to an end if you wait long enough—a remark to which Manners replied only with a sniff.

They returned to the upper regions, fastened the door of the vault staircase behind them, and made their way back to the Shell dormitory. The dormitory was wrapped in slumber by the time they entered it. Tom Merry burst into a chuckle as he was removing his boots.

"Manners, old man—"

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"Hallo!"

"I've got a dodge for finding out who it is in the Fourth Form that has dealings with those masked bounders."

"Good!" said Manners. "Good-night!"

He rolled into bed.

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

"Grooo!"

"Manners!"

"Yaw-aw-aw!"

"Blessed if the silly ass isn't asleep already," growled Tom Merry, "after keeping me up all this time over his rotten negatives! My hat! There goes one o'clock! I think I'd better get to sleep, too!"

Which he forthwith proceeded to do.

CHAPTER 9.

The Signs of Guilt!

TOM MERRY, as he sat at the breakfast table with the Shell on the following morning, glanced over curiously towards the Fourth Form table.

The Fourth Form—that is to say, the School House portion of the Form—were all there, and Tom Merry wondered who it was, and how many, who had had dealings with the masked men the previous night in the vaults under the School House.

Tom Merry and Manners had confided the whole affair to Monty Lowther, who had heard it in amazement; but the Terrible Three had resolved to let the matter go no further yet.

Who was involved in it, and what might happen if they talked too freely they did not know; it was better to find out more before speaking out; and as Monty Lowther so sapiently remarked, there was always time to jaw.

Tom Merry scanned the faces at the Fourth Form table, in search of signs of late hours; and in one face, at least, he found the signs he sought.

That face was Levison's.

Levison was looking very pale and harassed, and seemed to have a headache. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked him over True enough, Levison not infrequently looked like that. But the Terrible Three agreed that he looked much worse than usual this morning.

"He's one of them!" Manners remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I think it's very likely," he said.

"I feel jolly sure of it!" said Monty Lowther. "What about Mellish?"

"He looks more fit than Levison."

"True. And Lumley-Lumley?" suggested Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head decidedly.

"I think not," he replied. "I am sure Lumley-Lumley meant what he said to me when he gave me his word of honour that he was done with that kind of thing."

"He broke out before, you know, after reforming."

"Yes; but—well, I don't think he's mean enough to break his word."

Monty Lowther did not feel quite so sure about it, but let the matter drop.

Tom Merry had a scheme for surprising the member or members of the Fourth Form who were connected with the secret society, into giving themselves away. He slipped into the Fourth Form Room a short time before first lesson, and was busy with the chalk on the blackboard. He turned the blackboard so that it would be visible to the Fourth Formers when they took their places, but was turned away from the master's desk.

Tom Merry was seated at one of the desks when the Fourth Form came in. Tom's place, of course, was in the Shell class-room, but he intended to watch the effect of his device upon the Fourth.

He had designed a mask, with chalk, on the blackboard. Over it was inscribed the number 5, and under it he had written the word "To-night."

It looked like a very mysterious message from a secret society. As a matter of fact, it meant nothing at all; but it would startle any fellow in the Fourth who had dealings with a masked society of five members in the habit of meeting at night.

Several of the juniors stared at the blackboard as they passed in, going to their places in surprise.

But when Lumley-Lumley passed it, he started violently, and stopped and stared at the mysterious inscription.

The Outsider of St. Jim's could hardly believe his eyes.

That Levison of the Fourth was in secret communication with some unknown persons, who entertained designs against him, the Outsider knew.

But what did this mean?

(Continued on page 14.)

MORE NOTES AND NEWS FROM—



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

HALLO, chums! I've great news for you this week. Starting in next Wednesday's grand number is a super series of St. Jim's stories. It features the thrilling adventures of Tom Merry & Co.—in wildest Africa—fighting cannibals, tigers, and lions, etc. Ripping, eh? Martin Clifford has given us extra-special treats with these yarns, and you must make absolutely sure of not missing one of them. Next week's story is entitled:

"UNDER SEALED ORDERS!"

Tom Merry is chosen by Sir Richard Standish, a governor of St. Jim's, to take some very important papers to a ship in Southampton Harbour. Sinister Spaniards are menacing Sir Richard, for the papers are worth more than a million pounds. By sending a junior schoolboy as messenger, while Sir Richard himself goes off in another direction, it is hoped to throw the Spaniards off the track. Naturally, Tom Merry takes a few chums with him—a mere eight!—and the greatest secrecy is kept. But—Well, thrilling are the adventures that befall the chums of St. Jim's en route. Yet the greatest thrill of all is reserved for them when they reach Southampton. You'll revel in the excitement and breathless incidents of this gripping yarn. Coming next Wednesday, chums!

"THE DEVIL'S MIRE!"

Such is the sinister yet intriguing title of the next St. Frank's story in our smashing series, "The Ten Talons of Taaz!" Only two boys of the "marked ten" have now to face the ordeal of proving their courage to the Tibetan priests—McClure and Nipper. Who will be next? Great precautions are taken by the chums of the two juniors to ensure their safety from the priests, but it is all in vain. McClure disappears one foggy night! What happens to him? You must read this powerful yarn—it's one long thrill.

By the way, I shall have some more good news for you next week, concerning a ripping story of the Christmas adventures of the St. Frank's chums.

SUFFERING CATS!

You remember the story of the cat that climbed to the top of a seventy-feet high cooling tower of an electric-light works, and couldn't get down again? The local fire brigade spent all one week-end in vain attempts to reach it, and in the end the cat jumped to the ground itself. It leaped down to a roof thirty feet below, and then to another roof twenty

PEN PALS COUPON

17-11-34

feet lower, and so to the ground. Well, a similar story now comes from Chicago. A small kitten had reached the roof of a sixteen-storey building, and when someone attempted to pick it up to convey it back to safety, the kitten tried to escape by jumping across the angle of the building. But it made an error of judgment, and fell to the ground—one hundred and seventy feet below. That a kitten could live after such a fall seemed impossible; yet there was no sign of its body on the ground. A little while later the kitten was seen again on a ledge two storeys up—alive! The amazing animal then leaped to the ground and scuttled away.

THE BOY TARZAN.

Hunters were on the track of game in woods near Uzitza, Yugo-Slavia. They were getting ever nearer to the creature they were stalking, when suddenly, through the trees, the hunters saw something jump up and go racing away. On the instant they fired, and the creature dropped to the ground. The party of hunters ran up, to discover that the "creature" was—a naked boy, covered in hair and mud. Fortunately he was not shot, but just scared of the men. As far as could be gathered—for the boy knew no language—the woods had been his home most of his life, and he had lived on roots and berries!

A FISH OUT OF WATER.

How long can a fish live out of water? Two hours is the record of one particular specimen, and this is how it happened: A Brazilian running fish had been caught and placed in a glass tank for a fish society's show in Philadelphia. But suddenly the fish smashed the glass of its tank, and flopped six feet to the floor! Then it rapidly waddled away and disappeared. It was not until two hours afterwards that the fish was found—and it was still alive and kicking!

HEARD THIS ONE?

Teacher: "Name a group of islands off the coast of Scotland."

Jones: "The bridegrooms, sir."

Teacher: "The bridegrooms?"

Jones: "Well, sir, the He-brides!"

THE EDITOR.



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, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Billy Allen, 5, Rosedale Apts., Corner Rosedale and Osborne Streets, Ft. Rouge, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, wants correspondents; planes and stamps.

Michael J. Henwood, Vallis, 46, Ennors Road, Newquay, Cornwall, wants pen pals; age 10-12; stamp collecting.

Miss Edna Wood, 15, Mere Road, off Whitegate Drive, Blackpool, Lancs., wants girl pen pals; age 15-18; sports, films, stamps.

Maurice E. Badsby, 42, Melbourne Street, Leicester, wants pen pals in the tea-growing countries; India, China, Java; swimming; age 16-18.

Miss Eleanor Stone, Penmount, Sketty, Swansea, wants a girl correspondent in the North; camping, dance bands, films; age 15-17.

Miss Margaret Ellis, 5, Kingston Road, Sketty, Swansea, wants a girl correspondent in the North; age 15-17.

Miss Doris Roberts, Bank Buildings, Bridge Street, Abergele, North Wales, wants girl correspondents in Australia or Canada; age 17-18.

R. T. Jenkins, 42, Grove Street, Deptford, London, S.E.3, wants correspondents.

Ted Wahlstrom, c/o Hospital, Porirua, New Zealand, wants pen pals.

Ted Overen, c/o Hospital, Porirua, New Zealand, wants pen pals.

M. Scott, Winchester, South Canterbury, New Zealand, wants to hear from stamp collectors; age 11-13.

W. Upton, P.O. Box 96, Ashburton, New Zealand, wants pen pals in British Empire; age 13-15; carpentry, meccano.

Miss Fay Morgan, Staples Street, Motueka, South Island, New Zealand, wants girl correspondents; age 14-18.

Neville White, 589, Lincoln Road, Halswell, Canterbury, New Zealand, wants to hear from stamp collectors; age 12-15.

The School Fellowship League, 40, Earls Court Square, London, S.W.5, wants members. Write to secretary.

E. L. Fenner, 58, Thimblemill Road, Bearwood, Birmingham, wants members for the Pioneer Club.

Tom Evans, 6, James Terrace, Hengoed, Glam, South Wales, wants pen pals; Vancouver, British Guiana; age 16-18.

Miss Muirel Elliott, 11, Thomas Street, Newtown, Chester, wants girl correspondents who collect stamps; age 13-14.

Sidney Pennefather, 3, Firth Gardens, Fulham, London, S.W.6, wants a pen pal in India, Australia, or Africa.

Charles L. Donaldson, 88, Saughtonhall Drive, Edinburgh, wants correspondents in India, Australia, Malaya, China; sports, books, foreign countries; age 16-18.

P. Miles, Orleton School, Filey Road, Scarborough, Yorks, wants a pen pal in Canada or Australia; age 9-10; stamps swimming.

P. B. Seammell, 9, Louise Road, Stratford, London, E.15, wants correspondents; motoring, dancing, books, cycling.

Miss Dorothy Smith, 2, Reevy Hill Top, Wibsey, Bradford, Yorks, wants girl correspondents overseas; sports.

(Continued on page 28)

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THE MYSTERY OF THE VAULTS!

(Continued from page 12.)

Not for an instant did he dream of connecting the mark on the blackboard with Tom Merry. His only thought was that it was a message to Levison from the mysterious unknown whom he had secretly introduced into the dormitory the previous night, and who had vanished at the sound of Jack Blake's voice, like ghosts at cockcrow.

But where were the mysterious strangers now, then, and how had they obtained access to the class-room without being observed?

Lumley-Lumley's brain was in a whirl. Tom Merry watched him, with surprise on his face. For it was evident to him now, in spite of his faith in Lumley-Lumley, that the Outsider of St. Jim's was the fellow he wanted to find.

Lumley-Lumley pulled himself together with an effort, and went to his place, his face wearing a thoughtful look.

Levison was last in of the Form. He passed the blackboard and glanced at it carelessly, and started. Tom Merry noticed his start, but he could stay no longer, as he was already late for class in his own Form-room. Mr. Lathom was looking at him over his glasses.

"Merry! Is that you, Merry?"
 "Yes, sir!" said Tom Merry. "I'm just going, sir!"

And he went, before the master of the Fourth could ask him any questions.

He hurried into the Shell Room just in time to get fifty lines from Mr. Linton, his Form-master, for unpunctuality.

Monty Lowther and Manners looked at him with mingled sympathy and inquiry. But there was little opportunity of speaking under the eagle eye of Mr. Linton. Tom Merry attempted it, with disastrous results. Mr. Linton was taking them upon a personally conducted tour through ancient Athens, and all his thoughts ought to have been fixed upon Pericles and Alcibiades, but he had one eye for the Terrible Three.

"Merry!"
 The name was rapped out suddenly in the midst of the adventures of Alcibiades.

"Ye-es, sir!" said Tom Merry, in dismay.

"Were you talking to Lowther?"
 "T-talking to Lowther, sir?"

"Will you answer my question, instead of repeating my words like a parrot?" said Mr. Linton. "Were you talking to Lowther?"

"Yes, sir!"
 "Take fifty lines!"
 "Thank you, sir."

Mr. Linton, breathing hard through his nose, resumed the adventures of Alcibiades. Never had the Athenian hero bored the Terrible Three so much. He seemed to have become suddenly as intolerable as Julius Caesar. Perhaps he bored Mr. Linton, too, for the master of the Shell seemed to be paying more attention to the Terrible Three than to Alcibiades and the political state of Athens.

"Did it work?" murmured Manners, after a pause

"Yes. Lumley-Lumley saw it, and——"
 "Manners!" shouted Mr. Linton.

"Ye-es sir!"
 "Were you speaking to Merry?"

"Yes, sir."
 "Take fifty lines! Did you answer Manners, Merry?"

"Ye-es, sir"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1.396.



No. 40. Vol. 1. (New Series.)

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! I learned to play football in no time, says Gore. Yes, it looks like it! I was pondering deeply in the quad when Kerr came up. "A ha'penny for your thoughts!" said Kerr. I told him it is usual to offer a penny—whereat he said he didn't care twopence! They tell me a Rylcombe cobbler's shop was ransacked. He lost his "awl"! The thief was arrested at a dance, however. Caught on the "hop"! Short story: The contortionist had tied himself nearly in a knot, and was straining to pick up a handkerchief behind him when a benevolent old lady watching said: "Won't you let me pick it up for you?" Here's a shorter one. A lion-hunter's epitaph read: "Here lies a lion-hunter—he found one!" I hear the United States consumes nearly 20,000 tons of snuff per annum. Snuff said! Chicago gangsters are now experiencing bad times. From gun-employed to unemployed! It's certainly time they "walked" instead of being "taken for a ride." Harry Noble tells me kangaroos are very hard to catch. Awful "bounders"! Fatty Wynn just looked in. He says you can't pick holes in roast beef. Agreed—some we tackled recently would have resisted dynamite! A manufacturer says the £50 car will come soon. But will it go? A New York taxi-driver bit a passenger who didn't tip him. The driver of the station hack at Rylcombe only gives you a look—but it's much more "biting"! A Wayland grocer has made £15,000 in ten years. He has made plenty of "provisions" for the future! What sort of pet should I keep? asks a reader who is training to be a dentist. What about an armadillo—they have 90 or more teeth! Talking figures, a Rylcombe man weighing 20 stone has won 20 prizes for being the heaviest man. Leaving no "stone" "unturned" on the "scale"! But tall men frequently get rheumatism, we read. Big "stiffs"! Long legs are useful, though. A local business man insists on his messenger boys running all messages. "Double or quit"! "Nother fat man, the Wayland taxidermist, weighs over 13 stone. Not surprising, considering he spends all his time "stuffing"! An actor-manager acquaintance of mine is producing a theatrical show in a lorry. Should the audience be hostile, he is ready to start on a "long run"! As the motorist remarked, when he unwittingly drove down a steep hillside in the dark—"By Jove, she's touching ninety! I didn't know she had it in her!" A sword-swallower at the Wayland Hippodrome offered to swallow anything. Just the man to listen to Mr. Ratchiff's story of how he once landed a tunny fish! Skimpole has just offered Tom Merry a 200,000 word MS. on roses. Evidently a bit of a "rambler" himself!

Whoopee, boys!

SAINTS' FIRST NO LUCK FOR THE LE

Wally D'Arcy at the Microphone

A-choo! Excuse me, fellows! I've got a cold in my nose, I think. I caught it from my major, Gussy, who caught it from Blake, who caught it from either Tom Merry or Lowther or Manners or Figgins or Kerr or Wynn, or possibly Kangaroo! Anyhow, the fact is that pretty nearly the whole of the St. Jim's junior eleven is suffering from colds. Several chaps, including Figgins and Kerr, have been definitely forbidden to play this afternoon against Abbotsford, and Tom Merry has brought over a team largely composed of reserves. Good men, some of them, but you can't expect reserves to settle down at once and do as well as the fellows they are replacing, can you? Kangaroo is indisposed, and Patrick Reilly is deputising at centre-half. Here he comes, looking very excited at the prospect of acting as the St. Jim's pivot. Let's hope he doesn't get too excited, as Irishmen sometimes do! They're lining up, Tom Merry, at centre-forward, having two strange partners on each side of him in Pratt and Kerruish. Gussy—my major, you know—is in his usual place at outside-left, though he can't stop sneezing!

Phoop! The fight is on! Abbotsford, on their own ground, are a fairly useful side, though nothing to be afraid of in the ordinary way. They make quick headway from the kick-off. Fane comes through—watch him, Herries! Herries, in an unaccustomed position at back, just misses Fane, and the Abbotsford skipper is through! He steadies, lets fly a cannon-ball of a shot—oh, well played, Fatty! Wynn just reaches the ball, and throws it clear! Narrow squeak that!

Now Saints are warming up. Tom Merry instigates an attack which bodes danger. Kerruish makes a brilliant run, but is forced off the ball by a hefty full back, who clears. Fane snaps up the pill, and bears down on Fatty Wynn's "chicken-run" again. He dribbles past two defenders and rams home a pile-driver! Wham! The net's bulging, Fatty Wynn, full length on the grass, being beaten all ends up. Abbotsford leading, deservedly, too, on the play.

ST. FRANK'S TOP OF THE TABLE

REDCLYFFE ROUTED

Fast play by St. Frank's overwhelmed Redclyffe from the start. Oddly enough, after a period of sustained pressure by St. Frank's Redclyffe broke away and Judd netted a smart goal. Returning to the attack, however, Nipper & Co. carried all before them, putting on four goals before the interval, and adding four more in the second half. Nipper helped himself to four, and Pitt with a brace and Tregellis-West and Travers completed the tally. By this victory, St. Frank's

Saints interval, going. heroic s cross-ba My cold St. Jim's goal at Gus. fit champion to Tom shoots—over by The goal just wid Off the grimly makes a the ball full-back quite fa Wish B his usual freedom sends M fence, he so meet shoots h drives d throws di ball, can Oh, jum the uppi Merry! The A —he ha Tom Me been sha is out th redoubli resolute very clo which th bar. It those da referee St. Jim this sea Pat Rei in the g and bet

go to th one poi ABBOTS: Fane St. FRA Nipper Tregel Trav BAGSHO CLAREM ROOKW RYLCOM SCHO STOP Foot Presu

Merry's Weekly



Week Ending November 17th, 1934.

FIRST DEFEAT THE LEAGUE LEADERS

Saints buckle to in grim earnest till the interval, but the forward line cannot get going. Tom Merry goes very near with a heroic solo effort, but his shot just skims the cross-bar. A-choo! Excuse me, fellows! My cold's getting worse, I think. Here come St. Jim's again—determined to wipe out that goal at all costs. Whoopee, boys! Watch Gus, flitting down the wing like a sprint champion. See—he swerves in, centres neatly to Tom Merry's foot. Merry gathers the ball, shoots—oh, what bad luck! Merry is bowled over by a charge in the very act of shooting. The goalkeeper was beaten, but the ball goes just wide of the upright.

Off they go again—undeterred by ill luck, grimly intent on that equaliser. Kerruish makes a plucky effort, but is shouldered off the ball. Abbottsford have a hefty pair of full-backs, and the St. Jim's forwards are not quite fast enough to evade them to-day. Wish Blake and Lowther were playing—with his usual inside men, Merry would have more freedom. See now—a long pass from Reilly sends Merry away. Outdistancing the defence, he heads for goal. Goalkeeper advances to meet him—Merry pulls up in his stride and shoots before he is tackled. The goalkeeper dives directly at his feet, but in doing so throws out one hand. He just touches the ball, causing it to glance off at a tangent. Oh, jumping catfish! It's gone just outside the upright—a great shot, too! Hard luck, Merry!

The Abbottsford goalkeeper needs attention—he has bumped his head on Merry's boot. Tom Merry himself was bowled over and has been shaken up. I've got a feeling the luck is out this time, boys. Saints are at it again, redoubling their efforts to smash through the resolute Abbottsford defence. Kerruish goes very close, and Gus flashes in a great shot which the keeper is jolly lucky to tip over the bar. It's no go to-day, boys! It's one of those days when nothing will go right. The referee shrills his whistle—it's all over, and St. Jim's have suffered their first defeat this season. After Tom Merry and Gussy, Pat Reilly was our best man. A licking's all in the game—jolly well played, Abbottsford! and better luck next time, Saints. A-choo!

go to the top of the League table, being now one point ahead of St. Jim's.

FULL RESULTS

ABBOTSFORD .. 1	St. Jim's 0
Fane	
St. FRANK'S .. 8	REDCLYFFE .. 1
Nipper (4), Pitt (2)	Judd.
Tregellis-West,	
Travers	
BAGSHOT 1	St. JUDE'S 1
CLAREMONT .. 2	GREYFRIARS .. 6
ROOKWOOD .. 0	HIGHCLIFFE .. 0
RYLCOMBE GRAM. 2	RIVER HOUSE .. 2
SCHOOL	

STOP PRESS

Football Explodes During House Match. Presumably during a fierce bombardment.

ST. JIM'S SPOTLIGHT

SCORING A GOAL

in a junior practice game, Skimpole of the Shell was tremendously elated! Most of the other players were prostrated with laughter! Buttonholing Tom Merry directly after the match, Skimpole said he felt that he had perhaps neglected sport, devoting too much of his time to the study of Professor Balmycrumptet. He proposed to remedy this in future by playing regularly at centre-forward for the Junior XI. He pointed out that he would thus relieve Tom Merry of the onus of leading the forward-line, and he would also be prepared to skipper the team if required. While Tom Merry was trying to get his breath back in order to reply, Monty Lowther explained to Skimpole that he had scored against his own team!

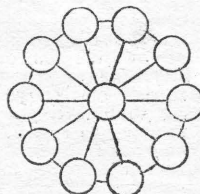
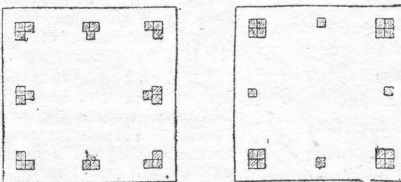
CALLING TOWSER NAMES

George Herries startled his chums when they visited the kennels. Herries is well known to be very fond of his bulldog, Towser. As Blake, D'Arcy, and Digby approached, they could hear some of the weird names by which Herries was addressing Towser: "Columbus!" "Nero!" "Julius Caesar!" Asked for an explanation, Herries said he had just read that great spirits of the past were sometimes reborn in animals—and certain that old Towser must be a very great spirit indeed, Herries was just trying him with the names of a few heroes of the past! Towser gazed solemnly at his master, however, without exhibiting any special interest till Herries addressed him by the familiar cognomen of "Towser"—whereat Towser barked and wagged his tail! We imagine he must be just an ordinary bulldog, after all!

APPEARING WITHOUT A MONOCLE

Gussy caused a mild sensation in class. After regarding D'Arcy for some moments, Mr. Lathom inquired if he felt quite well, to which Gussy replied in the affirmative. Several fellows whispered to him during Latin "construe," asking the reason for neglecting to wear his usual eyeglass. To all inquiries Gussy remained unmoved. It was later learned that he had lost it—but a dozen new ones were coming!

Solution of Last Week's Puzzle



CALIBAN'S PUZZLE CORNER

Can you arrange the figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 in these circles so that they total 18 across every one of the diagonal lines?

"Take a hundred lines."
"Oh, sir!"
"I will keep order in this class, or I will know the reason why," said Mr. Linton. "The next boy who takes a history lesson as an opportunity for holding private conversations will be detained for two hours after school."
That settled it. Tom Merry did not seek to impart any information on the subject of his device to Manners and Lowther until the recess after third lesson, when the Shell were released from their class-room for an interval. Manners and Lowther caught Tom Merry, one by either arm, and marched him out into the quad.
"Now!" demanded both together.
Tom Merry laughed.
"It worked!" he said.
"Who saw it?"

"Lumley gave himself away, and I thought Levison did; but I wasn't sure about Levison. The others, as far as I could see, thought it was a joke of some sort."

Monty Lowther grinned.
"Lumley-Lumley, hey?" he said.
"Yes," said Tom Merry reluctantly.
"I suppose he knows something about it; but it may be something quite innocent, of course."

"Oh, of course!" said Monty Lowther sarcastically. "He is an innocent sort of bird—I don't think! How are you going to bowl him out?"

"Ask him."
"Phew! That will give the whole show away, with a vengeance!"

"I trust him," Tom Merry said firmly.
"I believe he will be able to explain all right. Anyway, we shall get at what he knows on the subject."

"And if he won't talk?"
"I think he will."
"If he won't," said Manners, "we'll bump it out of him. And, as it happens, there he goes! We can catch him under the elms!"

The Outsider of St. Jim's had passed, at a little distance, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets and his eyes bent upon the ground, a thoughtful frown upon his brow, as if he were thinking out some problem.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry abruptly.
"Right-ho!"

The Terrible Three followed upon the track of the Outsider of St. Jim's. The Fourth Former did not observe them. He walked on in the same thoughtful way, looking neither to the right nor to the left. As he passed under the thick old elms the Terrible Three ran forward.

Lumley-Lumley started out of his reverie.

"Hallo!" he said. "What do you fellows want?"

"You!" said Monty Lowther.
"I guess—" began Lumley-Lumley.

"Shut up, Lowther!" said Tom Merry.
"It's all right, Lumley-Lumley, we want to ask you a question, that's all."

Lumley-Lumley laughed.
"Go ahead!" he said.

"What do you know about the secret meetings that are held in the vaults under the School House at night?"

It came so suddenly that the Outsider could not be prepared for it. He uttered a startled cry of amazement.

CHAPTER 10.

The Outsider's Plan!

"WHAT do you mean?"
Jerrold Lumley-Lumley gasped out the words. He stared wildly at Tom Merry. The Shell fellow's glance never wavered.
"I mean what I say, Lumley-Lumley," he replied quietly. "I've asked you a question, and you can answer it or not, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,396."

as you think fit; but if you don't answer it, I shall know what to think. What do you know about the secret meetings that are held in the vaults under the School House?"

"You—you took me by surprise," Lumley-Lumley muttered.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't explain," said Monty Lowther.

"I—I guess I'll explain soon enough, when I know what you're asking me for," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. "I was knocked off my balance." He was recovering himself now. "What do you mean? What do you know about the secret meetings?"

"More than you might guess," said Manners. "We watched them last night."

"You did! Great snakes!"

"And I put that rubbish on the blackboard this morning to see what effect it would have on the Fourth, and I saw you give yourself away," said Tom Merry. "That's why I asked you the question. I hope you will answer it."

"You—you put that on the blackboard?"

"Yes."

Lumley-Lumley drew a deep breath.

"Blessed if I should have guessed that," he said. "I—I thought it was a message of some sort to Levison, though I couldn't imagine how it got there."

"Levison!" exclaimed the Terrible Three together.

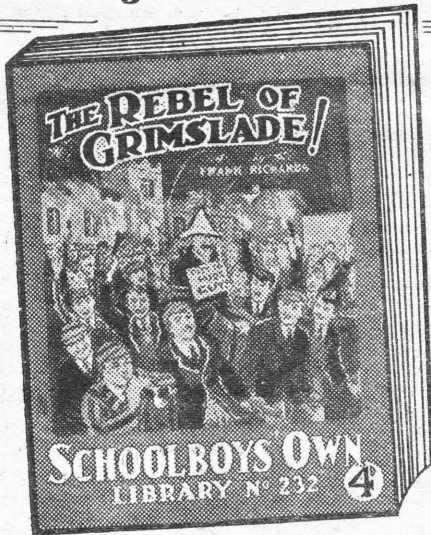
"I guess so! Look here," said Lumley-Lumley abruptly, "I guess you know as much about the matter as I do, though I can't imagine how you've got on to it. I reckon we'd better compare notes and see what we know."

"Agreed," said Tom Merry.

"That is, of course, if you trust me," said Lumley-Lumley, with one of his old sardonic looks. "I guess Lowther doesn't."

Monty Lowther coloured a little.

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"Well, you can't blame a chap for not trusting you!" he exclaimed. "You have always been so full of blessed tricks, I don't know whether this mayn't be another."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "I've said that Lumley-Lumley is fair and square, and I trust him all along the line."

"Thanks," said Lumley-Lumley quietly. "You'll find that you're right in this case, Tom Merry. As a matter of fact, there's some underhand bisney going on in the School House, and I guess it's up against me, and against nobody else."

"I'll explain first," said Tom Merry. "Then you can tell us what you know."

"All serene!"

And Tom Merry concisely told the story of the visit to the vaults for the purpose of developing Manners' negatives, and of its surprising results. Lumley-Lumley listened, with growing wonder.

"My hat!" he exclaimed, when the captain of the Shell had finished. "I guess it's queer. That room must have a door on each side, and while you were on one side, I was on the other, I guess. You were there on your lonesome, and I was tracking Levison."

"Levison! What has he to do with it?"

"I want to know, I guess."

The Outsider, in his turn, explained. It was the turn of the Terrible Three to be surprised. Lumley-Lumley and Tom Merry had been able to enlighten one another to some extent, yet they were still puzzled.

"It looks as if it's something up against you, Lumley, by the way you describe their going to your bed," Tom Merry said slowly. "But what can the little game be? And how is Levison mixed up in it?"

"I don't know how Levison is mixed up in it, unless it's through some of the rascals he's met at the Green Man in Rylcombe," said Lumley-Lumley. "But I can guess what the game is. My father has made a lot of enemies in his time—no man becomes a millionaire without that, I reckon—and I guess this is something up against him, through me, and they're making use of Levison."

"To injure you in some way?"

"I guess so."

"But—but Levison would never be so bad as that!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "He couldn't be a party to introducing ruffians into the House to do you an injury, Lumley."

Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"They mayn't have told him the whole story, and they mayn't intend me any actual injury, either," he said. "There's such a thing as kidnapping a millionaire's son to get money out of his pater."

"Phew!"

"I guessed it was something of the sort when I first got on to this thing," said Lumley-Lumley. "I remember hearing you fellows talking about Gussy being kidnapped once, and kept in an old castle near Rylcombe."

"Yes, that was a long time ago."

"It might happen again, only, from what I've seen, I guess I'm to be the giddy victim instead of Gussy," said Lumley-Lumley coolly. "But I'm going to find out."

"By questioning Levison?"

The Outsider laughed.

"That wouldn't be any use, I reckon. Levison would laugh at the whole story, and warn his friends secretly, and the game would be put off to a later time, when it was safe."

"Yes, I suppose that's very likely," Tom Merry assented.

"I guess it's certain. No, I'm going to find out for myself. I'm going to their next meeting."

"What!"

"That's my little game. I guess they'll congregate here every night until they get their blow in," said Lumley-Lumley. "and instead of Levison going to the meeting to-night, I'm going in his place."

"But he'll never agree—"

"I shan't ask him. When he leaves the dorm I shall follow, and I'll rope him in and tie him up," said the Outsider, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. "I shan't stand on ceremony with a worm like that, and if he tries to make a row I'll give him a crack over the napper that will stop him. I'm going to borrow his mask and domino and go in instead of Levison, and smell out the whole game."

"My hat!"

"I guess that's the lay-out," said Lumley-Lumley coolly.

"But—but it's too dangerous," exclaimed Tom Merry. "If they discover you, they may do you real injury—and, besides, it's placing yourself in their hands, if they are wanting to kidnap you."

"I'm going to risk it."

"You can't! Now, look here—"

"I've made up my mind," said Lumley-Lumley quietly. "You fellows can help me if you like, and make it safer."

Suppose we arrange for you to be in the vaults where you did the developing at the same time that I'm taking Levison's place in the meeting-room? Then, if I'm in danger, I'll whistle. You can run in, and in the confusion I shall get clear. You can have cricket stumps and bats with you."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

It was a wild adventure that exactly appealed to their tastes.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "I don't see why it shouldn't work, you fellows."

"It's horribly risky for Lumley-Lumley," said Tom Merry slowly. "We don't know how desperate the rascals may be."

"Oh, they won't go so far as murder," said the Outsider coolly. "Levison wouldn't get mixed up in anything so bad as that, stands to reason. Suppose they kidnap me—well, to get me away they'll have to go through the vaults, and you chaps will be waiting there, and you can have Kangaroo, and Dane, and Glyn, and some more, if you like, to make all sure."

"Good egg!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry, after a pause. "We'll let a few of the fellows into it, and we'll be there with stumps ready. If you are in danger give that whistle of yours—we shall hear it, and we'll rush in."

"All serene!"

"And we'd better help you with Levison in the first place," said Tom Merry.

Lumley-Lumley shook his head.

"No. I'm going to ask Blake to do that. You fellows had better be down in the giddy vaults at ten sharp, and wait there. I'll speak to Blake and tell him to have a jaw with you about it. No need to let Levison see us all confabbing together. He's as sharp as a needle, and he may get wind of what's going on if he catches half a word."

"Right-ho!"

And after a little further talk, they separated.

Needless to say, the Terrible Three waited for the evening with the keenest excitement.

In the afternoon Jack Blake joined them as they were chatting in their study after school. Blake's face told at once that Lumley-Lumley had spoken to him.

"This is a giddy go, and no mistake!" was Blake's first remark.

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "Lumley-Lumley has let you into it?"

"Yes. It seems like a giddy romance. I suppose the Outsider isn't pulling my leg—what?" said Blake, with a lingering doubt.

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, it's honest Injun!" he said.

"It's a rum go," said Blake. "I don't think I shall quite believe it unless I see Levison go on the warpath to-night. I never thought quite so bad as this even of Levison. If it turns out as bad as Lumley-Lumley thinks, it will mean the sack for that cad."

"And serve him jolly well right!" said Manners emphatically. "St. Jim's would be all the better for seeing the last of Levison!"

"Oh, yes; that's true enough," said Blake.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed the study door open. "Weally, Blake, I have been lookin' for you for ten minutes. Are you going to the footah practice, or not?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Weally Blake—"

Blake walked away with his elegant chum. But his manner was very absent during the footer practice. He could not help thinking of the mystery of the vaults, and wondering, as he expressed it, whether Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had been pulling his leg or not.

CHAPTER 11.

A Shock for Levison!

JACK BLAKE did not go to sleep that night. He was far too excited to think of sleep. Fortunately, Levison was too busy with his own thoughts to have any attention to bestow on Blake, and as it never occurred to him that Blake knew anything about the matter, he never thought of suspecting the leader of Study No. 6.

After lights out, Blake waited sleeplessly; and neither did Jerrold Lumley-Lumley sleep; but he waited and watched with perfect calmness. His nerve seemed to be of iron; and the peril he had marked out for himself that night did not seem to affect him in the least.

Boy as he was, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had been through many a wild experience before he came to St. Jim's, and had seen many things that it was not good for a boy to see. His strange life had hardened his character, and perhaps his heart. Under the influence of Tom Merry & Co., he

was learning better things; but the iron determination and courage he had learned in many strange lands remained unaltered.

He was looking forward to the night's adventure as calmly as he might have looked forward to an evening party.

Of the three juniors who remained awake in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House after lights out, Lumley-Lumley was assuredly the coolest.

Ten o'clock struck from the clock tower.

Blake quivered with excitement. But there was no sound in the Fourth Form dormitory. Half-past ten! The chimes died away, and there was a sound of movement from a bed.

Levison was getting up!

The moonlight glimmered in at the high windows, and showed the cad of the Fourth dimly, as he dressed himself.

He had just finished dressing when Jerrold Lumley-Lumley stepped from his bed.

Levison sprang round at the sound of a movement, and stared at the dimly seen figure of the Outsider of St. Jim's.

"Is that you, Lumley-Lumley?" he muttered huskily.

"I guess so."

"You're going out, eh?"

"No fear!"

"What are you getting up for, then?"

"Just for a stroll downstairs," said the Outsider coolly.

Levison drew a deep breath.

"You can go," he said. "I'm not going to interfere with you."

"I mean down the secret stairs," said Lumley-Lumley cheerfully.

"What?"

"Through the panel, you know—the spiral stair in the wall."

Levison gave a hoarse cry.

"You—you hound! You watched me last night, then?"

"I guess so."

"You—you were not gone out!" Levison panted in rage and dismay.

"Not much! I was in the dorm the whole time, and the night before, too," said the Outsider coolly. "I'll trouble you to get back to your bed, Levison!"

"What for? Hang you!"

"Because I'm going to tie you there," said Lumley-Lumley, taking a coil of rope from under his pillow. "I guess that's why."

Levison clenched his fist.

"You'd better not try," he muttered, and then gave a gasp as he was seized from behind. "Oh! Who—who's that?"

(Continued on the next page.)



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"Me!" said Jack Blake promptly and ungrammatically, as he twisted the cad of the Fourth over upon his bed. "Lie down, you rotter!"

"Let me go!" gasped Levison. "Let me go, or—or I'll yell and wake the House!"

Blake chuckled.

"And what about your friends in the vault?" he asked.

Levison panted.

"You—you know about that?"

"I guess we do," said Lumley-Lumley, "and we're going to know more! If he makes a sound, Blake, ram the sponge into his mouth! You can tie it there with this length of twine!"

"What ho!" said Blake cheerfully.

Blake held Levison down spreadeagled upon the bed, in a muscular grip, while Jerrold Lumley-Lumley tied his hands and feet to the bedpost. In a few minutes Ernest Levison was a helpless prisoner.

The cad of the Fourth was trembling and shivering with mingled emotions. He could not resist the two juniors by force; but he did not know what was intended, to follow his own capture. By making a disturbance he might alarm the men in the vault, and enable them to make their escape; but then he reflected how far the vault was from the dormitory—they could hear nothing. It was impossible to give the alarm, and if he roused the masters in the School House by calling out, he would only betray himself, without being able to warn his associates.

And in that extremity, with the fear of exposure and ruin hanging over him, his courage deserted him, and he shivered and trembled as he lay on the bed.

"You'll keep an eye on him, Blake?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I guess I'll be back soon."

Levison gave a faint cry of terror.

"Where are you going, Lumley?"

"Only to see your friends."

"You—you mad idiot! You—"

"Stick that sponge in his mouth, Blake; he's going to make a row, and we don't want any giddy prefects on in this scene!" said Lumley-Lumley coolly.

"Lumley! I—"

Levison's voice was cut short by the sponge, which was jammed into his mouth, and which Blake proceeded to tie in its place with the twine. Lumley-Lumley grinned softly and dressed himself.

By this time half a dozen of the Fourth were awake, and were eagerly demanding to know what was the matter. Jack Blake enlightened them, and there were exclamations of amazement. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed, groped for his eyeglass, adjusted it, and turned it upon Blake in the dim light, with a look that might have withered him.

"Pewwaps you will admit now, Blake, that I was right the othah night, and that there was somebody in the dormitow!" he exclaimed majestically.

"I shouldn't wonder," Blake assented calmly. "One of the rotters sneaking up here to spy out the lay of the land, very likely."

"You persisted in disceditit' the stow!"

"Well, why didn't you capture the chap?" demanded Blake. "What was the good of dabbing him on the chivvy and letting him go? That's what I want to know!"

"Hear, hear!" said Digby.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You see, you mucked it up, as you do everything!" said Blake.

"Weally, you ass—"

Click!

The secret panel had closed behind the Outsider of St. Jim's. The sound stopped the talk in the dormitory. The Outsider had gone into peril that might be deadly. The juniors knew that, and they waited in keen and tense anxiety for his return.

Lumley-Lumley's nerve was of iron as he descended the spiral stair.

Even now the perilous adventure was close at hand he did not shrink from it. At the bottom of the steps he turned on his torch, and stooped over the bag he had seen Levison take his disguise from the previous night. The Outsider, with a hand that did not tremble, enveloped himself in the black cloak, and placed the mask on his face.

He was about the same size as Levison; his clothes were similar where they showed. In the mask and domino he was an exact reproduction of the cad of the Fourth as he had appeared when he knocked at the door of the secret vault the night before.

Lumley-Lumley drew a deep breath.

On the other side of the hidden door in the stone wall were the men Levison had met, whom Levison had brought up to the Fourth Form dormitory by the hidden stair for a secret purpose—a purpose, however, which the Outsider of St. Jim's could guess.

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There were five of them, according to the accounts he had received from Tom Merry, and in all probability men of the most reckless and desperate character.

It was a perilous adventure he had entered upon, and for a single instant even the cool, resolute Outsider of St. Jim's paused, with his hand raised to knock upon the stone.

But it was only for an instant.

Then he set his teeth and knocked, as he had heard Levison do on the previous night. The knock echoed faintly up the spiral stair.

There was the sound of a movement on the other side of the wall, and Lumley-Lumley felt a cold draught on his face as a block of stone rolled back.

He knew that there was an opening before him now, but he could see nothing. There was no light, only deep, intense blackness.

But he knew that he was expected to enter, and he stepped boldly in. He knew that Levison had done so, and it was his cue to do exactly as Levison had done. A hand fell upon his shoulder, and, in spite of himself, he shivered a little. He was led forward in the darkness, and he heard the stone door close behind him.

"Light!" said a voice.

Lumley-Lumley's heart was beating fast.

A light flared out, and the room was illuminated; and Lumley-Lumley gazed round him with glinting eyes at the masked men in the secret vault.

CHAPTER 12.

Crooks in Conference!

LUMLEY-LUMLEY caught his breath for a moment, but only for a moment.

Then he was cool as ice again.

He looked round at the strange assembly. There were five men round the table in the secret vault, and all of them wore black dominoes and were masked.

Who were they?

Their nearest acquaintances could not have recognised them. All that could be seen of them was the glinting eyes through the openings in the mask.

There was a smell of spirits in the room. Bottles and glasses stood upon the table, and the chest in the corner was open. The damp, heavy air of the vault was laden with fumes of tobacco.

Lumley-Lumley's eyes wandered from the masked men round the vault. Opposite the door by which he had entered, and which was now closed again, was a wall of solid blocks of stone, and in that wall, he knew, was the secret door known to the Terrible Three.

On the other side of that wall, if the arrangement had been kept, Tom Merry & Co. were waiting. Were they there? Would they be able to open the stone door in case of necessity? The voice of the leader of the masked men interrupted the Outsider's reflections.

The leader, a fat man, from under whose mask protruded a big cigar, and who had a general flavour of whisky about him, sat at the head of the table. There seemed to be something familiar to Lumley's eyes in the outlines of his figure, concealed as it was by the folds of the ample domino. The junior had little doubt that he was one of the blackguards from Rylcombe or Wayland whom he had met when he was the Outsider of St. Jim's, and the most reckless scapegrace in the school.

"Well, my lad," said the masked man in a deep voice, removing the cigar from his mouth, "is it all right for to-night?"

Lumley-Lumley smiled slightly.

He knew the voice. It was that of the landlord of the Bird in Hand in Wayland, a man with whom the Outsider had played many a game of nap, and whom he had "skinned" without mercy. For the Outsider, whom the rascal had looked upon as a pigeon to pluck, had had more skill in play than his grown-up competitor, and he had come out best in the contest, leaving Mr. Gryce with a very sore feeling on the subject. Mr. Gryce's feelings were by no means friendly towards the Outsider of St. Jim's, and still less so since his reform.

"Yes," said Lumley-Lumley in a low voice, and imitating as far as he could the metallic, sharp tones of Levison; "it will be all serene."

He coughed as he spoke, as if he had a slight cold. That would account for any little difference in the voice.

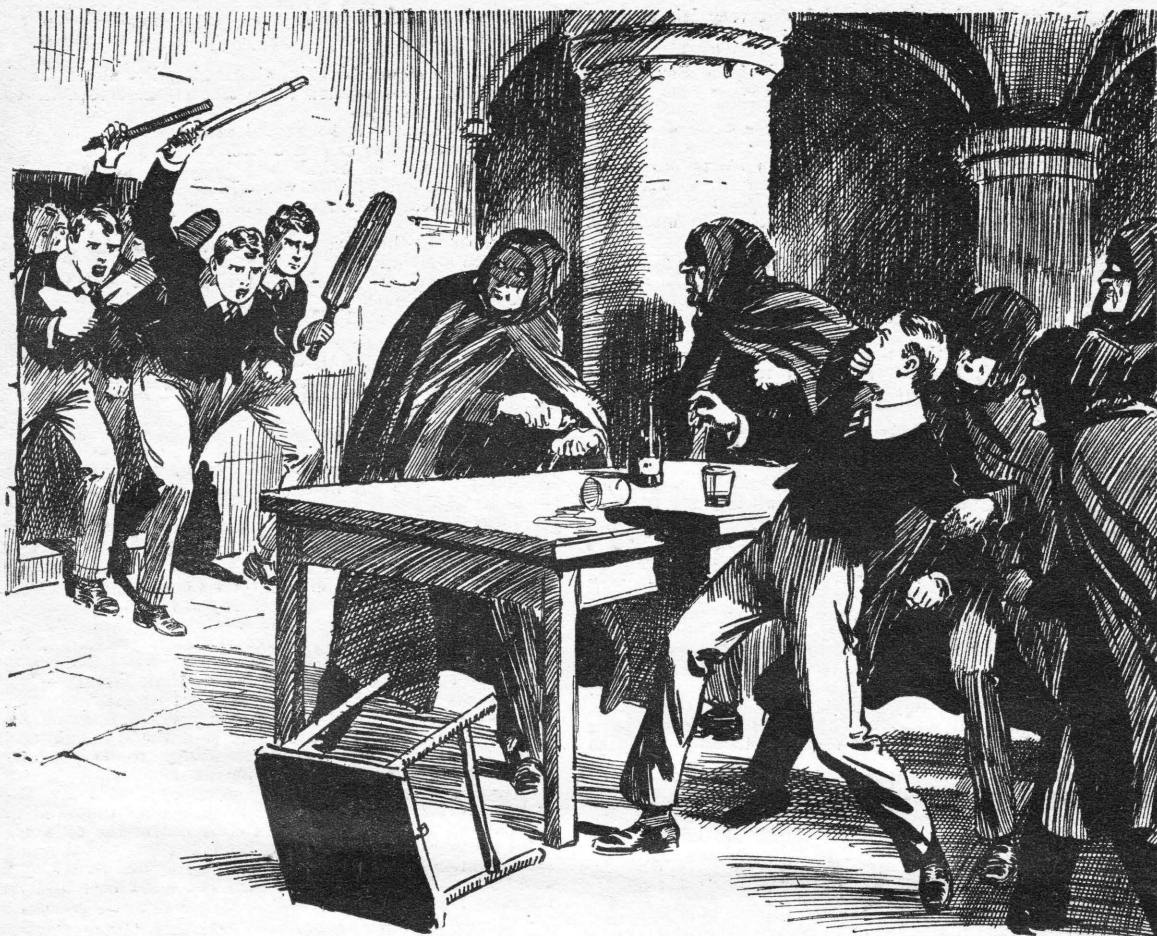
"He isn't gone out?" asked the masked man.

"Not to-night."

"It's curious," said another of the masked men. "I have been asking some questions in Rylcombe to-day, and it seems that Lumley-Lumley has not been there—I mean, he hasn't been seen at his old haunts. Where has he been for the last two nights, then?"

"I don't know," said the junior.

"Same old game, I suppose?" said Mr. Gryce, with a hoarse laugh.



As one of the masked men was soaking a cloth with chloroform, ready to be used on Lumley-Lumley, there came an unexpected interruption. The door of the secret room suddenly opened, and Tom Merry & Co., armed with bats and stumps, charged in. "Sock it to 'em!" roared Tom.

"I can't say."
 "You've got a cold, my boy," said Mr. Gryce, looking at the Outsider as he coughed again. "It will be just as well for you when this business is over. Is it safe to go up into the dormitory now?"
 "That depends. What is the plan exactly?"
 The masked man stared.
 "You know the plan as well as I do," he replied. "If Lumley-Lumley is in bed we have only to press the chloroformed rag over his face, and he will not wake up. Then it will be easy enough to carry him down the stair in the wall and get him here."
 Lumley-Lumley grinned under his mask. He understood clearly enough now. He was to have been chloroformed in bed—that was why the rascals had come to his bedside each of the previous occasions when Levison had let them into the Fourth Form dormitory by the secret panel.
 "But I mean after that?" he said. "After you have got him here, Mr. Gryce?"
 The masked man uttered an oath.
 "No names here!" he exclaimed angrily. "Have you no more sense than that? You know that it is not safe, you young fool!"
 "Sorry! I—"
 "Well," said Mr. Gryce, recovering himself, "after he's here it's simple enough. We get him along the underground tunnel to the old castle and we shall keep him there. As nobody knows the dormitory secret except yourself he cannot be followed or traced, I should think. Nobody can possibly guess how he went."
 "That's right enough."
 "Nobody can guess that he's in the old castle, I reckon."
 "But if he's not safe there we can easily get him to the island in the river, where he certainly couldn't be found. At one place or the other we shall keep him safely enough until we have made terms with his father."
 "With Mr. Lumley-Lumley?"
 "Exactly."

"You know all that, youngster," said one of the men. "What are you getting at now?"
 "I want to know where I come in," said Lumley-Lumley, still in Levison's metallic tones, which he imitated wonderfully well. "In the first place, how much are you going to ask Mr. Lumley-Lumley?"
 "Ten thousand pounds."
 "And you think you will get it?"
 Mr. Gryce chuckled.
 "I shall get it if the millionaire ever wants to see his son again," he replied.
 "But supposing he won't pay up?"
 "The boy will be kept till he does—on short commons. When he has starved for a week or so I dare say he will be willing to write a letter in his own hand, urging his father to pay the money."
 And the group of masked rascals chuckled together.
 "Not much difficulty on that subject," said Mr. Gryce, evidently well satisfied with his scheme. "The millionaire is bound to cash up. What is ten thousand pounds to a man like Lascelles Lumley-Lumley? Nothing. He could pay fifty thousand and not miss it. I reckon we shall get the money. If we don't, the boy will suffer. They can't get on to us—our faces have never been seen here, even by one another. We shall take it in turns to keep guard on the boy where we keep him, and he will never see anything but a masked face. The whole thing is perfectly simple."
 "But—"
 "Time we got to business, I think," said another of the group.
 "Wait a bit," said Lumley-Lumley, with a cough. "Hold on! I want to know where I come in. How am I to have my whack?"
 "It's agreed that you're to have five hundred pounds," said Mr. Gryce. "That's a good slice, considering that you take practically none of the risk. Besides that, I shall give you back your IO U's and release you from the money you owe me—a good sum, too, as you know very well. It's

making Lumley-Lumley pay your debts—a very fair revenge upon him for deserting his old friend.”

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

He could understand now how the cad of the Fourth had been drawn into this rascally scheme. Levison had been a far more reckless gambler than the Outsider, and he had had far worse luck. He was deep in the clutches of Mr. Gryce and his friends—he owed money, and they had his signature upon it. They had only to show his papers at the school to get him instantly expelled from St. Jim's. His fate was in his hands. The fact that he had had such dealing with them was more than sufficient to make Dr. Holmes expel him from St. Jim's.

Perhaps threats of something of the sort had been used to urge Levison to do this—perhaps he had been urged on still more by his hatred of Lumley-Lumley and his desire to be revenged upon the Outsider for what he regarded as his desertion.

Yet it was possible that the whole scheme was Levison's in the first place; and certainly the masked men could never have known anything of the secret panel in the dormitory unless Levison had told them. Levison had discovered that, and he was using his discovery for this purpose. It was pretty clear that there were the makings of a very thorough criminal in Ernest Levison.

“Five hundred pounds!” repeated Lumley-Lumley, for the sake of saying something. “And when am I to have the money?”

“When the millionaire pays up, of course.”

“Good!” said the Outsider. “I only wanted to make the thing clear. It couldn't be carried through at all without me.”

“I know that,” said Mr. Gryce. “When you told me about the secret panel and suggested carrying off Lumley-Lumley and getting money out of his father I know that I didn't think much of it at first. It was your idea, and I'm willing to admit it. But we are taking all the trouble and risk; you've simply got to get back into bed and hold your tongue while we deal with the boy. The sooner we do it the better, too. If the coast is clear up there we may as well get to work at once.”

“And we shan't come here again,” said one of the masked men. “One more drink all round before we get to work.”

“Good!” said Mr. Gryce. “But about not calling here again, I don't know. If we work this game successfully, we may try it again—with another boy perhaps—that fellow D'Arcy, for instance. He was kidnapped once—that was what put this idea into your head, I suppose, youngster?”

Mr. Gryce mixed himself a glass of whisky and water—a great deal of whisky and very little water. A glass was filled for the junior, but he did not touch it. Lumley-Lumley was feeling a little nonplussed now. He had discovered what he had come there to find out, and his next step was doubtful. The masked rascals were ready to enter the dormitory now, to carry out their scheme; but that was not what the Outsider wanted. Now that he had found out all he wanted to know, he only wanted to get clear of them. But that was not likely to be easy. He was conscious, too, that one of the masked men, who had not spoken at all, was watching him with a fixed gaze. He backed away a little towards the door behind him. The man who was watching him started to his feet.

“Don't be in a hurry, kid,” he said, speaking for the first time. “We ain't finished here yet, I think.”

Lumley-Lumley's heart beat faster.

“What's the matter?” asked Mr. Gryce.

“Our young friend has got rid of that bump on his chin remarkably quick,” said the man, still regarding Lumley-Lumley fixedly. “Don't you reckon so?”

Mr. Gryce uttered a sharp exclamation.

“What! Collar 'im!”

Lumley-Lumley made a spring backwards. But even as he did so, two of the masked men seized him, and he was dragged forward to the table again, a helpless prisoner in their grasp.

CHAPTER 13.

A Rush to the Rescue!

“LET'S see him!” said Mr. Gryce, between his teeth. “Now you mention it, Ginger, I remember the youngster had a bump where we could see it, under the mask, last night, and he said it came from a fight with Lumley-Lumley. Where's that bump gone?”

“That's what I've been wondering,” said Ginger.

“Take his mask off.”

Lumley-Lumley did not resist.

He knew it was useless, in the grasp of two burly men. Two of them dragged off his cloak and his mask. There was a yell of amazement from the gang of kidnappers.

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“Lumley-Lumley!”

“Himself!”

“Gosh!”

Mr. Gryce stared blankly, almost dazedly, at the Outsider of St. Jim's. He seemed to be scarcely able to believe the evidence of his eyes.

“Lumley-Lumley!” he gasped at last.

The Outsider was as cool as ice.

“I guess so,” he said.

“Lumley-Lumley! My word!”

The man called Ginger grinned unpleasantly under his mask.

“I reckoned there was some game on, from the first, and I've been watchin' 'im,” he said. “It's a game to find out about us—he's been watchin' Levison. He's come down 'ere instead of the other.”

Mr. Gryce clenched his hands.

“He's come down, and saved us the trouble of fetching him,” he said. “We've got him here now, and he won't get away so easy.”

“But—but if the game's known—” began one of the masked men uneasily.

Mr. Gryce uttered an oath.

“I don't care if it's known! We can get him away now, under the chloroform, and keep him in another place—we'll try the old hut in the wood, or some such place, and he'll be safe, and even if Levison talks, there ain't any evidence against us. Where is Levison, you young villain?”

“He's in the dormitory,” said Lumley-Lumley coolly. “He's tied down to his bed, and three or four fellows are watching over him. You won't see Levison.”

Mr. Gryce's teeth came together hard.

“It wasn't a very safe game to play,” he said. “If there was danger for us in it, Lumley-Lumley, you might never get out of this vault alive.”

“I don't think you'd go as far as that, Gryce—”

“Hang you! You know my name, of course.”

“I know your voice, and if you carry this game on, I shall give evidence against you,” said the Outsider coolly. “For the sake of old times, I'm willing to let you off—if you clear out at once, and give up the scheme.”

“Give up twenty thousand pounds, hey?” said Mr. Gryce savagely. Not if I know it. With twenty thousand quid between us, it would pay us to clear out of the country.”

“Twenty thousand—and you told Levison ten thousand,” said Lumley-Lumley. “You were going to give him five hundred out of twenty thousand. You know how to drive a bargain, I guess, Mr. Gryce.”

“You mind your own business,” said Mr. Gryce. “Ginger, get the chloroform. I reckon this young 'ound will be sorry he came down 'ere.”

Lumley-Lumley did not flinch. He put his lips together, and uttered a sudden loud, shrill whistle. The action was so unsuspected that the masked men made no motion whatever to stop him.

“Stop 'im!” Gryce yelled. “Silence 'im, can't you?”

A hand was clapped over Lumley-Lumley's mouth.

At the same moment, the stone door of the vault rolled open; the whistle had been heard on the other side, and Tom Merry & Co were ready. There were six sturdy juniors there, all armed with cricket stumps or bats, waiting for the signal from Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. The shrill whistle rang through the vaults; and Tom Merry's hand was already upon the stone door. It rolled open, and the juniors dashed into the secret room.

The interruption was utterly unexpected; the masked men were taken totally by surprise.

Ginger was soaking a cloth with chloroform, ready to be used upon Lumley-Lumley, the other men were standing round.

Tom Merry & Co. rushed upon them without warning.

“Sock it to 'em!” roared Tom Merry.

“Look out!” gasped Mr. Gryce.

But there was no time to look out.

The rush of the juniors hurled the masked men to right and left, the Shell fellows swiping out recklessly with bats and stumps. The masked rascals were knocked on all sides, and Tom Merry caught Lumley-Lumley by the arm.

“Come on!” he exclaimed.

He dragged Lumley-Lumley towards the door by which he had entered.

But the Outsider stopped.

“Hold on!” he exclaimed.

“Come—buck up—”

“Not that way!” said Lumley-Lumley hurriedly. “They'll be after us in the vaults—come this way!”

He quickly opened the door by which he had entered the secret vault, that gave admittance to the spiral stair to the Fourth Form dormitory.

Tom Merry understood at once. It was a safer and quicker retreat, and in a minute or less, they could be with the Fourth Form.

“This way!” shouted Tom Merry.

The Shell fellows followed him and Lumley-Lumley. The masked men had been quite knocked out, for the moment, in the surprise of the attack. It was just as well to be gone before they recovered themselves. If they chose to follow the juniors, the odds on Tom Merry's side would be irresistible, once the juniors were in the dormitory along with the Fourth.

The excited juniors dashed blindly up the spiral staircase in the dark.

Tom Merry stayed at the foot of the stair till the last, and drew the stone door shut after them.

Then he followed his comrades up the stairs, panting. The fight in the secret room had been brief but breathless.

In the vault the masked men staggered up. Most of them had had very hard knocks, and one of them was stunned. Mr. Gryce put his hand to his head, where a big bruise was forming, and cursed.

"What—what was it?" he gasped. "Who were they?"
 "The young villain had his friends close at hand!" gasped Ginger. "They rushed us, and they 'ad bats and stumps! Ow! My 'ead!"

There was a chorus of groans from the masked men. Mr. Gryce ground his teeth.

He understood now how thoroughly he had been "done" by the Outsider of St. Jim's, and his rage knew no bounds. "The game's up, gov'nor!" said Ginger. "We're done 'ere! We'd better 'ook it, while we've got the chance!"

Mr. Gryce shouted out an oath. "I'm not going without the boy," he said.

"What!"
 "Let's follow them!" said Gryce savagely. "We know the way, and there's a chance yet! We've got cudgels 'ere!"

"But—"
 "Are we goin' to take all this trouble for nothing, to be fooled by a kid?" yelled Mr. Gryce. "I ain't, for one. It's cost us something, in time and trouble, and I tell you I'm going to have the kid, and get the money from his father, all the same."

"But we can't—we—"
 "I'm going up!" said the leader savagely. "Who's comin' up with me?"

Ginger was already leaving the vault by the opposite door. Another of the ruffians followed him, and they disappeared together. Mr. Gryce, in his fury, hurled a whisky bottle after them, which smashed upon the stone wall, and fell to the floor in a thousand fragments.

"I'm going up," said Mr. Gryce; "them as don't follow me, don't share in the cash, that's all. Come on, I say!"

He opened the secret door, and tramped up the spiral stairs in the wall. Two followed him—ruffians as desperate as himself. Now that all was known, they could not venture to remain in that part of the country, and if they were to leave everything and run, they meant to take the Outsider of St. Jim's with them, to make, at least, an attempt to extract ransom from his father.

Mr. Gryce led the way up to the Fourth Form dormitory with a bludgeon in his hand. The fight for the Outsider of St. Jim's was not yet over.

CHAPTER 14.

The Fight in the Dormitory!

TOM MERRY & CO. burst breathlessly into the Fourth Form dormitory.

Blake had opened the secret panel as soon as he heard footsteps on the hidden stair, and they came rushing in, one after another.

The light was on in the dormitory now, and the Shell fellows blinked at the sudden change from the darkness.

"Here we are!" gasped Tom Merry.
 Blake chuckled.

"Yes, I can see you are here," he remarked. "You seem to be in rather a hurry, too."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the Shell fellows as they crowded in. "Have you got Lumley-Lumley all wight?"

"Yes; here he is."

"I guess I'm all serene," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley coolly. "But if it hadn't been for Tom Merry being there, I should have been under chloroform by now."

"Chloroform! My hat!"
 "Gweat Scott! The uttah wascals!"

Lumley-Lumley walked over to Levison's bed. The cad of the Fourth looked up at him with wide open eyes. All Levison's nerve was gone now.

The Outsider looked down upon him with a grim smile. He removed the sponge from the junior's mouth, and Levison gasped for breath.

"I've come back, you see," Lumley-Lumley remarked.

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"You mad idiot!" gasped Levison. "They might have—have—"

Lumley-Lumley laughed. "But they didn't," he said. "Tom Merry & Co. were on the other side of the vault, you see, ready to chip in, and they chipped in. And I guess some of the scallywags down there are feeling a bit sore now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Let me go!" muttered Levison. "It's all up now! I—I was drawn into this. Gryce holds papers of mine. He threatened me—"

"Oh, come off!" said Lumley-Lumley. "It was your idea from the start, I guess."

"He—he lied if he said that. Lumley-Lumley, you don't want to get me expelled?" muttered Levison. "Keep it dark. I was your friend once. Don't get me sacked from the school."

His voice was shaking with terror. The Outsider of St. Jim's smiled contemptuously. In any strait he would never have begged for mercy from a fellow he had attempted to injure. But Levison was made of different stuff.

"I guess I don't want to be hard on you," he said. "You're a pretty thorough rascal, Levison, but it's not my business to get you expelled from St. Jim's."

"You—you'll say nothing?" panted Levison.
 The Outsider was unfastening the cord that held the cad of the Fourth down to his bed.

"I don't say that, Levison."
 "If you betray me—"

"I guess I'll keep it as dark as I can. That's all I can say, and the best I can promise you," said Lumley-Lumley. "If it all comes out, you'll have to stand the racket. It's your own fault, anyway."

"The matter will have to be explained," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Only you fellows know that I—I was connected with them," whispered Levison. "If you say nothing about it—"

"Bai Jove!"
 "I—I shall be expelled. Think of my people! Oh!"

"We'll do the best we can for you," said Tom Merry, with mingled scorn and pity. "I suppose this will be a lesson to you?"

"It will—it will! I swear it will!"

"Yaas; I should wathah think so. I considah that Levison ought to have a feahful thwashin', deah boys, and we can let him off with that, undah the circs."

"I guess Gryce and the rest will run, and if they're not

(Continued on the next page.)

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arrested, there's no need for Levison's name to be mentioned," said Lumley-Lumley, in a low voice. "Only a few fellows know he was in it, and they'll keep it dark."

"Yaas, wathah, for the honah of the Form!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, I suppose we've seen the last of those scoundrels. I—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Blake, holding up his hand.

There was a crash upon the secret panel in the dormitory wall.

It burst open, and three masked men sprang in.

"My hat!" shouted Blake. "Here they are!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Look out!"

"Sock it to them!"

"Down with them!"

The three ruffians blinked for a moment in the light. There was a sound of footsteps in the passage outside the door. Levison ran to the light and turned it off.

"You fools!" he shouted. "Run for it!"

But the ruffians did not heed Levison. In the dim moonlight they rushed towards Lumley-Lumley.

It was the last attempt, and a desperate one. Lumley-Lumley caught up a bat to defend himself, and Tom Merry & Co. closed round him instantly.

There was a wild and whirling scrimmage.

The juniors were tumbling out of bed on all sides, catching up pillows and bolsters, or any weapons they could find, to join in the fight.

The ruffians had no chance.

Mr. Gryce staggered back, with Tom Merry's stump crashing upon his head, and fell to the floor. He picked himself up, and made a dash for the secret panel to escape. The other two ruffians followed him, under a shower of blows.

There was a sound of tumbling and crashing from the spiral stair. The three ruffians had lost their footing, and were rolling down.

Tom Merry burst into a reckless laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

"They've gone!"

"After them!" roared Jack Blake, brandishing his bat, and making a rush towards the secret door.

Tom Merry dragged him back.

"Hold on, Blake!"

"Let's follow them! We can capture them!" exclaimed Blake. "Come on!"

"It won't be safe to follow them down there," said Tom Merry soberly. "Besides, we don't want to capture them."

"But—but—"

"If they're caught they'll give Levison away. Think of the honour of the Fourth!"

Blake paused.

"Oh, all right! But they ought to be laid by the heels. Still, they've had a pretty severe punishment, all the same."

"Yaas, wathah! We have given the uttah wottahs a feahful thwashin' deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, with much satisfaction.

Someone turned on the light again. It was not Levison. He had crept into bed, and was lying trembling under the sheets, fervently hoping that his share in that night's work would never come to be known, and shivering at the thought of the consequences if the truth came to the ears of the Head.

The door opened.

The din in the Fourth Form dormitory had awakened many, and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, were at the door. They stared in at the dormitory in utter amazement.

It was a strange scene enough, and sufficient to amaze the Housemaster and the prefect.

The room was in utter disorder—the beds were wildly disordered, the floor was scattered with cricket stumps and bats and bludgeons and torn masks.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What has happened?"

"Great Scott!" muttered Kildare. "This is something more than a jape! What has happened, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry proceeded to explain. The junior gave as good an account as he could of the affair without mentioning Levison's name. Whether, upon the whole, it was better to screen the cad of the Fourth, or whether he ought to have been shown up, Tom Merry hardly knew. He did not want to be put in the position of telling a tale that would cause a fellow to be expelled; yet it was certain that some tale had to be told. At the same time, Tom Merry had not the least intention of avoiding telling the truth for Levison's sake.

If the fellow could be passed over unmentioned, that was all Tom Merry could do for him. If inquiry was strict and searching, the whole facts of the case would have to come out, and the cad of the Fourth must take his chance.

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But it never occurred to Mr. Railton or to Kildare, either, as they listened that any St. Jim's fellow could have been base enough to lend himself to the scheme for kidnapping a member of his Form.

Unless Mr. Gryce and his friends were captured, and told what they knew in order to ruin their accomplice, Levison was likely to escape.

"It is extraordinary—most extraordinary!" said Mr. Railton. "It is unheard of! I am very glad that you have been able to defeat these rascals. The police must be communicated with at once. Do you know any of them, Tom Merry?"

"One was named Gryce, sir."

"The landlord of the Bird in Hand at Wayland, sir," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Any others?"

Lumley-Lumley did not speak.

"Very well; that will doubtless be a sufficient clue to the scoundrels, and the police shall have possession of it at once," said Mr. Railton. "I will see that the panel is fastened up at once, and you boys can go to bed."

"Very well, sir."

In their excited state of mind, the juniors were not much inclined to go to bed again; but the Housemaster's word was law.

The Shell fellows went back to their own dormitory, where they found the rest of their Form awake, and determined to hear the whole story; and it was a long time before sleep visited the Shell dormitory in the School House.

In the Fourth Form dormitory, Mr. Railton nailed up the secret panel with his own hands, and then the juniors went back to bed.

Long they lay awake discussing the matter, but one by one they dropped off to sleep, with a single exception.

That was Levison!

The cad of the Fourth was too terrified to sleep.

What exactly might be his punishment if the whole truth came to be known he did not know. He knew that he would be expelled from St. Jim's. Dim visions of a reformatory, of a prison, floated before his tortured mind.

He could not sleep.

When the light of dawn came creeping in at the high windows, the cad of the Fourth was still wide awake, with restless, haggard eyes.

His face was white and haggard when he rose that morning, and Lumley-Lumley, who was not given to being tender-hearted, had a feeling of pity for him. He gave the junior a slap on the shoulder.

"Buck up!" he said in a low voice. "You're safe, unless Gryce and the others are caught, and even then they may not betray you. We shall hold our tongues."

"But will they be caught?" muttered Levison.

"Not if they can help it! They've had the night to get clear in, anyway, and I guess Gryce was the man to make good use of it."

"It's—it's awfully good of you to treat me like this after—after what I've done, Lumley!" Levison stammered.

The Outsider of St. Jim's shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I despise you too much to want to punish you," he said, with unpleasant frankness; "and I reckon you're punished enough, too, by the state of mind you're in. I'd rather face the music a hundred times than go about in a blue funk like that!"

Levison gritted his teeth. There was no real gratitude in his heart; at that moment he liked Lumley-Lumley even less than before. But he turned away without another word. It was not safe now to express what was in his heart.

The affair of the Fourth Form dormitory made a great sensation at St. Jim's. The police looked for Mr. Gryce for a long time, but they did not find him. The Bird in Hand had lost its landlord, and Mr. Gryce was not seen in the neighbourhood of Rylcombe or Wayland again. And as the days passed, and nothing was heard of him, Levison began to breathe more freely.

The spiral stair in the dormitory wall was blocked up with brickwork, and the secret panel fastened down; there was no danger of another attempt being made by the same means. Nor was Mr. Gryce likely to return to such a dangerous neighbourhood for the purpose. And all the juniors who knew the true story agreed that Levison was the last fellow in the world to be concerned in an attempt at kidnapping again.

The cad of the Fourth had had his lesson, and probably he would never quite recover from the scare he had had on the night of the revealing of the mystery of the vaults.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: "UNDER SEALED ORDERS!"—the first great yarn of a smashing series featuring the thrilling adventures of Tom Merry & Co. in Wildest Africa.)

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The Picture Postcards Clue!

THE mist is getting thicker, Reggie," said Jack Grey, with a shiver. "Let's be getting back." Although they were standing in the well-lighted High Street of Bannington, he glanced uneasily over his shoulder. His face, usually so cheery, had a drawn look, and there was almost a hunted look in his eyes, as though he momentarily expected some dread happening.

Reggie Pitt, very alert, was fully aware of his chum's condition, but he made no reference to it; on the contrary, he was more than usually cheerful.

It was a bitter November evening, with a penetrating coldness from the ground mist which half-enveloped the Stowe Valley. The two St. Frank's Removites had come into Bannington on Pitt's motor-cycle, and had been doing some shopping. There was no particular hurry, for calling-over was an hour distant.

"This mist has come up suddenly," remarked Pitt. "It was as clear as a bell when we left St. Frank's after tea. Nothing in it, though; we shall only strike a patch of it here and there."

"Well, let's be going!" said Jack Grey impatiently.

"Finished your shopping?"

"Yes."

"I thought you were keen on one or two of the November fourpenny books?"

"I might as well get them, I suppose," said Grey. "Still, they'll do another time—"

He broke off, for a little Morris Eight saloon, swerving recklessly towards the kerb, came to a stop, and the burly figure of Edward Oswald Handforth, leader of Study D, emerged from the driving-seat. Church and McClure, his faithful chums, climbed out of the little car, too. Church was looking normal enough, but McClure exhibited almost the same uneasy symptoms as Jack Grey. Almost the first thing he did when he got out of the car was to glance searchingly up and down, as though to satisfy himself that all was well.

Handforth fixed Reggie Pitt with a stern, accusing glance.

"Taking a risk, aren't you?" he asked bluntly, in a low voice.

Pitt laughed.

"Jack's in no danger here."

"Oh, isn't he?" said Handforth. "Remember, there are

only three left. Grey, Mac here, and Nipper. Nipper's a tough bird, and he can look after himself. But Churchy and I are keeping a keen watch over Mac; and it's up to you to look after Grey."

"Anybody not 'in the know' would think that you two chaps were dotty, by the way you're talking!" remarked Church.

"But we're not dotty—and the danger is mighty real!" said Handforth earnestly. "Ten of us went to the rescue of the priests of the Taaz Temple when they refused to leave that shipwreck. We looked on the face of Raa-ok, the high priest, and by the laws of that yellow, heathen, Tibetan cult, we were doomed to die. But because we went on an errand of mercy Raa-ok spared us."

"When we talk about it like this it sounds like a giddy nightmare," said Pitt. "Yet we've had plenty of proof, during these last weeks, that the Ten Talons of Taaz are not mythical. One by one we've had the mysterious 'call' Raa-ok told us that we should be summoned at any hour of the day or night, and that we must obey."

"That's the dickens of it!" growled Handforth. "There's no choice but to obey. By concentrating their will-power on one chap, the priests force him to do as he is told. Why, some of us have answered the 'call' in the middle of a football match and during lessons. There's no escaping it."

"The yellow men are ruthless, I know," said Pitt. "But if their orders are obeyed without question, their victim has nothing to fear. We know it. Handy, because we've been through the mill. So has Churchy. No need to be concerned about the three chaps who haven't yet had their turn. There's no escaping from it—"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth, in a startled voice. "Where's Grey?"

"Over by my motor-bike," said Reggie Pitt, glancing round. "I saw him fixing a parcel. Hallo! That's funny! He's not there now!"

"They've got him!" ejaculated Handforth, his eyes burning. "Even while we were talking here, in the open street, those yellow devils lured him away!"

They gazed up and down the High Street, into the thin film of mist; but there was no sign of Jack Grey amongst the passers-by.

"Keep your hair on, Handy!" said Pitt, laughing. "What a chap you are for jumping to conclusions! I'll bet Jack's in the bookshop; I know he wanted one or two

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**THE HORROR
OF THE
RUINED ABBEY!**

books. I'll fetch him, and then take him straight back to the school. You fellows get on. We'll be back soon."

Pitt's light-hearted treatment of the situation allayed Handforth's fears, and the burly junior climbed back into his car, followed by Church and McClure. The little saloon purred away, and Reggie Pitt, after watching it depart, strode along to the bookshop, some little distance away.

He was not nearly so comfortable as he had made Handforth believe. Yet he did not really think that anything dramatic had happened to his chum. The wish, in fact, was father to the thought.

Striding into the bookshop, he received something of a jar. For Jack Grey was nowhere to be seen. The man behind the counter looked at Pitt inquiringly, and, indeed, with rather unusual interest.

"Looking for your friend?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Pitt.

"He left three or four minutes ago," said the shopman. "I hope he was all right. It struck me that he was ill; he was very absent-minded."

"He's all right," said Reggie, forcing himself to speak calmly. "Did he buy any books?"

"He asked for two numbers of the 'Boys' Friend Library,' but he seemed dreamy, even then," replied the bookseller. "I had to ask him two or three times before he knew what he wanted. Then, when I had got the books out, I found that he was staring intently at these picture postcards."

He indicated a revolving rack which stood on the counter, the slots of which were filled with highly glazed postcard photographs of local beauty spots and places of interest.

"Looking at the postcards, was he?" said Pitt.

"Yes," replied the shopman. "He was staring at them with a peculiar concentration, as though the views fascinated him."

"Did he revolve this rack at all?" asked Pitt suddenly.

"No; he was staring only at the postcards which were towards him—the ones you can see now," said the other. "I spoke to him, and told him I had the books he wanted, but without a word he turned on his heel and left the shop."

"Thanks!" said Reggie, and he walked out of the shop.

He was a little excited now, for he felt that he had a direct clue as to Jack Grey's destination. There was no doubt at all that Grey had been "willed" by the grim priests of Taaz.

But it was significant that Jack should have been so intensely attracted by the picture postcard views in the revolving rack. For Pitt had seen that every one of the postcards on that particular side were views of the ruined abbey which stood almost midway between St. Frank's and the hamlet of Edgmore.

Surely it could mean only one thing. Jack Grey had been "told" to go to the abbey ruins. Seeing those pictures, he had naturally been intensely attracted by them. If he had been "willed" to go elsewhere, the various photographs of the abbey ruins would not have concerned him in the slightest.

In spite of the fact that the priests had more than once warned the boys that interference would be rewarded by death, Reggie's first impulse was to dash to the ruins, in order to be by his chum's side. But Pitt was quick-witted and cautious. Only for a moment did he hesitate, then he hurried across the road and went into the post office. A minute later he was in telephonic communication with St. Frank's, speaking to Nipper the popular Remove captain.

"They've got Jack!" said Pitt bluntly.

His tone was sufficient. Nipper knew just what he meant.

"Well, there's nothing we can do, Reggie," he said quietly. "In fact, it's better for Jack that we should do nothing."

"But I'm afraid for him," said Pitt. "He and McClure are both in a rocky state these days. I knew all along that it would be tough going for the last one or two of us. But listen! I think I've got a clue."

He gave the details and Nipper complimented him on his shrewdness.

"Never mind the back-patting," said Reggie. "I want you and the chaps to rally round. I'm going to the ruins direct; I won't interfere with anything, but I'll do some scouting. Handy and his chums ought to be at St. Frank's by this time; get hold of them and rout out Travers and Archie and the others."

"All right; if it's going to make you any easier, we'll come," promised Nipper crisply.

Meanwhile, Jack Grey himself, having walked out of Bannington by various byways, had reached the wide towing-path of the river. It was the shortest cut to the abbey ruins. A full moon rode in the cloudless sky, and

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there was not a breath of wind. But the countryside—particularly the marshy meadows near the river—lay obscured in a blanket of white ground mist.

The mist was not thick, and Grey had no difficulty in seeing the path ahead of him. The visibility, however, was confined to some ten or twelve feet. He walked purposefully now, his face quite calm but set in rather rigid lines.

But the priests of Taaz were destined, for once, to run up against a snag or two. The first snag took the human shape of Claude Gore-Pearce, of the St. Frank's Remove, who had been visiting his questionable friends, Wellborne & Co., of the River House School.

Gore-Pearce was going along the towing-path towards St. Frank's when Jack Grey overtook him. Hearing footsteps, the snobbish millionaire's son paused, glancing back into the white mist as Jack Grey loomed up.

"Jolly glad you came," said Gore-Pearce. "A fellow needs company on an evening like this."

Grey did not even look at him; he made no reply. He walked on as though Gore-Pearce did not exist.

"Look here, Grey, you funny idiot, what's the matter with you?" demanded Gore-Pearce.

But Grey strode on, and in a moment he was swallowed up in the mist.

"Gad! He gives me the creeps!" muttered Gore-Pearce, with a shiver.

He had caught a glimpse of Grey's set face and his fixed look. Gore-Pearce felt suddenly frightened. But curiosity bade him follow at Jack Grey's heels.

Grey walked resolutely, and, after a while, he left the towing-path and struck across the meadows. The mist was not so even here; it lay in patches, which constantly shifted. One minute Gore-Pearce would be walking through thick mist, and then, all in a moment, he would stride out into crystal clear atmosphere, his shadow hard and black in the brilliant moonlight.

Twice he lost sight of Jack in the mist, but he found him again. The third time, however, he lost sight of his quarry completely. Now he paused irresolutely, for the mist had shifted eerily some distance ahead, revealing the rugged, ivy-covered walls of the ancient abbey.

Something moved. Gore-Pearce, with goggling eyes, saw a sinister, robed figure; it walked for a moment between the ruined walls, in full view; then the mist closed in again.

"The abbot!" babbled Gore-Pearce, in terror. "The ghost of the abbot!"

As white as chalk, he spun round and fled—and that was another snag for the priests of Taaz, for Claude Gore-Pearce was not the kind of fellow to keep such a story to himself.

Ordered to Murder.

JACK GREY shivered from head to foot as he stood within the ruins. He looked about him in bewilderment, and immediately recognised his surroundings. He was in the great stone-flagged apartment which had once been the refectory of the abbey. The only windows were tiny slits in the massive walls, and the only doorway was one which led from the central hall—an interior doorway. Age and decay had deprived the chamber of its roof, and the moon, directly above, made the chamber almost as light as day.

Beyond, on all sides, the ground mist drifted about. Grey was not so much startled by the knowledge that he was in the abbey ruins, however, as by the character of his companions. For standing about him were a number of robed figures—men with immobile yellow faces.

"I knew it!" gasped Jack. "I felt something queer come over me a minute ago, while I was talking with Handforth in the High Street. But it must have been a lot more than a minute ago," he added, with a start. "How did I get here?"

"You came, my son, in obedience to the mighty will of the Omnipotent Taaz," said Yeza, the chief attendant priest, who spoke excellent English, and who always officiated in this way. "Fear nothing, but do as you are bidden without question. Prove yourself to be of stout courage, and Taaz, in his magnificence, will be at peace with you. Displease Taaz, and you die the death of a craven!"

"Well, go on," said Grey, with forced facetiousness. "I'll buy it. What do I have to do?"

"The task which has been chosen for you, young Unbeliever, is simple and swift," replied the priest softly. "Yet it is a task which will draw to the full on your reserves of courage. It entails no danger to yourself; only the exercise of great will-power. Succeed, and you may go, with the blessing of Taaz, within one minute. For we realise that our sojourn in the English countryside is

becoming dangerous, and we would make haste to complete the work which Taaz has ordained. Observe, then, the nature of your task."

He pointed, and Jack Grey saw, for the first time, that one of the yellow men was different from the rest. His upper robes had been removed, and he was bare to the waist; moreover, he was spreadeagled to the wall, where the moonlight fell full on him, his arms and feet being cruelly tied to heavy stakes. His yellow face was utterly expressionless, but his eyes seemed to burn like live coals, and there was something malignant and fearsome in their depths.

"Why is he tied like that?" asked Jack, shuddering.

"This son of treachery is Aarb, and once he was a loyal servant of Taaz," said the chief priest. "The tale of his black baseness is not for your ears, my son. Let it be enough that Raa-ok, in his wisdom, has sentenced Aarb to death!"

"Take your courage in both hands, for you are to be the instrument which shall send Aarb's spirit into the realms of everlasting torment, where it belongs! Come!"

He led Jack Grey nearer to that ex-priest who was

who had once been one of their fellow-priests. They would make a murderer of him!

"I won't!" he panted, thrusting the dagger from him, and letting it clatter on the stones. "Make me do something else—but not that!"

Utterly unmoved, Yeza bent down, recovered the dagger, and once again thrust it into Jack's hand. His face was less mask-like now; it contained an expression of ruthless command.

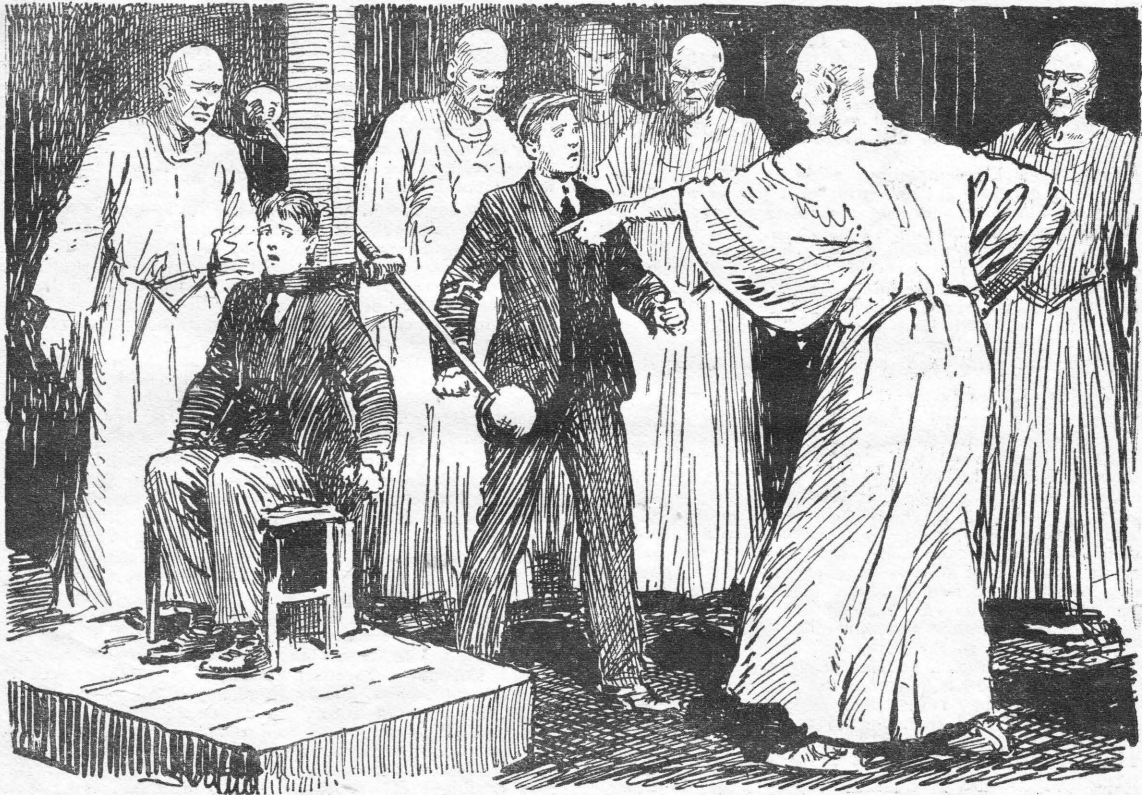
"Strike!" he said impressively. "It is the test which has been selected for you. This man must die—you shall kill him. Let the will of Taaz be done. Strike!"

"I can't kill a man in cold blood!" muttered Jack, white to the lips.

"Fail in this task," said Yeza, "and the positions shall be reversed."

"Reversed?" breathed Jack Grey, staring. "I—I don't understand!"

"Aarb shall be released, and you will be fixed where he is now fixed," explained the chief priest. "Then Aarb will take the dagger, and he will strike at once—and truly, You must decide at once, for we have already remained here over long."



"One swing of the balanced weights," said Yeza mercilessly, "and you will be your friend's executioner! 'Tis the will of Taaz!" "You devils!" cried Jack Grey. "You're mad if you think you'll get me to do a thing like this!"

under sentence of death; and now, moving forward, Yeza daubed a whitish pigment on Aarb's chest, forming a crude circle six inches across.

"So!" he said contentedly.

Into Jack's hand he thrust a heavy, long-bladed dagger. Jack looked at it in horror, and his heart was thudding like a hammer. The ugly blade of the dagger gleamed and shimmered in the moonlight.

"This is your task, my son," said Yeza, pointing. "Strike! Strike! Strike hard and true at the mark which I have made for your guidance—the mark which lies immediately over the treacherous heart of Aarb."

A feeling of nausea swept over the schoolboy.

"No, no!" he panted. "I—I couldn't do it! You're telling me to strike him dead—to bury this dagger in his heart!"

"Even so!" said Yeza solemnly.

The unfortunate Jack trembled in every limb. It was true that there was no danger to himself; but therein lay the cunning of the plan. It would require all the courage he possessed for him to deliver such a blow. They had ordered that he should be the executioner of this traitor

Jack Grey, realising that there was no escape for him, gritted his teeth and stood back, dagger upraised. But he had no intention of striking. A wild idea of escape had come to him; he hoped to fool the priests for a moment—and then make a sudden, unexpected rush for the doorway.

But in that dramatic second an interruption came. Voices in a strange tongue broke the tense silence. Jack half-glanced round, and he saw, in the moonlight, Reggie Pitt being dragged into the roofless refectory in the grip of two robed priests.

Meanwhile, dramatic things were happening at St. Frank's.

Nipper had lost no time in getting together the other members of the "marked ten." Handforth & Co. had come in, and, upon hearing the news, Handforth had promptly said "I told you so!" If only he had stayed in Bannington, he might have been useful.

"Pitt rang me up," said Nipper. "There's no direct

evidence that Jack has gone to the abbey ruins, but it looks mighty like it."

"What good can we do, dear old fellow?" asked Vivian Travers. "We've been warned not to interfere—"

"We won't interfere," interrupted Nipper. "But we'll go to the ruins—to be on hand in case we're needed. Something may go wrong. The longer we talk here, the more time we're wasting. Are we ready?"

"Yes; let's go," said Tommy Watson eagerly.

They had collected in Study C for this private talk, and now Nipper opened the door and led the way out. They only paused for a moment in the lobby to dash into the cloak-room and get their overcoats and caps.

But when they emerged into the moonlit Triangle they found a considerable number of Removites and Fourth Formers gathered there. Some were yelling with laughter, others were shouting excitedly, and there was a considerable hubbub.

"Heard the latest, you chaps?" grinned Harry Gresham as he came up the steps. "Gore-Pearce has seen a ghost."

"We can't be bothered with ghosts!" said Handforth impatiently.

"I thought, perhaps, you were going off to lay it!" chuckled Gresham. "Some of the chaps are talking about going over to the abbey."

"Going where?" asked Nipper sharply.

"The old abbey ruins," replied Gresham. "Gore-Pearce says he met Jack Grey on the towing-path, and Jack was looking like nothing on earth. Gore-Pearce lost him in the mist, and then he found himself within sight of the ruins. The mist drifted, and he saw the ghost of the old abbot."

Nipper drew his companions aside.

"Well, that's done it!" he said, in a low voice. "Gore-Pearce, of course saw one of the robed priests—and mistook the figure for the abbot's ghost. I don't blame him, because those robed priests do look a bit weird."

"Anyhow, it proves that the blighters are there—and that Jack Grey is in their hands," said Handforth tensely. "By George! We ought to have gone ages ago!"

"And now we shall have company," said Travers, with a shrug. "By the look of it, two or three dozen chaps are off to the ruins—and some of them have started already."

Handforth looked startled.

"But if they see the priests there'll be the dickens to pay!" he ejaculated.

"It's nothing to do with us," said Nipper. "Just chance. All the better, perhaps. These beastly yellow men will begin to realise that they can't do just as they like in the district. Anyhow, we'd better go along, too."

The situation was unexpected. Claude Gore-Pearce was in such a state of excitement, and his story was so convincing, that lots of fellows were eager to investigate. A group consisting of two or three might not have been so keen; but when it was known that a full dozen had decided to go, another dozen rapidly joined up. They evidently believed in the policy of "safety in numbers."

Thus, quite unknown to the priests of Taaz, half the St. Frank's Junior School was setting out in a noisy crowd for the abbey ruins. But Nipper and those others "in the know" had managed to get off first, and they went through the drifting mist at the double.

The next half-hour promised to be exciting.

The Garrotte!

"FOOLISH boy! Why came you here?" asked Yeza sternly. "How knew you that your friend had been brought hither?"

"I did not know—I guessed," replied Reggie Pitt, as he stood in the grip of the two priests. "What were you going to do just then, Jack?"

Jack Grey shivered.

"They wanted me to kill this man—but I wouldn't," he said fiercely. "I was only pretending to strike. I meant to make a dash for liberty—"

"Thus proving, by your own words, that the warmth of life is unfit to flow in your craven veins," said Yeza, placing a bony hand on Jack's shoulder.

He gave some orders to his fellow-priests, and two of them stepped forward, and held Jack in a tight grip.

"Wretched infidel boy, you have failed!" went on Yeza harshly. "Your reward shall be death. Yet, before you die, it shall be your task to inflict death on this other boy who has thought fit to interrupt our sacred activities!"

"That's not true!" said Pitt earnestly. "I had no intention of interfering. I'll admit I was creeping towards the ruins, and one of your yellow-faced watchdogs spotted me. That's all!"

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"You expect me to believe such a story?" retorted Yeza. "You have been warned, my son, and as a lesson to your companions you shall die, and by the hand of your friend!"

"Not the dagger!" panted Grey. "You can kill me first! I'll never use that dagger on Reggie!"

Yeza gave a scornful laugh.

"Witless youth! The dagger was but a trick to test your courage!" he said. "Since it is apparent by your expression that you do not believe me, come here!"

Jack was forced across the stone-flagged floor to the wall where Aarb was bound. With his knuckles, Yeza rapped on the helpless man's apparently bare chest. But the sound was hard, metallic.

"Aarb is loyal to the great Taaz," explained Yeza, as the "prisoner" was released. "This surface, which appears to be his chest, is a steel plate through which no dagger could be thrust. Had you obeyed orders, no drop of blood would have been spilled, and Taaz would have been satisfied. Alas! Your courage proved unequal to the demands, and now you must die. Both of you must die. Then shall the two boys who remain in the debt of Taaz know, when their turns come, that the Talons of the Vulture God are deadly!"

He made a motion with his hands, and several other priests—for there were more than a dozen present—left the refectory. Presently they returned, trundling a strange, cumbersome erection. This they placed in the very centre of the roofless chamber.

Reggie Pitt felt his flesh creeping. He had seen this thing before—in the torture chamber of Zinestero Castle. It was, indeed, an instrument of torture many centuries old—a relic of the cruel Middle Ages. It was that hideous instrument known as the "garrotte."

Utterly fascinated with horror, Pitt and Grey stared at the thing. Roughly, it was a kind of wooden platform, on which was fastened a chair and an upright at the back of the chair. On this upright there was a hinged iron ring, or collar. A big screw passed through the back of the upright, and into the ring—with a long, heavy lever at its outside end. On both extremities of this lever was a great ball of iron.

"The operation is simple," explained Yeza. "Once the heavy weights are set in motion with a quick swing, the force they generate drives the screw's point through the iron collar—and through anything which the collar contains. And the driving force is irresistible."

Again Yeza made a motion. His fellow-priests hustled Reggie Pitt forward, and sat him in the crude chair. Holding his head back, they opened the iron collar, and then clamped it round his neck, securing it. There was no escape. At the same time Jack Grey was led to the rear of the hideous contrivance.

"It will be very swift," said Yeza softly. "One swing of the balanced weights, and you will be your friend's executioner! 'Tis the will of Taaz!"

"You devils!" shouted Jack. "You're mad, if you think you'll get me to do a thing like this! I'm not a coward—and I'm not a murderer, either! I wouldn't kill one of your own men, fiends though you all are! I won't touch this horrible thing!"

Reggie Pitt sat there, cold perspiration running down his face. In imagination Pitt could already feel that horrible screw threading its way into his neck. But he was confident of one thing. The weighted lever would not be operated by his chum.

There was no make-belief now. The priests of Taaz were in earnest. They had been thwarted, and they meant business.

Grey was calm now—with a curiously deadly calmness. He had definitely made up his mind that he would not touch the garrotte; but this, he knew, would not spare Reggie. He thought he knew what would happen. Pitt would be executed by the priests—and then it would be his own turn. There was no escape. The two schoolboys were ringed by the heathen yellow men.

"Do you not see, my son, that herein lies your salvation?" said Yeza, bending forward towards Jack. "Perchance, Taaz will forgive you, after all, if you now obey. If you turn this screw, you will give full proof of your courage. Thus shall you earn life and freedom!"

Jack Grey made no reply. He looked scornfully, contemptuously, into Yeza's face. And for a moment there was a tense, brooding silence.

Somewhere in the distance, muffled by the mist, came the plaintive cry of a night bird. Yet, somehow, there was an unreal note in that cry. Jack Grey was the first to recognise it, and a sudden flush came into his pallid face.

"The call of the hawk!" he panted.

In a flash he understood. Both he and Reggie Pitt

belonged to one of the St. Frank's Boy Scout troops—they were both in the Hawk Patrol. And out here, in the mist, another member of the patrol was giving the recognised Scout call.

"They've come to save us!" yelled Jack.

And then, before he could be stopped, he gave the hawk's cry, in answer to the call which had come out of the mist.

"Help—help!" he shouted desperately.

With one accord, four of the priests jumped upon him and forced him into silence. They were talking rapidly in their own tongue, and their expressions were full of malevolent hatred.

"What was that cry?" demanded Yeza, staring at Pitt. "It was the cry of one of our friends," replied Reggie boldly. "They may be too late to save my life—but they won't be too late to seize my murderers!"

Yeza made an inarticulate sound. He sprang to the back of the garrotte and reached up for the weighted lever.

"Die, accursed infidel boy!" he snarled.

A wave of fierce anger swept over Jack Grey. His arms were held so that he could not move forward; but, with a sudden superhuman effort, he kicked his feet free of the ground, and lunged with all his strength. One of his shoes caught Yeza on the shins—just as the chief priest was about to whirl the weighted lever. With a shriek of agony, Yeza staggered back, and the dread deed was averted.

In that same moment a robed figure came running madly into the roofless refectory. He was the priest who had been standing outside on the watch. He was gabbling rapidly, gesticulating at the same time. And then, quite close at hand, came an ever-increasing roar of sound—the shouting of schoolboys.

Panic ensued.

The priests of Taaz, at last, were caught red-handed at their evil work. Yeza, to his consternation, realised that the ruins were virtually surrounded.

"This way, you chaps!" shouted Jack desperately. "Here! Help—help!"

Answering shouts sounded, and then, in a flood, Removites and Fourth Formers came pouring into the moonlit chamber. Curiously enough, a bank of mist had drifted downwards through the space where the roof should have been, and it was difficult to see what was taking place.

The priests, before they could reach the door, were cut off. Some of them were fighting madly, flinging the boys this way and that with relentless ferocity. All was confusion.

Jack Grey had only one thought. He had been released at the moment when the priests turned to escape. As though drunk, he staggered to the garrotte, and he clung to it dizzily.

"Reggie—Reggie!" he panted. "Are you all right?"

"Yes—thanks to you," said Pitt steadily. "Buck up, old chap! Do you think you can get this collar free?"

Jack fumbled at the clumsy fastening. With a scrap of rusty metal he forced the catch back, and then the hinged collar was open.

Reggie tumbled out of that instrument of torture, and he and Jack clasped hands.

"That was the nearest shave yet!" muttered Pitt. "Hadn't we better see what's happening?"

Nipper and Travers and the others of the "ten" were the first to get to grips with the enemy; but after Grey's call for help there had been a general rush. The other Removites and Fourth Formers—those who had come here

to lay the ghost—were urged forward by a wave of irresistible excitement.

So, in the fighting which took place, Nipper and his companions, and all the others who were not "in the know," dashed about indiscriminately. It seemed, at first, that nothing could save the priests of Taaz from capture. That they managed to escape was Nipper's doing—and he thought their escape was preferable to a number of deaths amongst the schoolboys.

For Yeza and his fellow-priests, finding themselves so grimly beset, flashed out their wicked daggers, and would have used them, too. Nipper, by suddenly wrenching at Handforth's arm, saved that burly junior from a wicked knife-thrust. They both sprawled over, but Nipper was up again in a flash.

"Back—back!" he panted, and he knew that those within earshot, at that moment, were his own companions. "They're out to kill—and it would be madness to attack them again!"

Handforth grasped something of the idea, and he and Nipper, rallying the others, went charging full tilt into the rank and file of juniors who now came pouring in, yelling with excitement. But some of the latecomers had caught sight of the robed figures through the wreathing mist.

There was no opportunity of asking any questions, for they found themselves fighting, apparently, against their own comrades. The confusion grew worse.

Meanwhile, as Nipper had shrewdly suspected, the priests had provided themselves with a way of escape. There was a second doorway—no window. But in one corner of that roofless chamber many of the bricks were crumbling away.

The priests charged at it, and the masonry fell away, and, like shadows, the yellow men passed out and vanished into the swirling mist beyond. Only Nipper knew that many of the boys had escaped death and serious injury.

"They're gone!" yelled Buster Boots of the Fourth when some of the confusion had died down, and the juniors found they had the refectory to themselves. "What's been happening here, you chaps? Won't somebody explain?"

"Well, there's no ghost, anyway," said Somerton of the West House.

"Ghost be blowed!" yelled Bob Christine. "We saw several queer-looking men in Oriental robes."

"No good asking us anything about it," said Reggie Pitt, with a shrug.

"But who yelled for help?" asked Boots blankly.

"Must have been one of our chaps having a joke," said Jack Grey, forcing himself to speak calmly—for any kind of explanation was out of the question. "There's a queer-looking chair here, too. Jiggered if I can understand what it all means. It's no good chasing those men—they're lost in the mist by now."

"Well done," murmured Nipper, a minute later, as he drew Pitt and Grey aside. "We couldn't explain—so the best thing is to leave it a complete mystery."

There was a first-class sensation, of course. The priests of Taaz had at last blundered, and when the boys went streaming back to St. Frank's—most of them quite bewildered—they talked freely. It even got into the newspapers; it was said that mysterious, robed figures had been seen by schoolboys in the peaceful Sussex countryside. Thinking people could not fail to see a connection between this incident and the mystery of the priests of Taaz who had vanished so strangely many weeks earlier.

Events were moving to a grim climax, and there was no doubt that things looked mighty ugly for McClure and Nipper—the last two members of the "marked ten."

(Next week: "THE DEVIL'S MIRE!")

PEN PALS

(Continued from page 13.)

R. D. Young, The Windmill, Chelmsford, Essex, wants pen pals interested in stamp collecting and books; age 12-15.

Miss Jeanette Barr, 18, Trainard Avenue, Tollcross, Glasgow, wants girl correspondents; age 15-18.

Alexander L. Ferguson, 73, Chirnside Road, Hillington, Cardonald, Glasgow, S.W.2, wants a correspondent in India; age 13-14; scouting.

Bill Jennings, 19, Cornish Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wants correspondents; radio, sports, motors, etc.

Ernest L. Cross, Colne Road, Coggeshall, Essex, wants correspondents; age 14-17; Hong Kong, Shanghai, Ceylon, South Africa, Europe, Australia; football, cricket, stamps, films.

Miss Vivienne Gawne, 24, Derby Road, Peel, Isle of Man, wants girl correspondents; age 14-15; sports, books, films.

Miss Dorothy Reid, 31, Stanley Avenue, Ville St. Pierre, Montreal, Canada, wants girl correspondents; age 16-19.

Robert A. Evans, Station Cottage, Kingsland, near Leominster, Herefordshire, wants a pen pal; age 16-18; films, autographs, old GEMS.

Miss Sylvia I. Hum, 111, Bridge Road, Litherland, Liverpool, wants girl correspondents; age 16-20; all sports; Canada, India, South Africa, U.S.A.

F. R. Wiggins, 151, New Bridge Street, Leicester, wants a pen pal; age 12-13; electrical engineering, chemistry, stamps; West Indies, Falkland Isles, Borneo.

Eric March, 16, Tripney Avenue, Peterborough, South Australia, wants correspondents who are interested in stamps, cigarette cards, all sports, snapshots, etc.

Harold Prince, Moore Street, Cessnock, N.S.W., Australia, wants pen pals; age 12-13; stamps, boxing, cricket, Soccer, cycling.

William Marshall, 16, South Terrace, Peterborough, South Australia, wants pen pals; stamp collecting.

Miss Dorothy Smith, 46, Paddington Street, Paddington, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants girl correspondents; age 15-16.

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M. G. Mee, 774, High School Road, Bukit Mertajam, Province Wellesley, Straits Settlements, wants correspondents in British Isles, France, Australia, U.S.A., Malaya, Hong Kong, Canada, and Germany; age 18-25; cars, motors, cycling, stamps, etc.

Miss Lucy Montgomery, Tanner Street, Middle Swan, Western Australia, wants girl correspondents interested in gardening, flowers, animals, knitting, swimming, tennis, cycling; age 16-18.

Harry W. Craber, 24, Newman Street, Newtown, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants correspondents; keen on views of London, also interested in British regiments.

Billy Achterburg, 6, Hillview Road, East London, Cape Province, South Africa, wants pen pals in Great Britain, Europe, and America; age 14-15.

Eric L. Fenner, Pioneer Club, 58, Thimblemill Road, Bearwood, Birmingham, wants to hear of new members.

Lionel George Baylis, Whitehall, Alcester, Warwickshire, wants to hear from stamp collectors.

H. Hughes, 35, Ridgeway Lane, Stalybridge, Ches., wants correspondents in Scotland, France, Germany, Canada, and India; age 16-18.

Francis Williams, 36a, Earlsfield Road London, S.W.18, wants a correspondent in France; age 13-16.

Miss Jean Meade, Lower Farm, Kelsall, Chester, wants girl correspondents overseas; postcard exchange.

James Lockeridge, 11, Hadfield Street, Newton Heath, Manchester, wants correspondents interested in music, any instruments; age 15-20.

Miss Jean C. Harris, Braco, Tuffley Crescent, Gloucester, wants girl correspondents who would join an astronomical club.

Röwland Laey, St. Peters, 50, Nicholas Lane, Landon, Essex, wants correspondents in British Empire and U.S.A.; age 16-18; railways, stamps, photos, cigarette cards.

B. W. Edwards, c/o Mrs. Dready, 20, Tennyson Road, Wimbledon, London, S.W.19, wants a correspondent in Europe; stamps, sports, cigarette cards.

Teddy Pearce, 10, Bluebridge Road, Brookmans Park, Hatfield, Herts., wants pen pals in England, France, and Scotland; aeroplanes, motor-cars, dance music, football.

Miss Beryl M. Mann, 93, Festing Grove, Southsea, Hants, wants girl correspondents overseas.

P. Parker, 196, Willesden Lane, Brondesbury, London, N.W.6, wants correspondents; age 14-16; Canada, Spain, Australia.

Miss Florence Ibbetson, St. Mary's Convalescent Home, Broadstairs, Kent, wants girl correspondents; age 13-15; Mexico, Arizona; interested in companion papers.

Miss Linda G. Hodges, St. Mary's Convalescent Home, Broadstairs, Kent, wants girl correspondents; age 16-18; sports, books, photos, postcards.

Miss Peggy Smith, 112, Clifton Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wants girl correspondents in England, South Africa, China, India; age 11-14.

George Coleman Allen, 135, Clarence Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, wants pen pals in America, Wales, and Scotland; age 12-14; films, model theatres.

Miss Olive Kitchen, School House, Sherington, Bletchley, Bucks, wants girl pen pals interested in books, to join a correspondence club; age 10-13.

Miss Marie Edgeworth, 71, Brookdale Road, Walthamstow, London, E.17, wants girl correspondents interested in films; age 18-21; England, Australia, America.

Robert D. Saunders, 34, Laburnum Street, Taunton, Somerset, wants pen pals in Gibraltar, Newfoundland, Rhodesia, Tasmania, and Victoria.

Stuart Agg, Warrandyte Road, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia, wants pen pals; age 12-15.

Mervyn Byrne, 33, Albion Avenue, Merrylands, New South Wales, Australia, wants to hear from stamp collectors; age 14-16; Jamaica and South Seas especially.

Reginald E. Bass, Gordon Cottage, Bishop Sutton, near Bristol, wants a pen pal in West Indies or South Africa, interested in cricket; age 14-15.

Ken Powell, 404, Oxford Street, Paddington, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants pen pals in Borneo, China, U.S.A., West Indies, Pacific Islands, and Africa.

E. Reddick, 11, Nutfield Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22, wants members for the Lion Model Aero Club; age 10-15.

Ian McBride, 41, Harrington Street, London, N.W.1, wants members for a correspondence club; age 13-17; stamps, films, photography, sports, books.

Alan A. Watt, 66a, Borrow Street, Bulawayo, South Rhodesia, Africa, wants correspondents; age 12-16; Rugby, tennis, swimming, hunting.

Miss Sylvia Arbuckle, Bellevue, Amanzimtoti, South Coast, Natal, South Africa, wants girl correspondents; age 12-14.

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