

**"UNDER SEALED ORDERS!"** First Thrilling Yarn of a Great African-Adventure Series, featuring Tom Merry & Co. **INSIDE!**

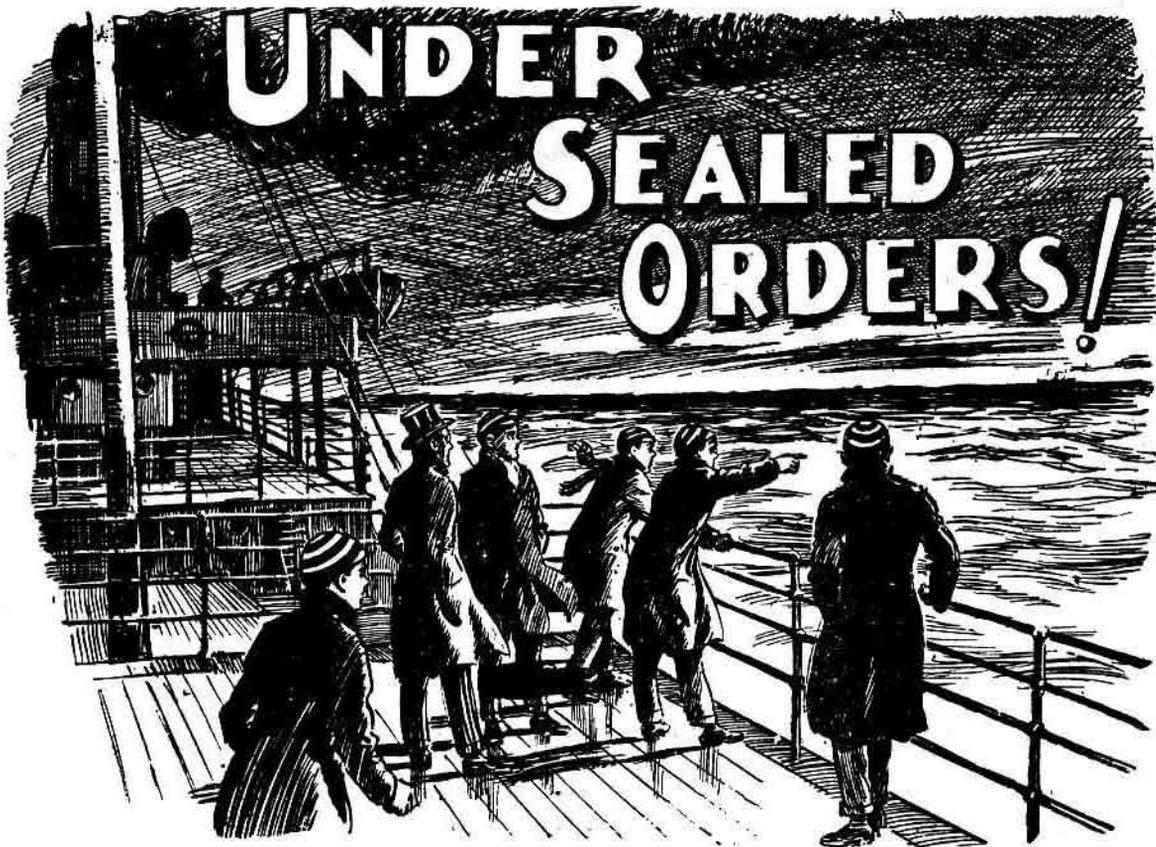
# The **GEM**

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*Peril Lurks for  
Tom Merry  
in the Woods!*

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HERE'S THE FIRST ALL-THRILLING YARN OF THE BEST AFRICAN-ADVENTURE—



## CHAPTER 1. A Startling Attack!

**G**REAT Scott! Look there!" Tom Merry, of St. Jim's, stopped and uttered the words in startled tones. He had been walking along the towing-path beside the Rhyl, where it ran past the school grounds. Manners and Lowther, his chums in the Shell Form, were with him.

Tom Merry looked away across the shining river, towards the towing-path on the opposite bank. The Rhyl was very wide at this point, though farther on, towards Rylcombe, it narrowed and shallowed, and there the old stone bridge spanned the stream. Against the blue sky a line of old elms raised their branches, already bare of foliage in the autumn winds, but casting deep shadows on the towing-path.

"Look there!" said Tom Merry, pointing across the river. "It seems to me like a highway robbery!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Lowther.

On the towing-path a portly old gentleman with white whiskers, and white hair peeping from under his silk hat, was walking slowly in the direction of the bridge. From the trees that lined the towing-path two men had emerged, and they were following him with stealthy footsteps, crouching as they went.

The three juniors could see them plainly. They were slightly built, active-looking men, with dark, swarthy faces that told of foreign blood. One, the taller of the two, had ear-rings in his ears, the glitter of which caught the sun. That they were stealing after the old man to attack him seemed certain; yet the audacity of such an attempt in broad daylight, within sight of the tower of St. Jim's, was staggering. The Terrible Three could scarcely believe their eyes.

"My word!" said Manners. "Shout to him! Those two foreign bounders are going for him as sure as a gun!"

"All together!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Give him a yell!"

"Right-ho!"

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The three juniors put their hands to their mouths and yelled.

"Hallo!"

The old gentleman started as the loud shout rang across the river and looked towards the juniors. And as his face was turned towards them the juniors recognised him. It was a face familiar enough at St. Jim's—the face of Sir Richard Standish, one of the Governors of St. Jim's.

"Look out!" shouted Tom Merry. "Look behind you!"

The two foreigners had heard the yell also, and they stared across the river. Realising at once that their intended victim was warned, they ran towards him, throwing further concealment to the winds. Sir Richard looked over his shoulder and gave a start at the sight of the two swarthy faces within a dozen feet of him. He stood for a moment staring at them, and then broke into a run towards the bridge.

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Run for the bridge! We may get to it, and across in time to lend him a hand. They're going for him!"

The three juniors raced along the riverside towards the bridge. If they could reach it and cross in time they could join in the struggle that was certainly coming. For, as the old gentleman ran, the two foreigners ran as well—and they ran faster. They were both young and active men, and Sir Richard was not likely to have much chance if they reached him and he was unaided.

The Terrible Three ran as they had seldom run on the cinder-path. They reached the old stone bridge and swung across it. On the other side of the river Sir Richard Standish had reached the opposite end of the bridge when the two swarthy-faced rascals were upon him.

The man with the ear-rings leaped upon him, dragging him backwards by the shoulders. Sir Richard, with a strength surprising in an old man, tore himself loose and met the second man with a drive from his right fist that sent him staggering back. Then he dashed upon the bridge, shouting to the juniors for help.

But it was only for a moment that the two foreigners were checked. They dashed after the old gentleman and

## —SERIES EVER WRITTEN—STARRING ALL THE FAVOURITES OF ST. JIM'S.

## By MARTIN CLIFFORD

## CHAPTER 2.

## The Man With the Ear-rings!

"BAI JOVE! What's the mattah, deah boys?"

Three juniors had come tearing over the bridge—Blake, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form. It was the last-named who asked the question. He jammed an eyeglass into his eye and turned it alternately upon the gasping baronet and the Terrible Three. Tom Merry & Co. were red with exertion, but looking very pleased with themselves. They had baffled the thieves and saved the sealed packet to which the baronet seemed to attach so much importance. They had reason to be pleased. Sir Richard leaned upon the stone parapet of the bridge, pale and out of breath now that the excitement of the struggle was over.

"What's the mattah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry. "Two foreign-looking bounders tried to rob Sir Richard and we chipped in; that's all I know about it."

"And you saved the packet, my brave lads!" gasped the baronet. "I shall not forget this. The packet is more valuable than you can imagine."

"I should think it was pretty valuable for those rotters to try to rob you of it in broad daylight, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They must have followed me from London," the baronet muttered. "I have been on my guard all the time. I thought I was watched in Wayland, and that is why I walked to St. Jim's instead of taking the local train." He was speaking rather to himself than to the juniors. "But they have been baffled—the packet is safe!"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "The uttah wottahs ought to be wun in, you know! Shall we follow them, sir, and capture the wottahs?"

Sir Richard shook his head.

"No, no. They are most likely armed."

"Bai Jove!"

"Pray walk with me to the school, in case they should return—though I hardly think that likely," said Sir Richard.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

The baronet crossed the bridge, the juniors keeping him company, and took the path through the trees towards the school. It is probable that Sir Richard did not need the

escort so much as that he wanted to keep the juniors out of the danger of chasing the two swarthy ruffians into the woods.

Tom Merry & Co. were very much puzzled by what had occurred. The mysterious packet interested them. What could it contain to make the two foreigners so bent upon obtaining it? It was hardly likely that Sir Richard Standish would be carrying about a packet of banknotes or jewellery. Then what was in the packet? The juniors could not help feeling curious upon the subject.

They reached St. Jim's, and Sir Richard, after thanking the boys again for their timely assistance, went into the Head's house.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, polishing his eyeglass in a thoughtful sort of way. "I wegard this as a most remarkable occuurrence. Those two boundahs ought to be awvested, you know."

"It's jolly odd," said Tom Merry. "They had a nerve to tackle Sir Richard so near the school. There might have been a dozen people on the towing-path."

"It shows that they were pretty desperate," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors strolled into the School House. It was growing dusk at St. Jim's; the old elms were casting dim, lengthening shadows. The Terrible Three went up to their study in the Shell passage, and Tom Merry put on the light. It had been a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the chums of the Shell were hungry after some hours out of doors.

But the thought of the two swarthy foreigners was still in Tom Merry's mind as they had tea. He wondered whether they would have the temerity to watch the school for the departure of the baronet. Sir Richard had not gone yet, and the juniors guessed that he was staying to dinner with Dr. Holmes. Tom Merry rose from the tea-table presently and crossed to the study window and looked out into the quadrangle.

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fastened upon him together. Struggling fiercely with the two of them, Sir Richard was borne to the ground.

The man with the ear-rings knelt upon him, pinning him down and grasping his wrists. He shouted to his comrade in a tongue strange to the ears of the juniors, but it was clear that he was giving an order, which the man instantly obeyed. His dusky hands went through the baronet's pockets with a quickness and sureness which showed that this was not the first man he had robbed. Such a daring robbery, in broad daylight upon a frequented bridge, showed the desperate character of the men.

Tom Merry & Co. were less than a dozen yards away by this time, and coming on at a tearing speed.

"Quick!" panted Tom Merry.

"Help! Help!"

"We're coming, sir!"

"Caramba!" The man with the ear-rings panted out the Spanish word. "Caramba!"

"Tengo!" gasped the other. "Yo le tengo!"

The man dragged an oblong, sealed packet from the baronet's pocket, tearing open his coat to get at it. The two foreigners sprang up from the fallen man just as the St. Jim's juniors ran up.

Sir Richard, panting, raised himself on his elbow.

"The packet!" he gasped. "They have robbed me! The packet!"

"Sir Richard—"

"The packet! Get it back! The packet!" panted the baronet.

The Terrible Three passed him. The two foreigners, evidently having now what they had attacked the baronet to obtain, were running. But they had no chance of getting clear. The juniors were upon them. The man with the ear-rings had taken the packet from the other, and he was thrusting it into his breast pocket as he ran for the woods.

Tom Merry leaped upon him from behind and dragged him down, and the packet fell to the ground and rolled in the grass beside the stream.

The Spaniard—for such he evidently was—fell heavily, and Tom Merry fell upon him. Monty Lowther rolled over him in his haste to catch hold and crushed him to the earth. The other man turned to his aid and met Manners full tilt. Manners and the second Spaniard fell together.

"The packet!" shouted the baronet, staggering to his feet.

Breathless as he was he ran to the aid of the juniors. The two foreigners were up in a moment, struggling fiercely with the boys.

The man with the ear-rings tore himself loose and ran towards the packet, as it lay in the grass. But Sir Richard was before him. The old gentleman seized the packet and thrust it into his coat and faced the ear-ringed Spaniard. Before the ruffian could attack him, however, the juniors were upon him again.

"That's right, my lads!" panted Sir Richard. "Seize them! The scoundrels!"

The Spaniard fought fiercely, but he was fighting for his liberty, not for the packet he had failed to obtain. Two or three St. Jim's juniors who had sighted the struggle from a distance were dashing across the bridge to the aid of the Shell fellows. The game was up as far as the two foreigners were concerned.

The ear-ringed ruffian dragged himself loose and ran for the woods, and the other rascal panted after him. They ran hard, and the Terrible Three gave chase. But the boys had been winded by the struggle. The two foreigners gained the wood and disappeared into the trees.

Sir Richard shouted after the juniors:

"Come back!"

The Terrible Three paused on the edge of the wood. The two footpads had disappeared in the distance, but the juniors could still hear a crashing of underwood as they ran.

"Come back!" shouted Sir Richard.

And the chums of St. Jim's, panting, returned to the spot where Sir Richard stood.

*When Tom Merry, supported by his chums, undertakes to carry important documents to Southampton, he little suspects that he is embarking upon an adventure which will take him into the unknown perils of Darkest Africa!*

The circle of light from the windows and doorway of the old School House was cast in a wide radius into the shadowy quadrangle. Beyond the radius of light all was dark. The fellows were all indoors now, most of them in their studies or in the hall downstairs.

Tom Merry scanned the shadowy quad. Suddenly he gave a start. Into the radius of light before the House a sinister figure emerged, and Tom Merry caught sight of a dusky face, a glitter of keen, black eyes, and golden ear-rings.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed.

Manners and Lowther started up from the tea-table as Tom Merry dashed towards the door.

"What is it, Tom?"

"The man with the ear-rings in the quad! Follow me!"

Tom Merry dashed out of the study and ran downstairs. Manners and Lowther were after him in a twinkling. They ran out of the House.

But the dusky intruder was no longer in the light. Tom Merry stared into the shadows of the quadrangle. That the man with the ear-rings was within the school walls he was certain.

"Are you quite sure, Tom?" Manners muttered doubtfully.

"Quite sure."

"Let's look for him."

"Call up the other chaps," said Lowther. "Better have as many as possible in the search. We're more likely to lay him by the heels."

"You call them!" said Tom Merry.

And he ran into the shadows with Manners. A dark figure loomed up before him and Tom Merry leaped upon it and bore it to the earth.

"Got him!" he shouted.

There was a sound of something breaking. Manners piled on with Tom Merry and the victim was crushed, gasping, to the earth. He struggled under the weight of the two juniors, uttering smothered gasps.

"Got him!" yelled Manners. "Bring a light!"

"This way!" roared Tom Merry.

There was a shout in reply from the direction of the School House. Monty Lowther dashed up with a torch in his hand. Blake and D'Arcy and Digby and Reilly and Herries and a crowd more juniors followed him.

"Show a light here!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Groogh!" came from the struggling victim.

"We've got him!"

The excited juniors gathered round. Monty Lowther flashed the torch upon the face of the prisoner as he lay struggling feebly under Tom Merry and Manners. The face was a round, fat one, with very plump cheeks.

"My hat!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha! Fatty Wynn!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### No Luck!

FATTY WYNN, of the New House, glared in breathless wrath at the School House fellows. Tom Merry and Manners stared at him in the light and released him in sheer amazement. It was Fatty Wynn of the Fourth Form—there was no mistake about that. Tom Merry had evidently seized the wrong person in the darkness.

"Fatty Wynn!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groogh!"

"You fat duffer!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "What do you mean by it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "I think Fatty has a right to ask that question."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Groogh!"

Fatty Wynn sat up, still gasping. His Eton jacket was smothered with a brownish liquid, and fragments of broken china clung to him. Little pieces of steak and kidneys were scattered upon him and round him.

"Oh, you chumps!" panted Fatty Wynn. "You silly asses! You've smashed the basin and messed up the steak-and-kidney pudding! Oh, you burbling duffers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter!" exclaimed the fat Fourth Former indignantly. "Look at that pudding! Done in! And look at the state of my clothes!"

"How did it all happen?" demanded Jack Blake.

"It's all Fatty Wynn's fault!" said Tom Merry wrathfully. "I saw from my study window one of those ruffians who tried to rob Sir Richard, and came down to collar him. Then Fatty Wynn came by, pretending to be him."

"I didn't!" roared Fatty Wynn. "I had just been to the tuckshop to get this pudding, and Figgins and Kerr are waiting for it in my study, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Those two dangerous lunatics jumped on me in the dark and pushed me over, and smashed the basin and wrecked the pudding," said Fatty Wynn almost tearfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! If you saw the wottah here, he must be here still, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We're wastin' time."

"Let's look for him," said Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Hold on!" said Herries hastily. "Wait till I fetch Towser. Towser'll smell him out if he's here. Towser can track down anything."

"Especially kippers," said Blake.

"Oh, shut up! I'll fetch Towser."

And Herries rushed off for his bulldog. Herries had a persuasion that Towser partook of the qualities of a blood-hound, and nothing would ever get that idea out of his head. The juniors did not wait for the arrival of Towser. They spread themselves about the quad, looking for the Spaniard. Most of the School House fellows knew of the attempt that had been made to rob Sir Richard on the towing-path, and they were keenly interested in looking for the Spaniard. But there seemed to be no sign of the man with the ear-rings in the quad.

Fatty Wynn took his way disconsolately to the New House. He was not thinking of the man with the ear-rings, or of the mysterious packet the man was after; he was thinking of the steak-and-kidney pudding, ruthlessly destroyed, and he was going to acquaint Figgins & Co. with the heavy loss. He entered Figgins' study in the New House with a woebegone visage that made his study-mates look at him in alarm.

"What's wrong?" demanded Figgins.

"The pudding—it's gone!"

Kerr sniffed.

"You seem to have most of it about your clothes," he said. "Have you fallen over and broken the basin, you ass? I've got the baked potatoes all ready, and Figgy has made the toast."

"I didn't fall over," exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly; "I was bumped over!"

"School House row, I suppose?" grunted Figgins. "I should think you might have kept clear of a House row when you were carrying a steak-and-kidney pudding!"

"It wasn't a House row!" roared Fatty Wynn, exasperated. "Do you think I'm ass enough to risk losing a pudding if I could help it?"

"Well, it wouldn't be like you, Fatty," Figgins admitted.

"Tom Merry and another idiot bumped me over—took me for a burglar in the dark, or something!" growled Fatty Wynn. "The silly asses are searching for him in the quad, and they took me for him! The— Where are you going?"

But Figgins and Kerr were gone.

They dashed out of the House to see what was going on, and as soon as they learned they joined in the search with great zest. Fatty Wynn was left in the study alone, to scrape the remains of the steak-and-kidney pudding from his waistcoat and trousers. When he had done that he looked out of the window to see what had become of Figgins and Kerr. He could not see them. Lights were flashing to and fro in the dusky quadrangle, and he made out the dim forms of juniors, and heard voices calling, but he could not distinguish the two New House fellows.

"Asses!" muttered Fatty Wynn. "Silly asses! The pudding's gone, but there's the toast and the taters. I'm not going to wait."

And Fatty Wynn sat down to the table before the pile of buttered toast and the baked potatoes, and the toast and potatoes vanished at record speed.

Meanwhile, the search went on in the quadrangle.

The news had soon spread that Tom Merry had seen in the quad one of the ruffians who had attacked Sir Richard Standish, and fellows of both Houses, seniors and juniors, and masters as well, turned out to assist in the search.

With electric lamps the fellows spread themselves over the quad, and almost every foot of the place was searched.

But the man with the ear-rings was not discovered. There was no trace of the Spaniard within the precincts of St. Jim's, and the search was abandoned at last.

### CHAPTER 4.

#### The Raiders!

FIGGINS and Kerr came into their study in the New House, looking tired and a little dusty. They had taken an active part in the search for the man with the ear-rings, and they had been among the last to give it up.

The search had taken considerably more than an hour, and as tea had already been late and Figgins and Kerr



As Tom Merry looked down into the quad from his study window, he saw a sinister figure halted in the light before the House doorway! A glimpse of a dusky face, glittering black eyes, and golden ear-rings told the junior instantly who the man was. "Great Scott!" exclaimed Tom. "It's the Spaniard!"

had not had time to eat anything, they came in with appetites worthy of Fatty Wynn himself. They were just in time to see the last morsel on the table disappearing into Fatty Wynn's mouth.

Wynn had made a general clearance. Toast and baked potatoes had vanished first, and then bread-and-butter and cheese had gone to help fill up the aching void; then there were tarts and cake, and they followed; and finally Fatty Wynn cleared out the jam-pot, with the remains of the last loaf to keep the jam company.

He was still mourning the loss of the steak-and-kidney pudding, but he was doing his best to fill the blank. Save for crockery, the table was quite bare when Figgins and Kerr came in as hungry as hunters. They glanced over the table.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "You've put the grub away. I see. Get it out, Fatty, there's a good fellow! I'm famished!"

"Eh?" said Fatty Wynn with a start.

He had certainly put the provisions away, but not in a place they could be extracted from again. Figgins, in his simplicity, imagined that they were in the cupboard. But Kerr knew better.

"You fat bounder!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Well, you see," said Fatty Wynn apologetically, "the steak-and-kidney pudding was done in and I was hungry."

"You don't mean to say that you've scoffed all the tommy, you porpoise?" exclaimed Figgins in amazement and dismay.

"I—I didn't mean to exactly. But I always get an extra keen appetite about this time of the year; there's something in the winter air that makes me specially hungry," said Fatty Wynn feebly. "I—I meant to leave you some, but—somehow it went. You see—"

"Yes, I see a prize porker!" said Figgins indignantly. "What are we to do now? Funds are all out. You blued the last on that pudding that you lost."

"I didn't lose it. I—"

"Well, it was lost," said Figgins. "Look here, what are we going to do? I'm hungry."

"Well, it was the School House rotters that busted the pudding," said Fatty Wynn. "And I know Tom Merry is in funds. I dare say he has a feed going, and—"

"Good! I feel just fit for a raid—"

"I didn't mean a raid. Might not get any grub after all," said Fatty Wynn. "I—I mean, if we explain to him, you see—"

"Rats! We'll raid him if we like."

"Come on," said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn hesitated. He was quite ready for another meal—he always was. But with a heavy cargo of toast and potatoes and jam on board, he did not feel much inclined for the exertion of a raid. But he could not refuse to follow his leader. He rose from the armchair with a sigh, and followed Figgins and Kerr downstairs.

It was a favourable moment for raiding the School House, for the place was in a buzz with the excitement of the hunt for the ear-ringed man, and in the excitement and confusion the three New House juniors passed unnoticed into the School House. They marched coolly upstairs to the Shell passage, and Figgins pushed open the door of Tom Merry's study. The study was dark within, showing that the Terrible Three were not there.

"What luck!" murmured Figgins. "Nobody at home! When Tom Merry gets here, the cupboard will be bare, and the poor dog will have none!"

Figgins closed the door softly and put on the light. The three juniors were grinning. Tom Merry's study was at their mercy, and it was only a question of getting away with the plunder after they had carried out the raid. The cupboard was locked, which showed that there was something of value in the eating line inside. But a cupboard locked was not likely to baffle Fourth Form raiders long.

Raids of this sort were common enough between juniors of the rival Houses at St. Jim's, and it was understood on both sides that all was fair in war. Figgins burst the lock with the aid of the study poker with a crash that echoed along the Shell passage, and Kerr ran to the study door and listened. But the crash had not drawn any attention to the study.

The cupboard door flew open, and Fatty Wynn gave a fat chuckle of delight. On the shelves were arrayed several paper bags containing pastries, and there was a steak-and-kidney pudding in a basin, precisely similar to the one that had been distributed over Fatty Wynn's waistcoat and trousers earlier in the evening. Those steak-and-kidney puddings were specialties of Mrs. Taggles, and she had many customers for them.

"My word!" said Fatty Wynn. "This is really like poetical justice, isn't it?"

"Collar it!" said Figgins.

"What ho!"

"I'll take these bags of tarts. My hat, the bounders are doing themselves down well, and no mistake!" said

Figgins. "Look at the table. They've had pork-pies and jam-tarts for tea, and cake. I don't approve of this blessed gluttony. As a matter of principle, we ought to take these things away."

"Of course, we ought," said Kerr.

The raiders turned towards the door with their plunder. But it was too late; there was a tramp of footsteps in the passage. Figgins halted.

"Blow the luck! Here they come!"

"We shall have to rush them!" muttered Kerr.

"Ready, then!"

Tom Merry threw open the door of the study. Manners and Lowther were just behind him.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the Shell leader. "Why, what—"

"Look out!" yelled Lowther.

Figgins & Co. made a rush.

They dashed right into the Terrible Three. Manners was bowled over, and Kerr rushed past him, and gained the passage. Figgins and Lowther closed and rolled together on the floor.

Tom Merry seized the pudding in Fatty Wynn's hand. Fatty could easily have escaped by letting Tom Merry keep the pudding; but he meant to put up a fight for it. He dragged at the pudding, and Tom Merry dragged at it and wrenched it away.

Fatty Wynn grasped him and began to punch; and Tom Merry had to let the pudding go to defend himself. The pudding slid down his chest and burst, and steak and kidneys and brown gravy ran down Tom Merry.

"You—you fat burglar!" he gasped. "Oh, look at my clothes!"

"Oh, the pudding!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

Kerr turned back in the passage as he saw his comrades hotly engaged. He could have got quite clear; but, of course, he could not escape without his comrades. He ran back, and plastered jam-tarts over Tom Merry's face till, blinded and half-choked, the hero of the Shell released Fatty Wynn. Fatty Wynn, gasping breathlessly, staggered down the passage, and Tom Merry reeled away gouging at the jam in his eyes. Manners was sitting up dazedly, and Kerr pushed him over, and then dragged Monty Lowther away from Figgins.

There was loud alarm all along the passage now—Gore, and Kangaroo, and Dane and Glyn were rushing out—and

Blake's voice could be heard in the Fourth Form passage. There was nothing but flight left for the raiders, and they fled. They dashed downstairs at top speed, upsetting several juniors who tried to stop them, and dashed out into the quadrangle.

"Buzz for it!" gasped Figgins.

"Oh, the pudding!"

"Haven't you got the pudding?"

"It's smashed—all over Tom Merry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three raiders fled across the quadrangle in the darkness. Their raid had not succeeded from a point of view of plunder, but they had given the School House fellows a hot time, at all events. In the Shell passage, Monty Lowther was sitting on the floor rubbing his head, and Manners was gasping for breath with a sound like air escaping from a big puncture. Tom Merry staggered into one of the studies, gouging jam off his face, and crumbs of pastry from his eyes and nose. He presented a spectacle that evoked roars of laughter from the juniors as they came crowding on the scene.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as he turned his eyeglass upon the hero of the Shell. "Bai Jove! I wegard you as a gweedy boundah, Tom Mewwy, to go for your gwub in that way! You are simply smothahed!"

"Ow! Groo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox of the Sixth came pushing his way through the crowd of juniors. Knox was a prefect, and a most ill-tempered one, and he was seldom seen to smile except when he was caning somebody. But he burst into a roar at the sight of Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! Is that you, Merry? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groooh!"

"The Head wants to see you!" grinned Knox. "The Head and Sir Richard Standish. You are to go to them at once."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry jumped.

"A-a-all right," he gasped. "I—I'll come in a minute. I shall have to get a wash first—"

"Can't be did!" said Knox coolly. "You'll come as you are. The Head said at once, and I can't allow you to disobey his orders."

"But look at me, Knox. You see—"

"Come on."

"I—I can't go like this. I—"

"Come!"

There was no gainsaying the prefect. Tom Merry, dabbling frantically at the jam and the gravy with a handkerchief that already seemed more gravy and jam than handkerchief, followed the prefect disconsolately, wondering what Dr. Holmes would think of him when he saw him.

## CHAPTER 5.

### A Task for Tom Merry!

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, was seated in his study. There was a bright fire burning in the grate. Sir Richard Standish was sitting in an arm-chair, with his feet on the fender, and a cigar in his mouth. The baronet had dined with the Head, and he was staying at St. Jim's that night, and the two old gentlemen had retired to the Head's study for a talk.

On the table lay an oblong sealed packet—the packet which the two Spaniards had made such a desperate attempt to wrest from Sir Richard.

Sir Richard was speaking, and Dr. Holmes was listening with an intent look upon his face, evidently much interested in what the baronet was saying—interested, but dubious.

"It would be a pleasant little excursion for the boy, sir," said Sir Richard, taking the cigar from his mouth and looking at the doctor through a cloud of smoke, "and I cannot see that there would be any danger. If I thought he would be going into danger, I would not suggest anything of the sort for a moment. But it is for the precise purpose of eliminating the element of danger that I suggest entrusting the task to Tom Merry."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Quite so," he said. "If you will explain exactly—"

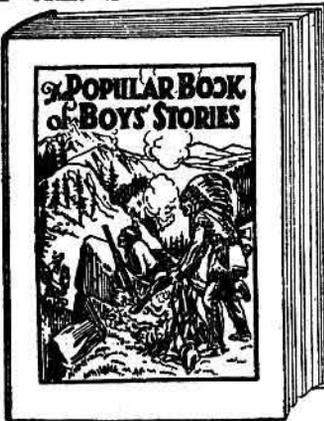
"The case stands like this," said Sir Richard. "This packet has to be taken out to the West Coast of Africa—and taken intact. It contains information for a certain person there—information that may lead to great things for myself and for other parties concerned. It is all a dead secret at present, but I may tell you that it concerns a new discovery in the rubber trade. If our rivals succeed in getting hold of the secret contained in that packet, if they once had the papers and the map sealed up there, they could forestall us. And as they are desperate and unscrupulous men, accustomed to the lawless ways of the



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Gold Coast, I know perfectly well that they will stop at nothing."

"Certainly what happened to-day seems to indicate as much," the Head assented.

"Several desperate attempts have been made in London, and the last was made to-day," the baronet went on. "If I sent a special messenger with this packet he would be waylaid and robbed. The scoundrels have money, and I'm certain that they would go so far as to charter a vessel and stop a steamer on the high seas by force if they knew that the packet was going out by any steamer."

"Bless my soul!"

"The only thing is to keep it a dead secret—to conceal which vessel is taking the packet out, to avoid letting even the captain know what he is doing until he is out at sea. We have chartered a steamer, now lying at Southampton, but not to sail until the captain receives a packet. When he receives it he is to open the outer cover, which will give him his immediate instructions. When he has been two days at sea he is to take off the next cover, which will give him further instructions, and reveal to him his destination. He will, in fact, sail under sealed orders, and until the steamer is two days from England not a man on board will know where she is going."

"That certainly should make things all secure."

The baronet blew out a cloud of smoke and nodded with satisfaction.

"Yes, I think that will baffle the rascals. Certainly not a word can leak out from anybody on board the steamer. The rascals will be watching all vessels for the West Coast that I have any connection with; but the steamer I am speaking of has lately returned from America, and is supposed to be preparing to return to New York. The skipper himself believes that he is going to New York. All is safe in that quarter. But there is one point we cannot guard. If a messenger takes the packet down to the steamer he will be watched and the steamer will be followed at sea if the Spaniards have no chance to get at the man on shore."

"You mean that all your movements are watched—?"

"Exactly! I have been under surveillance ever since I was first interested in this new rubber territory."

"But the post—?"

Sir Richard laughed.

"I should be hardly likely to entrust a secret worth a million pounds to the chances of the Post Office," he said.

"A million pounds!" said the Head, in a deep breath.

"Yes, and more than that."

"I suppose it would hardly be safe."

"Hardly!"

The old gentleman smoked in silence for some minutes. The curtains at the windows rustled in the breeze from the quadrangle. The window, as always, was open a few inches at the top, and the rustle of the thick ivy in the breeze could be heard in the study. Outside all was deeply shadowed in the old quad.

"Well," said the baronet, throwing his cigar-end in the fire at last, "now you see my idea. I cannot post such a thing to the steamer; I cannot send anybody who will not be watched. But if a schoolboy leaves St. Jim's and takes a train at Rylcombe, who is to suspect that his destination is Southampton, and that he carries a packet addressed to the captain of the Opossum?"

"That is true!"

"The thought came into my mind while I was thinking it out," said Sir Richard. "As I am a governor of St. Jim's, it occurred to me to ask your permission to send one of your boys to Southampton with the packet. It will be a pleasant little run for him, and cannot possibly lead to harm. Upon the whole, I should select a junior boy as less likely to attract any attention. Tom Merry is a sensible lad, and just the one I should select. As it happens, he aided me this afternoon when I was attacked by the Spaniards, and showed very great courage."

"He is a brave lad, and a sensible one," said the Head. "Then your idea is—?"

"To let him leave the school simply as if he were going out in the ordinary way. He will take the local train to Wayland, and at Wayland he will catch the express for Southampton. There he will go on board the Opossum and deliver this packet to the captain."

"It seems very simple."

"It is simplicity itself. The lad is to be trusted, and he knows how to hold his tongue," said Sir Richard. "If, however, you have any objection, sir, say so, and I will think of another plan for sending the packet to Southampton."

"Not at all! I see no danger in the plan," said Dr. Holmes. "It only remains to see Tom Merry and tell him what is required."

"You are agreeable, then?"

"Oh, quite!"

"Then send for Merry."

Dr. Holmes stepped to the door of the study and looked out into the passage. Knox, the prefect, was passing, and the Head called to him.

"Find Tom Merry and bring him here at once, Knox, please," he said.

"Certainly, sir!" said Knox.

The prefect went cheerfully on his errand. He imagined that some punishment was in store for Tom Merry, and he was pleased to send him in to the Head for that purpose.

Dr. Holmes returned to his seat.

Two or three minutes later there was a tap at the door and Knox looked in.

"Here is Tom Merry, sir."

"Thank you, Knox! Tell him to come in."

"Go in, Merry."

"I say, Knox—"

"Go in at once!"

Then the hero of the Shell entered.

"Ah, Merry, I have— Good heavens!"

Dr. Holmes jumped up from his chair at the sight of the Shell fellow. Sir Richard stared at him in equal surprise.

Tom Merry certainly presented a strange sight—his clothes covered with pudding and gravy, his face plastered with pastry, and his eyes blinking through smears of jam.

His face was crimson where it showed through the plaster of pastry.

"Merry—what—what—" gasped the Head.

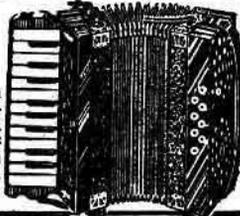


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## CHAPTER 6.

## The Junior's Trust!

**T**OM MERRY stood crimson and dumb. The Head gazed at him and Sir Richard gazed at him. Knox, as he closed the door and slipped silently down the passage, chuckled softly.

He had obeyed the Head's order to the letter—he had brought Tom Merry to Dr. Holmes at once. It was no business of his if the hero of the Shell was in no state to appear before the Head. That was a matter which concerned Tom Merry only.

"Merry!"

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Richard. "Begad!"

"Merry, how dare you appear in my study in that state!" exclaimed the Head.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sir Richard.

"I—I couldn't help it, sir," stammered Tom Merry. "Knox said you wanted to see me at once, sir, so there was no time to—change, sir."

"But how did you come to be in this—this disgusting state?" asked the Head.

"It was a—a—an—"

"An accident, of course," gasped Sir Richard. "Accidents will happen in junior studies, Dr. Holmes. I remember that from the time I was a fag at St. Jim's, begad! Ha, ha, ha!"

The Head's frown changed into a smile. He realised that Tom Merry would not have appeared before him in that state if he could possibly have helped it.

Tom Merry ruefully gouged jam out of his eyes and blinked at the doctor and the baronet. He was feeling exceedingly uncomfortable.

"Well, well," said Dr. Holmes, "go and get yourself into a cleaner state at once, Merry, and then come back here as soon as you can. I have something very important to say to you, but I cannot talk to you while you are in that state."

"I—I'm very sorry, sir—"

"Very well!"

Tom Merry quitted the Head's study. Then the Head allowed himself to laugh. He gave a sudden start and looked round towards the window. The ivy was scratching against the panes in the night breeze.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, in surprise. "Was that an echo?"

"Was what an echo?" asked Sir Richard.

"I certainly thought I heard the sound of a laugh—or, rather, a chuckle," said the Head, looking towards the window. "I suppose it was only an echo."

Sir Richard laughed.

"There could hardly be anybody at the window, sir," he said. "I believe it is a great height from the ground."

"Twenty feet at least."

The baronet rose, suddenly becoming very serious. The thought of the man with the ear-rings had flashed into his mind.

"Begad!" he exclaimed. "It's possible—not likely—but possible—"

He did not finish, but ran to the window and dragged the blind aside. He looked out. There was a glimmer of starlight on the branches of the old elms, but the quadrangle was very dusky. There was no trace of anyone to be seen.

Sir Richard drew a breath of relief.

"What were you thinking of, Sir Richard?" asked the Head, in surprise.

The baronet laughed rather uneasily.

"Well, when you spoke the thought came into my mind that that confounded Spaniard might have climbed to the window and listened to what we have been saying," he replied. "Of course, it isn't possible."

The Head smiled.

"Quite!" he said. "He has been searched for too thoroughly to be still within the school walls. I don't think you need have any uneasiness on that score, Sir Richard."

"No, I suppose not. But the thought of that man haunts me," said the baronet, dropping the blind into its place and resuming his seat. "Juan Rodriguez is a desperate rascal, and I am prepared for anything when I am dealing with him. But, as you say, it is impossible."

The baronet lighted a fresh cigar. By the time it was half finished Tom Merry had returned to the study.

Tom Merry had changed his clothes and washed off the jam and pastry, and looked decidedly the better for the change.

"You may sit down, Merry," said the Head.

"Thank you, sir!"

"Sir Richard Standish wishes to entrust an important commission to you, Merry," said Dr. Holmes. "You are at liberty to undertake it or not, as you please. If you do not care to do so Sir Richard will not be in the least offended. It will necessitate a journey to Southampton."

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Tom Merry's eyes danced. He was not likely to decline to undertake any commission which promised him a run out of school and a visit to a seaport.

"I shall be very glad to do it, sir, whatever it is," he said eagerly.

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"Please explain to him, then, Sir Richard," he said.

"Certainly!" The baronet removed his cigar from his lips. "Merry, you acted in a very plucky manner to-day and showed great presence of mind—"

"Oh, sir!"

"That is partly my reason for selecting you; but, also, I have observed you before, and I think you are a sensible and reliable lad," said the baronet. "I want this packet taken to Southampton and delivered into the hands of the skipper of the Opossum, now lying in harbour there. No one is to see the packet and no one to know that you have it upon you. You are to observe great secrecy, and at the same time to keep up an appearance of having no secret whatever. You understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You will leave the school in the morning, as if merely strolling down to the village. In Rylcombe you will take the local train for Wayland. At Wayland you will take the express for Southampton. You will understand, of course, that the men who tried to rob me to-day—Juan Rodriguez, the Spaniard with the ear-rings, and Yanex, his companion—will be on the watch for me when I leave the school and will make another attempt to seize the packet. I need not explain to you what it contains, but it is of the utmost importance. Now I hope to lead those rascals on my track back to London; and, meanwhile, you will deliver the packet in perfect safety. There is no danger whatever, as the scoundrels will not, naturally, have the least suspicion of a schoolboy."

"Quite so, sir!"

"Well, do you feel inclined to undertake the task?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Then Dr. Holmes will excuse you from lessons to-morrow for the purpose."

"Certainly, sir," said the Head.

"May I make a suggestion, sir?" asked Tom Merry diffidently.

"Undoubtedly."

"Suppose, sir, that I took a few friends with me? That would make it all the safer, in case the Spaniards should by any chance get on the track. We could go out with lunch baskets, as if we were going on a trip, and instead of going by train to Wayland we could stroll there through the woods."

"By Jove! A good idea!"

Dr. Holmes smiled a little dubiously. He quite understood that Tom Merry was willing to give the "Co." a chance of sharing his little run.

"But that would make it necessary to tell others about it," the Head remarked.

"I need not tell them anything, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly, "only that I have a day off, with permission to take them. I need not tell them we are going to Southampton till we get to Wayland Junction. That would be sailing under sealed orders."

Sir Richard laughed.

"I think it's a good idea, Dr. Holmes, if you will give Tom Merry's friends permission to go with him," he said.

The doctor nodded.

"Very well," he said, "you have permission, Merry, since Sir Richard thinks it is a good idea. You will leave the school, of course, without any appearance of preparation for a journey."

"On, yes, sir!"

"Don't say a word on the subject till to-morrow morning," added the baronet. "Your friends can wait for information till then."

"Very well, sir."

"There, I think that is settled," said Sir Richard. "You may go, my boy, and I am very much obliged to you."

And Tom Merry left the Head's study.

## CHAPTER 7.

## A Few Friends!

**I**T was the following morning after breakfast when Tom Merry imparted the good news to Manners and Lowther.

"You've got a day off?" said Manners.

"Yes."

"And you're going on a picnic, and can take your friends with you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's jolly good, anyway," said Monty Lowther; "but I'm blessed if I understand!"

"That's not necessary," said Tom Merry sweetly. "You follow your leader, and don't ask questions, and everything in the garden will be lovely. It's something to have a day off from lessons; isn't it?"

"Oh, that's all right! I'm on!"

"Is the number limited—the number of the fellows you can take, I mean?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry grinned.

"No; the numeroer's not fixed," he said. "I said a few friends—"

"A few might mean any number," said Lowther. "It would be only cricket to give Blake & Co. a little run."

"Let's ask them."

"And perhaps Figgins & Co. would like to come, too!"

"Good! We'll ask them as well."

Blake & Co., with the exception of Herries, who was worried because Towser was on the sick list, and Figgins & Co. were only too willing to accompany Tom Merry & Co., and the juniors were soon making schemes for the day's outing. Fatty Wynn, needless to say, was entrusted with the important task of preparing the lunch baskets.

Tom Merry was called into the Head's study after he and his chums had finished making preparations.

"You are ready, Merry?" the Head asked.

"Quite ready, sir."

"You have chosen a few friends to go with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Sir Richard will give you your instructions."

The baronet drew the mysterious packet from his coat pocket, and handed it to Tom Merry.

"Put it in an inside pocket," he said. "Take every care of that, Merry. It has a value greater than you can possibly understand. You saw how determined those rascals were to obtain possession of it yesterday."

"I will be very careful, sir."

"You need not mention to the other boys that you have

it; better keep the knowledge of it to yourself," said the baronet. "Unless, of course, in the unlikely event of your being attacked. That is, of course, practically impossible. If I believed that there was the slightest chance of it I should never allow you to become mixed up in the affair at all. You will require money for your expenses. How many friends are you taking?"

Tom Merry coughed.

"Eight, sir," he said.

"Ahem!" said the Head.

"If—if you think that's too many, sir—" faltered Tom Merry.

"Never mind," said the Head good-humouredly. "Give me their names, so that I can inform their Form masters, that is all."

"Lowther, Manners, Blake, Digby, D'Arcy, Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty—I—I mean Wynn, sir."

The Head wrote down the names.

"Very well, Merry."

"Nine in all," said Sir Richard. "Very well. And you must allow me to stand the lunch you will take with you, and any little expenses that crop up."

"You are very good, sir."

"Here are two five-pound notes," said Sir Richard. "If you find the expenses run to a larger sum, you will let me know."

"Oh, that will be heaps, sir!"

"And you will take every care of the packet, Merry?"

"Yes, rather, sir."

The baronet gave Tom Merry his final instructions, and the hero of the Shell shook hands with him, and so did the Head, and he took his leave. He seemed to be walking on air as he went down the passage. At that moment he was far from dreaming what his strange task was to lead to.

The juniors were waiting for him at the end of the passage. Fatty Wynn had a large lunch basket in each hand, and a beatific smile upon his plump face.

"All serene?" asked Figgins, as Tom Merry came up.

"All serene," replied Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Good! Let's get off, then!"

"I've got three of the steak-and-kidney puddings, cold."



Tom Merry looked out of the carriage window as the train began to slow down. Next moment he saw a man leap from the train down the embankment, to be followed immediately by another! They were the two Spaniards who were after the important packet Tom was conveying to Southampton!

said Fatty Wynn, in an ecstatic whisper, as they walked out into the quad.

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

The bell was ringing for classes. Tom Merry & Co. walked airily across the quad and out of the gates, with a proud disregard for classes.

The juniors did not take the road to Rylcombe. Tom Merry led the way in the opposite direction, and they took a footpath through the wood.

Tom Merry kept his eyes open for the Spaniards, but there was no sign of them. It was very probable that they were lurking about the school, watching for the departure of the baronet. Tom Merry grinned at the idea of their following Sir Richard to London, while the packet was on its way to Southampton.

"I suppose we'd better picnic in the woods," Fatty Wynn remarked, looking about him. "I know some jolly nice places here."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Not yet, my son."

"Where are we going, then?"

"Wayland."

"Bai Jove! What are we goin' to Wayland for, Tom Mewwy?"

"You'll see when we get there, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But if we're going on a railway journey we ought to have brought some grub," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "I've only laid in enough for a picnic."

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Well, it's no good going hungry," said Fatty. "I've always noticed that if you want to enjoy yourselves for a day, the best thing to do is to lay a solid foundation."

And Fatty Wynn, by way of laying a solid foundation for the day, began to nibble at sandwiches.

The juniors tramped through the wood, taking a devious path. Tom Merry kept his eyes well open, and the other fellows soon became aware of the fact that he was looking for something or somebody. But in answer to questions, the hero of the Shell simply shook his head. He had nothing to tell.

It was not till the juniors were near the Wayland Road, on the other side of the wood that Tom Merry saw anything to arouse his suspicions. Then a rustle in the thicket caught his ears, and he ran from the path, just in time to see a figure disappear into the wood.

He caught but a momentary glimpse of it, but it looked to him very like that of one of the foreigners who had attacked Sir Richard Standish the day before. But the man, whoever he was, vanished in a moment.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah?" asked Arthur Augustus, as Tom Merry came back to the footpath.

"It's all right."

"Look here," said Blake. "I know jolly well you've been looking out for something ever since we left St. Jim's. Why can't you tell us what's up?"

"I'll tell you in the train."

"Blessed if I can see what there is to be so jolly mysterious about," said Figgins.

"Let's buck up," said Tom Merry sharply.

His face was so grave and concerned that the other fellows said no more, but they hurried on to Wayland. They reached the railway station, with a quarter of an hour to wait for the train Tom Merry intended to take. Tom Merry looked round the station vestibule, but there was no sign of the Spaniards. He breathed freely again. The thought had been in his mind that somehow Rodriguez had discovered the plan for getting the packet to Southampton.

"Go on the platform, you fellows," said Tom Merry—"the down platform."

"That's where the Southampton train stops," said Figgins.

"Right you are! Wait for me there while I get the tickets."

"Oh, all serene!"

The juniors, very much puzzled, went on to the platform. Tom Merry's manner was enough to show them that there was something very unusual toward. Tom Merry hurried to the booking-office, and took nine tickets to Southampton. There was no one of a foreign aspect in the station near him, only a man was waiting his turn at the booking-office—a sunburnt man, with a pair of very keen, black eyes that seemed to be watching him. But he put that down to his nervous fancy. The man was evidently an Englishman, and there was no reason whatever to suppose that he had any connection with the Spaniards.

Tom Merry put the tickets in his pocket, and hurried to the platform, where the juniors were awaiting him. They looked at him inquiringly.

"Got the tickets?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yes."

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"Where are they for?"

"You'll see when the train comes in."

"My hat! This is getting rather thick! You'll make us think that you're off your silly rocker soon, Tom Merry!" exclaimed Digby.

"I'll explain when we're on the train. Can't you see that I'm only carrying out instructions?" said Tom Merry.

"Whose instructions?"

"I'll tell you on the train."

The juniors kept their eyes curiously upon Tom Merry. Even Fatty Wynn forgot the probable necessity of another lunch basket or two. They observed that Tom Merry watched the entrance to the platform, as if fearing that someone would come. The sunburnt man, whom he had seen in the vestibule, came sauntering in. He wore a brown slouched hat, and had a thick, black cigar between his teeth.

He came up to the group of juniors.

"The Southampton train stops here, I think?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Can you tell me whether it stops at Brookfield?"

"Yaas, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Thank you!" said the man civilly. "Then that's my train."

And he sauntered away.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath of relief. If the man was going by the train, he was evidently getting off at Brookfield, twenty miles down the line, and so could not be one of the gang tracking him to Southampton. There was a shrill whistle on the line, and the train came rumbling in.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, as it stopped with a grinding of brakes.

The juniors stared.

"That train's going to Southampton," said Figgins.

"So are we!"

"What!" exclaimed all the juniors together.

"Buck up!" said Tom Merry.

And the juniors, in utter amazement, followed Tom Merry into the train.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Suspicious!

"**B**AI JOVE!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he settled down in a corner seat, and brushed a speck of dust from his trousers. "Bai Jove! It is wathah a surprise!"

"Yes, rather!" said Digby, with emphasis. "And it only convinces me of what I suspected before—that Tom Merry is off his rocker!"

"Looks like it to me," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully, with a glance at his chum. Tom Merry was sitting in the corner of the carriage, buried in thought. He did not seem to hear the remarks of his companions.

"Have you noticed anything strange in his manner lately?" asked Blake affably.

"Yes, I have!" said Lowther seriously.

"Bai Jove! What was it?"

"He decided to bring you fellows along on this expedition when he might have left you at home," said Lowther blandly. "Queer, wasn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at in Lowther's rotten attempt at humour," said Blake, as Figgins & Co. roared. "Look here, we ought to know why we're going to Southampton."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wake up!" roared Kerr, giving Tom Merry a dig in the ribs that made him jump. "Are you going to sleep without explaining what the whole bizny is about?"

"Ow! You ass! I wasn't going to sleep!"

"Wake up, then, and explain!"

"I'll explain as far as I can," said Tom Merry, sinking his voice. "I've got to go to Southampton to deliver a message, and I've brought you fellows along to give you a run, and because it will be safer in a crowd. That's all I can say at present."

"Who's the message to?"

"I'm not allowed to say."

"Who's it from?"

"Same thing."

"What is it?"

"I don't know that myself."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well," said Figgins, rubbing his nose thoughtfully, "I should think the ass was hoaxing us, only it's pretty clear the Head has really given us a day off, so there must be something in it."

"Yaas, wathah! I nevah thought of that!"

"I suppose we must be content with crumbs of information at present," said Blake.

"Look here, are you afraid of being followed, Tommy?"

demanded Manners. "You've looked like it ever since we left the school."

"Well, yes," said Tom Merry. "I may as well tell you that much, and you can help me to keep a look-out. If you see either of those Spanish chaps who tried to rob Sir Richard Standish yesterday, they're following me."

"Then you're going on Sir Richard's biznez?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Excuse me. That's not a fair question," said Manners. "We won't ask you anything, Tommy. Only don't look so worried. We haven't seen any giddy Spaniards."

"Hush!"

A form passed along the corridor. It was the man in the slouched hat that had inquired whether the express stopped at Brookfield. He glanced carelessly into the carriage, and passed on down the corridor. Tom Merry wrinkled his brows.

"Blow!" he muttered. "I wish it weren't a corridor train. Look here! Will you keep your eyes open, and see if that chap gets out at Brookfield?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You don't think he's watching you?" Monty Lowther exclaimed, in surprise.

"I don't know what to think," Tom Merry confessed. "I thought I saw one of the Spaniards in the wood, but I'm not sure."

"I shall have to get out at Brookfield," Fatty Wynn remarked meditatively.

"What on earth for?"

"To get some grub. There's no dining-car on this train. It's sickening, but this train is run without a dining-car. You didn't warn me that we were going to Southampton, or I'd have laid in enough grub. What I've got here won't last us half the distance."

"Oh, cheese it, Fatty!" said Tom Merry. "We want to attract as little attention as possible. None of us must leave the train."

"Oh, now, look here, Tom Merry! Do be reasonable!" "Shut up!" roared Figgins. "If you jaw any more about grub, Fatty, I'll sling you out into the corridor, and your blessed lunch baskets after you!"

"Look here, Figgy—"

"Ring off!"

And the fat Fourth Former subsided into indignant silence. The juniors watched from the windows when the train stopped at Brookfield. If the sunburnt, seafaring man had alighted from the train they would certainly have seen him. But they did not see him. They saw several passengers board the train, but no one alighted.

"He hasn't got down!" said Figgins, as the train started again.

Tom Merry nodded. His suspicions were confirmed now. They had been vague at first, but surely he had grounds for them now—the seafaring man in the slouched hat was following him. He could not doubt it.

The juniors were silent and concerned, their eyes fixed upon Tom Merry. Tom Merry did not speak, but there was a deep and anxious frown upon his brow.

Sir Richard had told him to tell his companions nothing, excepting in the unlikely event of his being attacked by the rascals who were seeking to obtain possession of the packet.

But that event now was far from unlikely, and if Tom Merry found himself watched, with an attack imminent, it was evident that, under the circumstances, the baronet would approve of his taking the other fellows into the secret, so that they could guard against the danger together. Tom Merry determined to tell the juniors as much as he knew himself.

That was the outcome of his cogitations. He raised his head at last, after a long and deep reverie. The other fellows were watching him.

"I think I'd better let you all into it," he said abruptly.

Thereupon Tom Merry explained the whole matter as far as he understood it, Figgins standing just outside the door in the corridor to keep watch against possible spies and eavesdroppers.

His story was listened to with the keenest interest and surprise. The juniors had not connected, in their minds, this sudden expedition to Southampton with the coming of the baronet to St. Jim's the previous day.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "It looks to me like bein' a dangewous business, deah boy. May I make a suggestion?"

"Go ahead, Gussy."

"Well, I think that you should hand the packet ovah to me, deah boy, so that I can take care of it."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We'd better all keep our eyes peeled," said Blake. "If that fellow was really inside the school walls last night—"

"He certainly was!" said Tom Merry.

"Well, then, he mayn't have cleared out when we were

(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.

**UNEXPECTED.**

Teacher: "No pen again, Brown? What would you call a soldier who went to war without a rifle?"  
Brown: "An officer, sir!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Beales, 73, St. Donatts Road, New Cross, London, S.E. 14.

**LOOKING AHEAD.**

Mr. Jones: "My glazier is very enterprising."  
Mr. James: "Why?"  
Mr. Jones: "He celebrated his birthday by giving all his young friends catapults!"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Deacon, Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, Clifton, Bristol, 8.

**BELATED HUMOUR.**

Finding it difficult to make the audience laugh, the comedian cracked another joke and added:  
"I suppose you'll laugh at that next year?"  
"No!" shouted a voice. "We did that three years ago!"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Evans, 17, Belle Vue, Garden City, Ebbw Vale, Mon., S. Wales.

**EASILY REMEDIED.**

Pessimist: "I have only one friend on earth—my dog."  
Optimist: "Why don't you get another dog?"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Wonfor, 20, Sternhold Avenue, Streatham, London, S.W.

**THIS WEEK'S HOWLER.**

A boastful young man had been bragging about the ancestry of his family.  
"I suppose," said a bored friend, "you will be telling us next that your ancestors were in the Ark with Noah?"  
"Certainly not," replied the boaster. "My ancestors had a boat of their own!"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Myerscough, 34, Wavertree Nook Road, Wavertree, Liverpool, 15.

**KEEPING UP APPEARANCES.**

Boss: "If Mr. Smith calls tells him I'm out."  
Office-boy: "Yes, sir."  
Boss: "And understand—don't be working or he'll know I'm in."  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Edelsten, Summerleaze, Littleham, Exmouth, Devon.

**MUCH MARKED.**

"And how is your boy getting on at college?" asked the visitor.  
"Excellently!" gushed Reggie's mother. "He's got full marks for chemistry and for mathematics—"  
"Yes," cut in Reggie's father; "and when I saw him last week his face showed that he's got full marks for boxing!"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Morrish, 43, Edward Street, Shepparton, Victoria, Australia.

searching for him; he may have hidden himself somewhere, and may have heard something of this giddy scheme."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"I suppose that's possible," he said.

"Yes, rather. He may have climbed up to a roof, or even to a high window-sill among the ivy," said Blake. "A dozen men could hide themselves away in a place like St. Jim's."

"Yaas, that's vevy twue."

"If he had an inkling of what was intended, the scoundrel would let Sir Richard go back to London this morning without following him, and would follow us," Figgins remarked.

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Tom Merry. "Isn't it peculiar about that chap not getting out at Brookfield? He—"

"Hush!" muttered Figgins.

"What is it?"

"Here he is!"

The seafaring man came down the train corridor. He paused at the crowded compartment containing the juniors of St. Jim's, and nodded to the boys.

"We've passed Brookfield, I hear," he said.

"Yes; ten minutes ago," said Figgins.

"Missed it," said the seafaring man. "I was asleep in the train. I suppose I'm booked for Southampton now?"

"No; we stop at two or three stations," said Figgins.

"Thank you."

And he passed on. The juniors looked at one another. The forced explanation as to why the man had not left the train did not satisfy them. He was far from looking like a man who would go to sleep and miss his station. Besides, why should he take the trouble to explain to them, if not to avert suspicion.

"The chap is on the track," said Kerr quietly.

"I'm pretty certain about it," said Tom Merry. "Sir Richard never mentioned any Britisher as being in the plot, but he spoke as if there were a good many of the rascals, and this may be one of them. I think that chap is English; he's got his dark skin in the tropics."

"Yes, rather! Look here! Several passengers got on at Brookfield," said Kerr sagely. "Those Spaniard chaps may be among them. They could easily have cut across country in time, if they were in the wood when we came through from the school. You remember we had a long wait for the train at Wayland."

"Bai Jove!"

"If this man means mischief, he won't be alone on the train," said Kerr. "It's more than likely that the Spanish chaps got on, too. Suppose I take a stroll along the train and see if they're there. I didn't see them yesterday, but I should know Spaniards if I saw them, of course!"

"I'll come, too," said Lowther, "as I did see them yesterday."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Both of you go."

And Kerr and Lowther went along the train corridor. The train was going at a good speed now, rocking as it rushed. The juniors made their way along the corridor, looking into every carriage as they passed it, and scanning the faces of the occupants. They received a good many stares in return, but that did not disconcert them. They did not mean to leave a single face unscanned.

In a carriage at a distance from their own two men were seated in corner seats, with newspapers held up as if to read. They could not be seen, and the two juniors guessed that the newspapers had been raised on the approach of footsteps in the corridor.

Monty Lowther coolly entered the carriage and bumped into one of the newspapers, knocking it down from the hands that held it. There was an angry exclamation in a foreign tongue, and a swarthy face started into view. There was a glimmer of gold ear-rings under thick black hair.

The Spaniard and Monty Lowther looked at one another. The recognition was mutual. The man with the ear-rings knew the junior who had helped to deprive him of the stolen packet the previous afternoon. And Monty Lowther, of course, knew the foreigner at once. He was not a man easily forgotten.

The junior stepped back out of the carriage into the corridor. The other man lowered his paper, and was seen to be the other Spaniard. They glared at the juniors, but did not speak; they appeared to be too nonplussed to know what to do. There were other passengers in the compartment, and any violence was impossible. The juniors retreated down the corridor again, leaving the two Spaniards enraged and puzzled what to do.

They rejoined Tom Merry & Co.

"We've found them," said Kerr.

Tom Merry started. He had more than half expected it, yet the discovery that the rascally foreigners were really on the train came as a shock to him.

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"The Spaniards?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lowther, "as large as life."

"Did they see you?"

"We couldn't help it. I had to bump over the paper one of them was holding, so as to be able to get a squirt of his chivvy."

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"Look here!" he said. "Both those men are wanted for attacking Sir Richard Standish yesterday. We could swear to their identity, and have them arrested at the next station. How's that for a wheeze?"

"Bai Jove! That's wippin'!"

"We're stopping now," said Manners.

The train was slowing down. Tom Merry looked out of the window. The train was passing a green embankment previous to running into the station. As the St. Jim's juniors looked out, a man leaped from the train and rolled down the grassy embankment. Another man immediately followed. It was a dangerous jump, but the soft grass and the slope broke the fall, and the two men picked themselves up nimbly and ran.

Tom Merry caught only a glimpse of them. But he knew that they were Juan Rodriguez and Yanex, the two Spaniards.

They were gone!

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther, with a deep breath.

"They're nery beggars, at any rate. I shouldn't care to make that jump, if I could help it!"

"We've nothing more to fear from them if we remain on the train," said Kerr thoughtfully. "I suppose they guessed we should denounce them. But—supposing that seafaring man is one of the gang—"

"It's pretty certain now."

"He may have other associates here," said Kerr. "There may be half a dozen of them on the train for all we know."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"It's rotten," he said. "It's pretty clear now that they know the whole scheme. Those Spaniards could not have got on the train for nothing. That seafaring man is one of the gang, and means business. One of the Spanish rascals must have been hanging about St. Jim's after all, last night, and must have learned something; he certainly didn't hear me saying anything, as I kept mum, but he might have heard Sir Richard Standish giving me instructions, or talking about it with the Head. The question is, what are we going to do? There's no hurry about getting to Southampton. Can we dodge them? A most important thing is not to let them know the ship that the packet is taken to. They're a desperate gang, and the packet is extraordinarily valuable, Sir Richard says, and if they know what ship it is on, they will follow it and attack it at sea."

"Bai Jove! Pivacy, deah boy?"

"Well, piracy is no worse than robbery on land, and they've done that," said Tom Merry. "They seem to have plenty of money, and this packet is worth as much to them as to Sir Richard. They must not know the ship we are taking it to. Now, that seafaring man is going to follow us, and see where we go, even if he cannot make any attempt to rob us now that his friends have bunked."

"No doubt about that."

"Well, look here, we can't have that. Sir Richard was very earnest about the importance of not letting the rascals know the steamer. Look here, we shall have to leave the train and get to Southampton some other way," said Tom Merry abruptly.

And the juniors, after discussing the matter, agreed that it was the only possible method of throwing the shadower off the track. They waited for the train to stop at the next station.

## CHAPTER 9

### Shadowed!

THE juniors were all ready by the time the train stopped.

They had no luggage, except Fatty Wynn's lunch-baskets—and one of them was empty by this time, and could be left behind in the carriage.

They intended to jump off the train at the last moment, so that the shadower, who would not be prepared for that move, would be carried on to Southampton, without having time to follow them.

Tom Merry looked out of the carriage window as the train slowed down in the station, the last stop before the seaport.

Along the train another head was projected from the window—a head crowned by a brown slouched hat.

It was the head of the seafaring man.

(Continued on page 14.)

GATHER ROUND FOR 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.

**H**ALLO, CHUMS! You have in your hands now the first wonderful yarn of the grand series of St. Jim's stories which I promised you last week. I expect you will have read it by now, and will probably be thinking what a long time off next Wednesday is! If you have not yet read it, then you have a ripping treat in store. But I can promise you that an even better treat will be yours next week. The second great yarn of this African-adventure series, entitled,

#### "THE ST. JIM'S EXPLORERS!"

is simply crowded with the thrilling adventures of the chums of St. Jim's in Darkest Africa. Having lost to Gally and the Spaniards the important documents entrusted to them to deliver at Southampton, Tom Merry & Co. go all out to retrieve them, for they naturally feel that it is up to them to do so. The trail of the three crooks leads the juniors up the Congo, and many are the perils and adventures they encounter on that famous river, in pursuit of documents worth over a million pounds. You will enjoy every minute of the thrilling journey with Tom Merry & Co. next week. Make sure you book your passage; in other words, don't forget to order your GEM in advance.

#### "THE SCARAB OF DREAD!"

The final yarn of our "Ten Talons of Taaz!" series is, in my opinion, the most thrilling of them all. Only Nipper remains to face the ordeal of courage that the Tibetan priests will set for him. But it will also be an ordeal for the nine juniors who have passed theirs, for it is the will of Taaz that Nipper's test shall be applied in their presence. What happens

in Death Gully, in Bellton Wood, and the big surprise that is the climax of this series, makes an unbeatable St. Frank's story.

#### OUR CHRISTMAS ST. FRANK'S STORY.

As Christmas is drawing very near, and our present series is ending, a story of the festive season is obviously indicated. And what could be better than a story of the holiday adventures of the chums of St. Frank's in an old sinister mansion, with ghosts and a hidden treasure? This great story will be starting in a fortnight's time, and I will tell you more about it next week.

#### THE WEMBLEY TRAIL.

It seems early in the season to start talking about Cup-ties, but as long ago as September 1st hundreds of small clubs all over England began on the long trail to Wembley Stadium. Few had much chance of even making the distance to the First Round of the competition proper, yet every club was confident and full of enthusiasm of winning through the preliminary rounds to try conclusions with the Third Division League clubs. The latter came into the Cup next Saturday, when the First Round ties will be played. Most of the small clubs left in will make their exit from the Cup then, but not all. Every season there are "giant killers" who cause a sensation by beating a big League club. Not only is it a feather in the cap of the

#### PEN PALS COUPON

24-11-34

"giant killer," but it brings in added wealth from gate receipts, which means a lot to the small struggling club. And the publicity the club gets very often results in the transfer of one or more players in exchange for nice fat cheques.

Last season two clubs outside the big Leagues succeeded in getting through to the Third Round, when the First and Second Division teams enter the competition. They were Coltenham and Workington. The former lost 3-1 on their own ground to the strong Blackpool team. But Workington went a stage farther by beating Gateshead 4-1. In the Fourth Round they put up a brave fight against Preston North End before losing 2-1.

Who will be the "giant killers" on Saturday? Whoever they are, they will certainly have provided their share of thrills to the greatest football competition in the world. Good luck to them!

#### HORSE POWER.

In this age of the motor-car, the poor old horse which has so long been such a great assistance to man, is being pushed farther and farther into the background from the streets. So it is refreshing to read of a horse putting up a record performance for a long-distance run. Queenie is a seven-years-old mare, and she recently completed a journey from Land's End to John o' Groats, with her owner in the saddle! The distance is nearly one thousand miles, and the ride establishes a new record for long-distance horse-riding.

#### A MAMMOTH MEAL.

Isn't it surprising what a lot of food some people can eat? Have you heard about Charles Vienot? He's the latest trencherman to astonish the world with his powers of putting away an outside in meals. Charles, by the way, is over twenty-three stones, and you will understand why when you read what he ate and drank at one sitting! This was his meal: 2½ lb. of fish, 2½ lb. of chicken, and 2½ lb. of mutton; white beans, a whole cheese, and 29 other different sorts of cheese; 6 apple tarts, 2 bottles of Alsatian wine, 2 bottles of Burgundy, and 4 bottles of cider. Phew! What a blow-out! There's no truth in the rumour that Fatty Wynn is thinking of issuing a challenge!

#### TAILPIECE.

Simpkins: "You gave that waiter rather a generous tip, didn't you?"

Timpkins: "Yes, but see the fine coat he gave me!"

#### 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.

B. Woolfenden, 3, High Bank, Dane Bank, Denton, Manchester, wants a pen pal in Canada, Africa, or Russia; age 14-16; sport, horse riding, swimming.

Miss Mary Elizabeth McPhun, 64, Dawlish Avenue, Lawrence Park, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wants girl correspondents.

The World Wide Correspondence Club requires more members. Address: 3989, St. Dominique, Montreal, Canada.

Albert E. Kirby, Jun., 186, Rushton Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wants to hear from stamp collectors in the British Empire; over 17.

Miss Dorothy Gatecombe, 7, Castle Road, Kentish Town London, N.W.1, wants girl correspondents; age 17-23; books, sports, swimming, cycling.

Miss Jean Meade, Lower Farm, Kelsall, near Chester, wants a girl correspondent overseas; postcards, stamps.

N. R. Prasad, c/o Kishan Prasad & Co., Ltd., 207, Kalbadevi Road, Bombay 2, India, wants correspondents, more particularly in China, Japan, Malta, Germany, Italy and West Indies; age 17-19; riding, scouting, coins, stamps, photographs.

Ronald Hepworth, 5, Hirst Street, Lower Hopton, Mirfield, Yorks, wants a correspondent in Australia or France; age 13-15; dance bands, sport.

Donald J. Hayne, 57, Browning Street, Fairview, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wants a correspondent in Queensland; wishes to get in touch with railway enthusiasts interested in the 3 ft. 3 in. tracks of Queensland and elsewhere.

K. Munn, 40, Duke Street, Kingston, Jamaica, wants correspondents interested in stamps and swimming.

R. A. Oliver, Victoria Inn, Three Mile Stone, near Truro, Cornwall, wants to hear from readers who have made a hobby of old "Nelson Lees."

Miss Esme Lawes, 28, Kynaston Road, Bromley, Kent, wants girl correspondents in India, Australia, or any of the colonies; age 14-16; interested in ships.

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**UNDER SEALED ORDERS!**

(Continued from page 12.)

He was watching, with his keen black eyes, to see if anyone alighted from the train. He would see them the moment they left, that was certain. But it could not be helped. If he leaped out after them at the last moment, at all events, they would know beyond the possible shadow of a doubt he was following them.

The train stopped. The juniors moved along the corridor, and just before the train got into motion again they leaped out, one after the other. Tom Merry was last, and the train was already moving when he jumped out upon the platform. The juniors stood in a breathless group, watching the train. As it moved on, a lithe figure leaped from one of the doors and fell, and the sunburnt seafaring man picked himself up on the platform, put his slouched hat straight again, and nodded to the juniors.

"Nearly missed it again," he remarked.

The juniors did not reply. They walked to the station exit and the seafaring man strolled carelessly after them, lighting a cigar. They went out into the street of the country town and the shadower followed.

"He's hardly making a secret of it now," Figgins remarked, glancing back and seeing the slouched hat turn a corner behind them.

"Wathah not!"  
 "We'll stop him, though," said Tom Merry, with a glint in his eyes.

"How can we stop him?"  
 "We'll go into the fields and lay for him," said the hero of the Shell. "He will follow us there, and we can collar him and tie him up."

"Bai Jove!"  
 "It's justifiable enough, under the circumstances," said Tom Merry. "We can tie him in a way so that he can get loose in a couple of hours or so—too late to do us any mischief."

The juniors strolled down a lane, turned into another, and sauntered into the town again. If they wanted proof that the seafaring man was shadowing them they had it now, for he never lost sight of them. Their wandering was perfectly aimless, and he could have had no reason for following such a course, excepting to keep them in sight. They stopped at a shop in the town to purchase a coil of rope, which Figgins hid under his jacket, coiling it round his waist in the shop. Then they strolled out of the town again.

While they were doing their shopping the seafaring man had waited on the other side of the road. When they resumed their way he followed them again, with his airy saunter. Outside the town were fields and meadows, with a rim of dark woods in the distance, and it was towards these that Tom Merry made his way. It was better for the ambush to be laid in good cover, where the seafaring man could be seized without having a chance to escape, or to obtain help.

The juniors crossed the meadows and followed a footpath into the wood. From the cover of the trees they looked back and saw the man in the slouched hat crossing the field by the same path.

Tom Merry smiled grimly.  
 "We'll get a bit farther on, and stop him," he said.



No. 41. Vol. 1. (New Series.)

**SHELL versus FOURTH FIGHT FOR FORM CUP**

*Wally D'Arcy at the Microphone*

To-day St Jim's is without a match in the Eastwood League, but there is an important game between teams representing the Shell and Fourth Forms for the coveted Form Cup.

The Form Cup is competed for annually by all the Forms at St. Jim's, from the babes of the Second to the mighty men of the Sixth, and usually the Sixth walk off with it as a matter of course. This year, however, Kildare has generously withdrawn the Sixth Form team from the competition, leaving the lesser fry to battle for it among themselves. In the first round the Shell were drawn against the Fifth, and playing magnificent football, Tom Merry and his men just managed to win 3-2. Lefevre of the Fifth explains that some of his best men were unable to turn out, but the result stands. In a close game between the Fourth, captained by Blake, and the Third, captained by myself, the Fourth just got home to the tune of 4-1. I say just, because the scores were level until the last quarter of an hour, when our defence cracked, and the Fourth put on three more goals quickly.

Differences between School House and New House are forgotten this afternoon, in the keen rivalry between the Shell and Fourth. There goes the whistle—they have started. The ball whizzes across the turf to Digby on the wing, and the Fourth are on the attack straight from the kick-off. "Dig" speeds down the wing, pulling up sharp just before he is tackled, and swinging the leather across the field. Gussy—my major—speeds in from the opposite wing, taking the ball in his stride and shooting on the run. Thud! Oh, well shot, sir—it's a goal! First blood to the Fourth!

Now watch the Shellfish. They're going all out now—and we're seeing some pretty play. Skill combined with speed brings the ball into the Fourth Form penalty area. Wynn in goal shapes in readiness as Tom Merry accepts a centre from Lowther, but Kerr quickly rushes to tackle, and Merry puts

a square pass to Kangaroo, following up close. The Australian catches the ball a terrific thump, and it flashes into the net before Wynn can even wink! Level pegging!

Nothing in it at half-time, both sides being value for their goal. Tom Merry sets the crowd on fire with an electric dribble on the re-start, weaving a way round defenders and finishing off with a rip-snorting drive which makes the net quiver like a live thing! Is that a goal? I'll say it is!

The Fourth now redouble their efforts. A long pass to Gussy on the wing, and the attack is set going. Gussy centres in the nick of time, being charged by a full back, the next second. But Blake has the ball, whipping round to avoid a charge, and letting fly all at the same moment. Whiz! Goal! That makes it 2-2, and the result is in the lap of the gods!

Merry sets the Shell attack going again with a nicely-judged pass to Pratt on the wing. Pratt makes ground, passing back to Lowther. Lowther does a neat dribble which leaves Kerr standing, and the goal yawns invitingly. Watch Fatty Wynn shape. Lowther fires in a rocket of a shot. Fatty Wynn leaps almost before it leaves his foot, grasps the ball, and throws it out on the instant. But Merry dashes up, meeting the leather with his head and flicking it skilfully just out of Fatty Wynn's reach! The leather spins in the top of the rigging, and the Shell are leading 3-2.

A last gallant attack by the Fourth spells fireworks—Blake goes close with a smashing drive, but the leather glances off the upright behind the goal. Gussy puts in a great run just on the stroke of time. He steadies and tries a long shot, but even in the act of shooting the whistle shrills, and the game for the Form Cup is over—with Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell deserving victors in a "needle" match. Blake gives Merry a hearty handshake, and Figgins is only a second behind him. Next week the teams will be united again in a League fixture.

**ST. FRANK'S CRICKET SCORE**

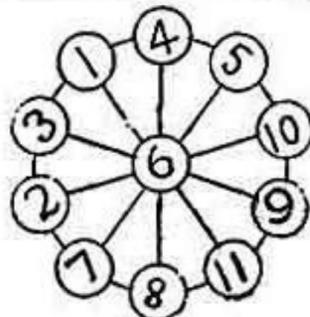
A mysterious challenge over the telephone from Terence Tucker, junior captain of a new school, Ravenside, near St. Frank's, was accepted by Nipper in hopes of a lively game. Lively it was—but not owing to any particular skill shown by Ravenside! Tucker and his comrades were a weedy lot, and sadly lacking in practice. Against the swift, incisive methods of St. Frank's, they were completely at sea, and the score against them mounted by leaps and bounds. After Nipper had scored a double "hat trick," and Tregellis-West and Travers had added two more each, the match became a joke. At half-time St. Frank's led 11-0, and the final score was 26-1. If you want to know how they got their solitary goal, ask Handforth—he still can't understand how he let it through!

**CALIBAN'S PUZZLE CORNER**

MA

To its front add letters two,  
 Repeat them both behind  
 In the same order, and then you  
 Something good to eat will find.

Solution of Last Week's Puzzle





Week Ending November 24th, 1934.

## JUST MY FUN

### Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! Gore complains that he goes deaf for periods of from two to three hours. As these periods have so far coincided with class hours, his statements fall on "deaf ears." News item: I hear the scholars at a Wayland school lent their aid when the school caught fire. Despite their efforts, however, the blaze was extinguished! At a junior boxing contest, Figgins offered to challenge anybody. He didn't mind a "scrap." Skimpole has just rung up to ask if I do any knitting. Yes, I often knit my brows over queer queries! What can I do for tired feet? asks Fatty Wynn. Take longer strides—you won't put them down so often! Howlers from Third Form essays: "A career is the seat on the back of a bicycle." "A spa is where people go to drink bath water." I understand a competition is being held to discover the most beautiful word in the English language. All juniors agree it is the word, "Dismiss." Advert in the "Wayland Courier": "Good car, £15. A trial to drive." Mr. Selby's second-hand one is just that sort! Then there was the American millionaire who wanted to buy the Crystal Palace because his son liked throwing stones at greenhouses! How can I keep a tap from dripping? asks Mrs. Mimms, the Matron. Remove the dripping.

The school doctor was telling fags that one way of curing a cold is to bathe the neck with warm water. Wally D'Arcy said he didn't think a cold could be as serious as that! Neck-washing is not popular in the Third! A relative of Tom Merry's is exploring the African jungle before writing a book on lions. Looking for "roar" material. Did you hear about the Scotsman who swallowed a sovereign? Finally, an appeal for charity made him "cough it up." Believe it or not! Yes, I'm going to tell that other Scotch story, too—about the Scot who only used a mirror the first time he shaved. After that, he shaved from memory. How ought I to take Tom Merry's instructions on the best way to sleep? asks Skimpole. Take them "lying down," old chap! And "bye-bye"! Talking of snoozing, a burglar was found in a house, fast asleep. On being awakened, he inquired: "What's the time?" The judge told him! "Look at that fine car!" said D'Arcy minor, gazing in a Wayland showroom. "£500 Ex-Works!" "Gosh, that's a lot for a car without the works!" ejaculated Jameson. Next story: "I'll take a pound of those sausages," said the House Dame; "are they British?" "Yes, ma'am," answered the shopkeeper—"the good old bulldog breed!" "Oo-er! Next: "Don't you think you are straining a point in your explanation, D'Arcy minor?" demanded Mr. Selby suspiciously. "Possibly, sir," answered D'Arcy, "but you often have to strain things to make them clear!" "I'll be right back!"

## ST. JIM'S SPOTLIGHT

### THESE NAMES MAKE NOISE

#### HITTING OUT RIGHT AND LEFT

in his study, George Gore startled the entire Shell passage. Thuds and bangs reverberated from the study, accompanied by gasping ejaculations from Gore, such as: "Take that!" "That'll show you!" "Hold that one, you rotter!" Each ejaculation was followed by a terrific thud, and a body seemed to crash against the panels of Gore's study door. Whoever Gore had in his study seemed to be going through the mill. To Tom Merry's frantic knocking, there was at first no response. During a lull, however, Gore's voice sounded in answer to the chorus from without. "Go away—everything's all right!" Nobody was in the mood to believe that, however, and Gore was informed that unless he unlocked his door, it would be broken in. The door was at once unlocked, and Gore faced the crowd—looking almost as surprised as they were. A dozen pairs of eyes stared round the study, looking for Gore's "victim." What they saw, though, was a sandbag, which hung from a rope secured to a staple in the ceiling. The thudding on the door had been caused by the sandbag on which Gore had been practising straight lefts. The onlookers agreed that Gore needed a certain amount of "grit" to tackle a sandbag!

#### REFUSING TO TOUCH FOOD

Fatty Wynn amazed his chums, Figgins and Kerr. Fatty, usually the possessor of the largest appetite ever known at St. Jim's, began by refusing a second helping of eggs and bacon at breakfast! At dinner he was equally sparing, while at tea in the study he nearly broke his chums' hearts! Fearing he must be ill, they laid in a huge pile of jam puffs, cream horns, and luscious meringues—feeling certain that such an inviting array would bring back Wynn's appetite with a rush! Contrary to their expectations, however, Fatty Wynn coolly ignored the stacks of dainties, and contented himself with a slice of bread-and-butter and a cup of tea! Next day, it was the same, and the day after. Then Figgins and Kerr seized their chum, and demanded to know the reason for his inexplicable behaviour. Fatty Wynn produced an American magazine, pointing out an article which advised all fat people to go on a "slimming" diet to achieve extra efficiency. Wynn admitted that, though he had been keeping off food as much as possible, he was not feeling quite so "peppy," as usual. Kerr referred the matter privately to the school medico, who told Wynn that a naturally fat fellow needs a lot of nourishment—and dieting is likely to do more harm than good. That evening, there was a record "spread" in Figgins & Co.'s study—and Fatty Wynn once again proved himself beyond doubt the champion trencherman of the New—or any other—House!

Next week's star Soccer fixtures:

Saints v. Grammarians.  
River House v. St. Frank's.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors tramped on. Fatty Wynn nibbled sandwiches en route, but the other fellows were not thinking of lunch. They stopped at last, where trees and bushes shadowed the footpath on either side.

"Here's the place!" said Tom Merry. "This will suit us down to the ground. Take cover, my sons!"

"Right-ho!"

"And not a sound, mind. When I call out, jump on him—and mind he doesn't have a chance to draw a weapon, if he's got one!"

"What-ho!"

The juniors took cover in the bushes. From the thickets they could watch the path, unseen themselves. They waited in silence.

A sound of cautious footsteps came softly through the wood.

They waited tensely.

Over the bushes came a slouched hat, swinging into sight, and the seafaring man, looking round him quickly and keenly, like a suspicious wild animal, came along the path.

He came abreast of the juniors without a suspicion that they were ambushed in the thickets. They were as quiet as mice. He had just passed when Tom Merry gave the signal.

"Go for him!"

Nine juniors leapt from the thickets together.

They crashed upon the seafaring man, and he went down in the grasp of many hands, with nimble juniors sprawling over him.

He uttered a stifled cry and clawed out wildly. But he had no chance of even offering any resistance.

"We've got you," said Tom Merry.

"Oh!"

"You can lie still, you scoundrel! Get the rope off, Figgy, and tie up his hands and feet."

The seafaring man struggled fiercely. He raised his face from the ground and opened his mouth to shout for help. But as he did so Kerr thrust some earth into it, and the man choked and gasped into silence.

The juniors chuckled softly as they bound the seafaring man hand and foot. He had shadowed them, and he had blindly walked into the trap they had laid for him, and he was a helpless prisoner now. Their way to Southampton lay unwatched if this man was prevented from following them.

When he was securely bound they turned him over and allowed him to sit up. His black eyes were gleaming with rage. He spat out the earth Kerr had crammed into his mouth.

"Hang you! What have you done this for?"

"Because you were following us."

"I—I was not!"

"Don't tell lies!" said Tom Merry scornfully. "You were watching us in the train, and you left it to follow us, and you have been shadowing us ever since."

"Why should I shadow you?"

"You know perfectly well, and so do we, and I shan't argue with you upon the subject. We're going to take good care that you don't shadow us to Southampton, that's all!"

"I did not intend—"

"Don't lie, I tell you!"

The seafaring man ground his teeth. It was indeed useless for him to lie. It was hardly possible for him to deceive the juniors after he had shown his hand so plainly. He sat in the grass, his eyes burning with rage, helpless in the hands of the fellows he had shadowed. Tom Merry & Co. had scored so far, at all events.

## CHAPTER 10.

## A Signal of Danger!

THERE was a short silence. The juniors, breathless, rested after their exertions, and the seafaring man sat glowering.

Tom Merry glanced along the footpath.

"Someone may come along," he said at last. "We'd better get him into the wood."

The prisoner uttered a loud, piercing cry before Kerr, who was watching, could clap a hand over his mouth. The next moment a handkerchief, folded tight, was stuffed into the man's jaws, and Blake was tying it there with a length of string, passing the string round and round the prisoner's head.

"That's the last yelp you will give," said Tom Merry.

The prisoner glared at him in dumb rage.

Several of the juniors seized him by the shoulders, and he was dragged away from the footpath into the depths of the wood.

Tom Merry & Co. kept their eyes well about them. Why had the prisoner uttered that cry? Did he hope for help from passing strangers, or had he associates near at hand? The latter was unlikely; but the juniors were uneasy and well upon their guard.

They halted in a deep glade in the heart of the wood. The prisoner was dropped in the grass, and he lay there, writhing in his bonds.

"You'll stay there!" said Tom Merry sternly. "Before we leave you we shall loosen the cords a little, and you can spend a couple of hours wriggling yourself loose. It will keep you out of mischief while we go on our way."

The man could only reply with his eyes. But if looks could have killed, Tom Merry would have fallen dead upon the spot.

The hero of the Shell took out a pocket time-table and consulted it. He ran the list of trains over with a quick eye.

"There's a train stops here at three, going to Southampton," he said. "We'd better catch that. It's a couple of hours to wait, but it can't be helped. We shall leave this rotter safely tied up, and get in at Southampton a little later than we expected, that's all."

"Good!" said Figgins. "If we leave this brute safely here, we're not in such a hurry to go to Southampton."

"No; any time will do."

"If we've got to wait, it's a good idea to have lunch here," Fatty Wynn suggested.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Right you are, Fatty!"

And the juniors opened the lunch-basket. It was past the usual time for their dinner at St. Jim's, and they were hungry, especially Fatty Wynn.

They enjoyed the lunch under the greenwood trees.

The prisoner lay in his bonds, watching them with savage eyes, yet with an expression in his gleaming eyes that the juniors did not understand. Perhaps he hoped something from the delay.

The good things disappeared quickly under the attacks of the juniors. They finished their lunch, and lay down in the grass, under the shade of the trees, to rest. They were still upon their guard, but for an hour or more there had been silence in the wood, and their suspicions had nearly died away. It was very improbable, after all, that the seafaring man had any associates in the vicinity, or that, if he had, they would be near at hand to know what had happened to him.

"This is what I call ripping!" murmured Fatty Wynn, as he sank into the thick grass and pillowed the back of his head against a projecting root. "I think I'll have a nap. You can wake me up when it's time to buzz off and catch that train."

And Fatty Wynn closed his eyes and sank away peacefully into the arms of Morpheus.

Two or three more of the juniors went off to sleep in the silence of the wood. But Tom Merry remained wide awake and watchful.

The expression upon the face of the prisoner caught his eye, and awakened his suspicions anew.

The man was listening; the strange look upon his face showed that easily enough. He was listening—for what?

For the footsteps of rescuers? The hero of the Shell did not know. But he knew that something was working in the prisoner's mind, and he was watchful.

Tom Merry turned over in his mind the thought of going back to town and waiting in the station for the train. But if the seafaring man had any friends there, that was the way to set them on the track. And the two Spaniards, too, might have come on by the next train, and might be hanging about. It was best to remain in cover until the last

possible moment, and especially to keep the seafaring man under watch as long as possible.

Tom Merry decided to remain where he was.

But he was very watchful. The cracking of a twig in the wood made him start and look round him. But the minutes passed and nothing happened. The anxiety in the face of the bound man was now intense. Tom Merry understood his anxiety. If help did not come for him his schemes were ruined for good. If he was left bound in the wood while the juniors went on to Southampton, he might as well throw up his cards at once. But did he hope for help to come?

Tom Merry gave a jump.

Echoing through the wood from a distance came a long, peculiar whistle, somewhat like the unusual call of a parrot.

Was it a signal?

Tom Merry's eyes sought the bound man at once. He had given a start, and was working his jaws furiously, evidently in the attempt to get rid of the gag.

Tom Merry smiled grimly.

"So that's a signal of your friends, is it?" he said.

The man's eyes gleamed. He worked fiercely with his jaws, but the gag was tied too well for him to move it, and Blake stood ready to jam his hand over the man's mouth if he succeeded in loosening it.

The man fixed his eyes upon Tom Merry's. Tom Merry, arrested by his looks, came closer to him.

"You have something to say to me?" he asked.

The seafaring man nodded.

"Untie his right hand, Blake, and I'll give him a pencil."

"Right-ho!"

"The other chaps keep watch."

"Yaas, watah!"

A pencil was placed in the man's free hand. Tom Merry held the cover of his timetable for him to write upon.

The man scrawled hastily, evidently listening all the time for a repetition of the signal in the wood.

"Give me the packet, and go unmolested."

Tom Merry laughed.

"It was not worth writing that down," he said. "Of course, I shall do nothing of the sort. Have you anything else to say?"

The prisoner nodded.

The pencil scratched over the cover of the book again.

"My friends are near. They are armed. They will not hesitate at bloodshed. The packet will cost you your lives."

The juniors read each word as it was written. Some of the faces turned pale. It would be no light matter to be attacked by armed desperadoes in the wood. They had no resource if deadly weapons were used against them. Tom Merry set his teeth.

"I shall not give you the packet!" he said.

The pencil scratched on.

"Then you will be shot! You cannot escape from the wood. My friends are searching for me. You will fall into their hands."

"I shall risk that."

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is gettin' watah sewious. Pewwaps you had better give the packet, that's all. If you are gone with the packet, and you fellows can covah the wetweat."

"My word!" said Digby. "That's not a bad idea. If the villains mean to shoot, Tom Merry, we can't do anything. Suppose you slide off by yourself, and get back to the town, and we'll take the attentions of the scoundrels. We'll make a row here, and draw them to the spot, while you slide off."

Tom Merry's eyes brightened.

"A ripping idea!" he exclaimed. "If you fellows will run the risk—"

"Well, they're hardly likely to hurt us for nothing," said Blake. "They might shoot as a last resource to get the packet, that's all. If you are gone with the packet, we shall be safe enough."

"Yaas, watah! But you had better let me—"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You fellows all agreeable?" asked Tom Merry, looking round.

"Yes, rather!"

"Then I'll buzz off," said Tom Merry. "If you draw them here, I shall very likely get a clear run back to town, and can take the train. You fellows come on to Southampton later, and meet me at the hotel where we stopped with Lord Conway when we went to the South Seas."

"Right you are!"

From the wood, but nearer at hand, came the long, shrill whistle once more, echoing among the trees. Tom Merry set his teeth.

"I'm off!" he said. "We must think of the packet first. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Tommy!"

Tom Merry plunged into the trees. For a moment there

was a rustle in the thickets, and then silence. Tom Merry was worming his way through the woods with all the caution he had gained by his experience as a Boy Scout.

The prisoner clenched his hand. He realised only too well how this might baffle him, even if his friends effected his rescue.

"We may as well let them hear us now," Figgins muttered. "It will keep them from looking out for Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins opened a bottle of ginger-beer with a loud pop. Kerr dropped a plate upon a bottle, and it broke with a crash. The juniors waited and listened. The sound had been heard in the silence of the wood; that was very clear, for in a few minutes there was a rustle in the bushes, and a swarthy man came running into the glade. It was the man with the ear-rings.

CHAPTER 11.  
Flying Lead!

THE Spaniard stopped in amazement at the sight of the bound man in the grass, and the juniors standing in a group.

He gazed at the strange scene, and then ran forward again, towards the seafaring man.

The juniors of St. Jim's ran into his way.

"Hands off!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Stand back, you dweadful wuffian!"

The Spaniard stared at the juniors for a moment, and then his hand went into his pocket. It came out again with something in it that gleamed and shone. It was a polished steel barrel.

A thrill ran through the juniors as the man with the ear-rings raised the revolver. Would he shoot?

His dark and desperate face seemed to indicate that he would. In spite of themselves the juniors retreated.

"Keep back!" said the man with the ear-rings, in a savage tone. "I am not to be played with! I would shoot you as soon as look at you! Caramba!"

"You hound!"

"Stand back!"

The Spaniard approached the bound man. The juniors exchanged glances; but they could not interfere. They had no weapon to oppose to a loaded revolver. The man with the ear-rings held the trump card.

Still holding the revolver in his right hand, the Spaniard bent over the bound man, opened a knife with his left hand and his teeth, and cut through the rope. He cut the string and jerked the gag away.

The seafaring man licked his cramped lips, and mumbled. For some moments he could not speak articulately.

"Ha, mi amigo!" the Spaniard grinned. "You have allowed yourself to be taken by a set of boys. It is fortunate that we followed."

The seafaring man mumbled.

"Which of them has the packet, Senor Gally?" said the Spaniard, his black eyes roving over the group. "Do not move, ninos, or I shall shoot!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He is gone!" gasped the seafaring man, whom the Spaniard called Gally, finding his voice at last.

The Spaniard stared.

"Gone! What do you mean, senor?"

"He has gone."

"But—"

The seafaring man licked his lips.

"Don't you see?" he sneered. "These young villains have remained, to put you off the scent, and the other one—Merry they call him—has fled with the packet."

The Spaniard seemed utterly taken aback.

"Gone!" he muttered. "Fled! But he was here!"

"He was here five minutes ago."

"Five minutes! Cinco! Caramba! Then I will have him yet! Yanex is in the wood, and may fall in with him. Which way, senor?"

"Come with me!"

Gally sprang to his feet. He gave a cry of pain as he moved his limbs, cramped from the ropes that had held him fast so long. His face went white for a moment; but he did not heed the pain. Gritting his teeth hard, he tramped into the wood quickly in the direction Tom Merry had taken.

The Spaniard followed him.

The juniors started in the same direction, but the ear-ringed Spaniard swung round and his revolver came up to a level.

"Not a step this way, ninos," he said between his teeth, "or I shall fire!"

He plunged into the trees.

"Hang it!" said Figgins resolutely. "We're not going to leave Tom Merry alone with three scoundrels looking for him! Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll risk it," said Jack Blake. "The scoundrel will hardly dare to commit murder, with all his blessed swank!"

The juniors dashed into the wood after the two scoundrels. From the bushes ahead a swarthy face looked fiercely back, and a gleaming barrel swung to a level among the bushes.

"Look out!" shrieked Blake.

Crack!

The pistol-shot rang out like the crack of a whip. Blake dragged Figgins back, who was rushing on ahead. Figgins gave a sharp cry.

"Good heavens! Are you hit?"

Crack!

The second bullet tore through the branches over them and brought down a little shower of twigs. The Spaniard disappeared in the wood and the juniors halted. They gathered round Figgins, who was very pale.

He held up his arm. A hole had been torn on the inside of his sleeve—the first bullet had passed between his arm and his body. Had not Blake dragged him back when he did the lead would have gone through his body instead of barely missing it.

"That was a jolly narrow escape," muttered Figgins. "My hat! The scoundrel meant to shoot me down! They're in deadly earnest."

"What will become of Tom Merry?"

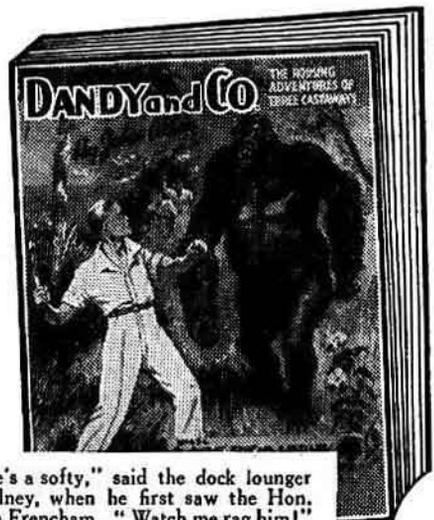
"I—I hope he won't resist if they find him," muttered Lowther, with white lips. "After all, he may get clear; and if he doesn't he won't be ass enough to buck against a loaded revolver."

"Wathah not!"

"We'd better get back to the town," said Figgins soberly.



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"Here's a softy," said the dock loungee at Sydney, when he first saw the Hon. Evelyn Frencham. "Watch me rag him!" Hank Brodie and Bill Mullins, of the steamer Simoon, were just going to the Dandy's help when they saw the burly loungee knocked into the water with one smack from Frencham's fist. "Gosh!" murmured Hank. "He may be a dandy, but he's a corker, too! And when the three of them shared the perils of shipwreck together, landing on an island inhabited by man-apes and pygmies, the Dandy proved himself more of a corker than ever. Here's a regular dandy yarn, and a corker, too! Get it to-day.

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"Only it's no good getting near that villain again. He means to shoot."

"If we had a firearm or two it would make a difference," muttered Blake; "but fists are no good against a popper like that. Better keep our distance."

It was evidently the only thing to do. They proceeded at a more moderate pace, keeping in the same direction. The Spaniard had long disappeared, and all sound of him was lost in the silence of the wood. The juniors listened with straining ears in momentary fear of hearing a pistol-shot, which might mean that Tom Merry had fallen a victim to the savage Spaniard. But the silence of the wood was unbroken.

They were near the border of the wood when a loud, shrill whistle came to their ears from the depths of the trees. They halted.

"That's one of the villains signalling to another," said Blake. "I wonder if it means—"

He paused.

"That they've found Tom Merry?" said Figgins.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! Listen!"

The signal whistle was repeated from a greater distance, only the faint echo of it reaching the juniors' ears. Then silence.

They listened tensely.

But there was no further whistle—no sound in the wood—no crack of a pistol such as they dreaded to hear.

"What does it mean?" muttered Figgins faintly. "Have they found Tom Merry?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Which direction did the whistle come from?"

"One could hardly tell."

The juniors looked at each other hopelessly. To plunge into the trackless thickets in search of Tom Merry seemed useless. Perhaps the hero of the Shell had got clear and was already waiting for them at the railway station. If he was still in the wood they had no chance of finding him.

"We'd better get to the station," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm afraid it's the only thing to do, deal boy."

And the others assented.

They tramped on out of the wood and across the meadows. There was no sign of Tom Merry in the fields, but he might be already in the town. They hurried on to the railway station, and there they searched for the hero of the Shell.

But Tom Merry was not to be seen. It was clear that he had not returned to the station.

They gave up the search with sinking hearts and waited.

What could they do? To return to the wood was useless. There was no clue to his whereabouts, and he might be already in the town. He might arrive at the railway station at any moment. To go to the police—the stolid country police—would not be of much use, even if they believed the story. To wait where they were for Tom Merry—that was the only thing to do. It was the arrangement they had made, and it was best to keep to it. But they were filled with anxiety while they waited.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Robbed!

**T**OM MERRY ran quickly through the wood after leaving his comrades in the glade. He kept his head low and ran softly and silently, keeping his eyes well about him.

A rustle in the thickets made him halt suddenly, and he started back as a swarthy man leaped out. It was the man named Yanex, the comrade of the man with the ear-rings.

The swarthy scoundrel rushed straight at him, and Tom Merry, with a desperate leap, bounded into the bushes and ran. He heard tramping footsteps behind him for a minute or two, and laboured breathing, and then the sounds died away as the Spaniard missed him in the wood.

Tom Merry ran on some distance, and then stopped to take breath and consider. To go on in the direction of the town was to court capture, for Yanex would certainly watch in that direction now that he had missed him.

The junior decided to make a wide detour through the wood and leave it at some other point. After all, he could reach Southampton across country by devious ways, and he could explain to his chums afterwards. Anything would do so long as it enabled him to keep the packet safe from the Spaniards.

He halted again as he heard the distant sound of pistol-shots. A sick feeling came over him, and his strength seemed to leave him for a moment. Had any of his

comrades fallen at the murderous hands of the Spaniards? Had he brought them away from the school for that?

He tramped on more slowly. The two shots had not been followed by more, and they had told him the direction to avoid, at all events.

He had quite lost his way in the wood by this time.

The country was strange to him. He had never been in the wood before, and whether he was keeping a straight course or wandering in a circle he could not tell.

He fell into a footpath at last and followed it, hoping that it would lead him to somewhere where he could discover his whereabouts. The afternoon sun was glinting through the trees, and Tom Merry was growing tired. He fell into a slower walk.

Suddenly, from the thick bough of a tree over the path, a form dropped, and before the junior could defend himself he was seized and flung to the earth.

A savage, swarthy face bent over him and a knife was pressed to his body. A knee was on his chest holding him down.

Yanex, the Spaniard, grinned down at him.

"So I have found you again, seniorito!"

"You foreign hound, let me go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Yanex laughed, and then uttered a whistle that rang through the woods—the signal whistle that the juniors had heard at a distance. It was answered from the wood, and there was a sound of running feet a few minutes later and the seafaring man and Juan Rodriguez came panting up.

They uttered a simultaneous exclamation of satisfaction at the sight of Tom Merry in the grasp of the Spaniard.

"It is he!" exclaimed Rodriguez.

"Tom Merry, as they call him," grinned Gally. "He does not look so merry now. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rascals laughed cheerily. They knew that the packet was upon Tom Merry, and they were exultant. Yanex held the junior pinned to the earth, white and desperate.

"Have you taken the packet, Yanex?" asked Gally.

"No. I can feel it in his pocket."

"I will take it," said the ear-ringed Spaniard.

He thrust his hand into Tom Merry's breast-pocket and drew out the packet of Sir Richard Standish.

His black eyes snapped with satisfaction at the sight of it.

"Por Dios, it is the same—the very same!"

"Good!" said Gally eagerly.

"You thieves! You scoundrels!" cried Tom Merry.

Gally laughed.

"Keep him tight, Yanex, while we examine the packet."

"Lend me aid to tie him up," said Yanex. The ear-ringed Spaniard drew a cord from his pocket, and whipped it round Tom Merry's wrists and ankles in a twinkling and knotted it fast. Then the junior was lifted from the footpath and tossed into a thicket. Gally looked at him with a grin as he rolled breathlessly in the underwood.

"Your turn now," he remarked.

"You villain!"

"You can lie there and yell till someone hears you!" grinned the seafaring man. "It is not likely to happen soon. But do not yell while we are within hearing, or I shall come to you and silence you in a way you will not like."

The three ruffians opened the packet in a glade close at hand, the bound junior lying within sound of the murmur of their voices, although he could not distinguish the words.

Their talk was in English; the seafaring man probably did not know the Spanish tongue.

Gally laid the packet on the greensward and cut the string and unsealed it. It was sealed with red sealing-wax. He removed the outer cover of thick brown paper and took up a note that lay inside. The note was open, and ran as follows:

"To Captain Crane, of the steamer Opossum.

"This is the packet of which you were advised by my wire. You will get steam up immediately and proceed to sea, and after sailing in a westerly direction into the Atlantic for two days, you will take off the second wrapping of this paper and you will find further instructions within.—RICHARD STANDISH."

Gally whistled softly.

"You understand that?" he asked after reading the paper out slowly to the two Spaniards.

"Si, si!" said Rodriguez.

Another wrapping of the paper was removed.

A second note was disclosed. It ran:

"To Captain Crane.

"On reading this you will make for Cape Three Points, on the West African Coast, and you will deliver this packet, without opening it further, into the hands of my agent, Henry Hudson, who will come aboard and ask for it.—RICHARD STANDISH."

The ear-ringed Spaniard's fingers twitched.

"This is the packet that contains the maps and plans," he muttered.

"Undoubtedly."

"Caramba! We have succeeded."

"We have obtained the papers," said the seafaring man slowly, "but we have not yet obtained the concession of the rubber territory. We have only made a beginning. And listen to me, my friend. As soon as this boy returns to Sir Richard Standish, and reports that he has been robbed of the packet, the baronet will cable to his agent

shall judge. I have materials here. I am never without them."

He drew a writing-case from his coat and opened it. He sat upon a fallen tree and made a desk of the case, copying the letter of Sir Richard Standish with unwearied patience half a dozen times. He had great skill with the pen, and this was evidently not his first forgery; the sixth attempt was an almost exact facsimile of Sir Richard's letter.

He held it up for the two Spaniards to read.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"It is wonderful; I should never have known which letter was yours and which was Sir Richard's."

"Good enough."

Gally crumpled up the letters. He took a fresh sheet and wrote afresh, not a copy of Sir Richard's letter this time, but a fresh letter in an exact imitation of Sir Richard's handwriting.



A thrill ran through the St. Jim's juniors as the Spaniard's hand flashed to his pocket and came out gripping a revolver. "Keep back!" hissed Rodriguez savagely. "Caramba! I am not to be played with—I would shoot you as soon as look at you!"

to take every step against us—to have us watched for, to have us spied upon, to leave no stone unturned to baffle us."

The Spaniard made a gesture.

"The boy need not return!" he muttered.

Gally shrugged his shoulders.

"Naturally your first thought, Juan. But there are the others—eight others, scattered in the wood, and if one of them returns to make the report to Sir Richard, all is spoiled, the same as if Merry returned."

"Caramba! What do you propose, then?"

Gally smiled, a cunning, cold smile.

"You know my old skill with the pen," he said, sinking his voice. "What do you say to making up a dummy packet for this boy to deliver to the captain of the Opossum? We can return it to him as if we were mistaken, and he will take it to the steamer at Southampton and deliver it to the skipper. The captain will sail under sealed orders, but they will be a little different."

The ear-ringed Spaniard grinned.

"Por Dios!" he said. "You are cunning, Senor Gally!"

The seafaring man laughed.

"I have done more difficult things," he said, "but you

"To Captain Crane, of the steamer Opossum.

"On receiving this, you will immediately get steam up and proceed to sea. You will take the boys who bring this message with you, it being my wish and the wish of their headmaster that they should make the voyage and see a little of Africa before they return. You will make for Cape Three Points, on the West African Coast, and hand this packet, unopened, to my agent, Mr. Henry Hudson, and also place the boys in his care.—

"RICHARD STANDISH."

Gally read the letter in a low voice to the two Spaniards. Rodriguez gasped.

"Dios! Do you think he will obey?"

"Why not? The order is nothing to awaken suspicion. He is certainly completely under the orders of Sir Richard, or he could not be trusted to sail under sealed orders."

"True."

"My opinion is that he will sail without question, and take the boys with him. I will make up a dummy packet, with this note under the outside wrapper. That the packet is a false one cannot be discovered until the steamer is at

Cape Three Points, when it will be opened by Mr. Henry Hudson, and he will find only wastepaper in it."

"Caramba! It is good!"

The seafaring man was very busy for the next few minutes. He chuckled softly as he made up the dummy packet which was to be delivered to the captain of the Opossum at Southampton.

### CHAPTER 13. The False Packet!

**T**OM MERRY lay alone in the thicket. He had struggled with his bonds for some time, but it was useless, and he gave up at last the attempt to free himself.

He lay listening to the murmur of the voices of the three rascals, and wondering why they did not take the opportunity of escaping with their prize.

The junior's heart was very heavy. He had lost the packet entrusted to him by Sir Richard Standish. It was not his fault. It was certain now that the ear-ringed Spaniard had overheard the baronet and the doctor discussing the scheme at St. Jim's. The rascals were in full possession of the plan. The fault was not Tom Merry's; but the loss of the packet weighed upon his mind.

There was a step in the thicket, and the seafaring man appeared. His breast-pocket was bulging, as if the packet was there. He bent over Tom Merry and untied him. The junior, surprised and relieved, sprang to his feet.

"Now go!" said the seafaring man. "And if you fall into our way again, beware!"

He strode away through the wood.

Tom Merry hesitated a moment.

That the seafaring man had the packet he was certain, and that he had parted from his comrades was equally clear. Would it be a chance to tackle him? But the man was doubtless armed, and he was too powerful for a boy to attack.

Tom Merry, wondering, followed the man, who was making in the direction of the town.

Gally strode on, apparently unconscious of the fact that he was shadowed.

Tom Merry's heart beat hard as they drew near the town. Was it possible that Gally was going to the railway station?

If he wished to go on to Southampton he would have to do so, but—

Gally looked round as he quitted the wood, and Tom Merry dodged into the thickets.

The seafaring man strode across the fields and disappeared. Tom Merry ran. The man was making for the railway station, there was no doubt about that; he could hardly have any other motive for entering the town, but he did not know that Tom Merry was shadowing him. That was how the Shell fellow worked it out.

Tom Merry took a side-street to avoid the seafaring man, and made for the railway station at a run.

He hoped to find his chums there. But if he did not find them, he could call upon the police to seize the seafaring man, and force him to deliver up the packet belonging to Sir Richard Standish.

Tom Merry's hopes were high now.

He wondered why the rascals had not left him bound in the wood. But he might have starved there, and doubtless they did not wish to risk being charged with murder. And the seafaring man doubtless had no fear of a mere boy.

Tom Merry reached the railway station breathless.

There was a shout as he dashed in:

"There he is!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Tom Merry!"

The juniors of St. Jim's, overjoyed to see their leader safe and sound, surrounded him and clapped him on the back, and shook his hands. Fatty Wynn affectionately tried to press a sandwich into his hand.

"Where have you been?"

"What has happened?"

"Is the packet safe?"

Tom Merry gasped.

"They've taken it."

There was a general exclamation. The juniors stared at Tom Merry in dismay. They had expected it, but it was a blow.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "That's wotten, you know!"

"Beastly!" said Blake ruefully.

"There's a chance yet," said Tom Merry eagerly. "I'm on the track of the scoundrel. He's left the Spaniards, and I'm certain he has the packet, and I'm sure he's coming to this station!"

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"Bai Jove!"

"We can lay for him, and have it off him in no time if he comes," said Tom Merry. "Of course, he won't dare to call for help—we could have him arrested."

"Wippin', deah boy!"

"Yes—if he comes!" said Kerr dubiously.

"Oh, he doesn't know I followed him from the wood!"

And he doesn't know you chaps are here."

"I should think he would guess both," said Kerr, still very doubtfully.

"I don't see why," said Digby. "Anyway, if he comes to the station that's proof that he doesn't guess, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins, who was looking out of the station doorway. "Here he comes!"

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Tom Merry triumphantly.

Kerr shook his head.

"Well, I can't understand it, that's all," he said.

Gally entered the station.

The seafaring man came straight on without looking about him, apparently not seeing the juniors, and made directly for the booking-office.

Tom Merry & Co. closed round him at once.

That he should be so utterly reckless in coming to the station surprised Kerr and made him vaguely uneasy of some kind of trickery. But the rest of the juniors were satisfied. The man had not expected them to be there, and he had come to the railway station as the quickest way of getting far from the scene of the robbery.

The man started as the juniors closed round him in a circle and faced them, his hand going to his pocket.

"Don't be fool enough to draw a weapon here!" said Tom Merry. "We have only to call in the police!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The seafaring man ground his teeth.

"What do you want?" he muttered sullenly.

"The—the packet!"

"Yes, the one you stole from me in the wood," said Tom Merry. "Hand it over at once, or we shall take it by force."

"I—I—"

"Hand it ovah, you uttah wottah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, I am greatly inclined to give you a feahful thwashin', anyway!"

"Hand it over, you thief!"

"I—I haven't it!" faltered the seafaring man. "The Spaniard—Juan Rodriguez—has it, and he is gone to—London."

Tom Merry laughed scornfully.

"I think I can see it through your coat now," he said.

"Anyway, we know you have it, and if you do not hand it over we shall search you for it."

"And give you a feahful thwashin' into the bargain, you uttah wascal!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, bump him!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "What's the good of wasting words on a boulder like that? Collar him and bump him!"

"Good egg!"

"Collar the cad!"

"Belay, there!" exclaimed the seafaring man hastily. "I'll give you the packet! Hang you!"

He dragged the packet from his pocket and threw it upon the floor with an oath.

Tom Merry stooped and picked it up. To all appearances the packet was the same as when it had been taken from him. He turned it over in his hands. It did not seem to have even been opened.

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"You have not opened this?" he asked.

"I've not had time, hang you! I had to dodge the Spaniards—"

"Oh, then you have played them false?"

"That's my business!"

"It's all the better if it has prevented you from opening the packet," said Tom Merry. "You can go; and you're lucky not to be arrested. Mind, if you follow us again—if you attempt to take the same train I shall point you out to the police at once. I have a definite charge to make against you now, and you know you can be arrested for it."

"Better see him off in the next up-train, to make sure," said Kerr, the ever cautious.

"Good idea!"

The seafaring man clenched his hand.

"You've got the packet," he said. "Let me go! I—"

"You'll come on the platform with us and get into the first up-train," said Tom Merry. "You can take your choice of walking or being carried. If you make a row, we will call in the police, and you'll get taken into custody. I don't want to waste time here in charging you at the police station, but I will do it if you don't instantly do as you are told."

"I'm in your hands," said the seafaring man sullenly.  
 "It's just as well that you understand that," said Tom Merry.

Porters and loungers were gathered round, looking on. The juniors hurried the seafaring man upon the up platform; and ten minutes later a train came in. It did not stop till Wayland, and the man would be safely off the track before the juniors restarted upon their journey to Southampton.

Gally made no further demur about entering the train. He stepped into a carriage, a scowl upon his face. The juniors waited for the train to go out before leaving him.

The train started, and the last the St. Jim's fellows saw of the seafaring man was his dark and scowling face looking sullenly at them from the windows of the carriage. Then the train rolled swiftly away and they saw him no more.

But they would not have felt so satisfied if they could have seen him after the train had left the station and he was safe from observation.

The scowl upon his face faded away and was replaced by a grin of derision.

CHAPTER 14.

Aboard the Opossum!

THE juniors made their way to the down platform. The train they had intended to catch was gone, and they had to wait nearly an hour for another, and in the meantime Fatty Wynn proposed a feed. It was late in the afternoon now, and as there was a buffet at the station, Fatty Wynn's suggestion was adopted, and the juniors made a meal while they were waiting for the train.

Kerr was looking very thoughtful as he ate. Kerr's expression drew Tom Merry's eyes upon him. Tom Merry was in great spirits. The packet reposed in his breast-pocket once more; it had been, as he believed, unopened, and all was well. He never even dreamed that the scene at the station and the surrender of the false packet was a comedy planned between the seafaring man and his associates. Kerr did not suspect so much as that, but he was suspicious and dissatisfied. He had a vague feeling that something was wrong somewhere.

"What's the trouble with you, Kerr?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully. "You ought to be looking a bit more chirpy now, I should think. We've come out of it all right."

Kerr nodded.  
 "Yes, it looks like it," he assented.  
 "Looks like it," repeated Blake. "What do you mean? We've got the packet back, haven't we?"

"I suppose so."  
 "And it hasn't been opened," said Figgins.  
 "So it seems."  
 "Seems!" exclaimed Tom Merry, a little exasperated. "Hang it all, Kerr, you can see for yourself that it hasn't been opened. My opinion is that the rascals quarrelled about it, and the man we took it from bolted with it and left the others in the lurch."

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "Queer that he should stop to set you loose, then," said Kerr.  
 "Well, yes. Perhaps he didn't bolt with it. Perhaps he made them bolt—threatened them, or something. He's a desperate character."

"Not so desperate as Rodriguez. He fired at Figgins in the wood, and he might have killed him," said Kerr.

"Well, that is so, too. But look here! We've got the packet, and it's sealed up just as it was before. It's all nonsense to suppose that if he had opened it he would have sealed it up again to carry in his pocket."

"Well, yes, I suppose so," admitted Kerr.  
 "Then isn't it certain it hasn't been opened?" demanded Digby.

"I suppose so."  
 "Blessed if your supposer isn't working double time!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.  
 "What is it you suspect about it, Kerr?" asked Tom Merry.

Kerr shook his head.  
 "I don't know," he said candidly. "But there seems to me to be something fishy about the whole bizney, that's all. I can't get on to it, but it doesn't seem to me to be all serene, somehow. But that's all. Better let it drop."  
 "Oh, you're a blessed suspicious bounder!" said Manners. "You never are satisfied about anything, you know."

Kerr laughed.  
 "Very well. Let it go at that."  
 Tom Merry looked a little worried.  
 "Well, Kerr is a keen chap," he said. "If he isn't satisfied, it makes me think there may be something wrong, but I'm blessed if I can see what it is."  
 "I can't, either," said Kerr. "So it's no good bothering

(Continued on the next page.)



*"I'll help you with your sums for that Fry's Cream Tablet"*

- "Nothing doing. I've done 'em."
- "All right, I'll swop two unused Malay States."
- "Not for a whole bar. Half."
- "Oh, all right—miser."

**The most and the best for a penny**

**FRY'S**

**1<sup>D</sup> MONSTER CHOCOLATE CREAM**

J. S. FRY & SONS, LTD., SOMERDALE, SOMERSET.

about it. After all, I dare say it's all right. If it isn't, it can't be helped, that's all."

"What do you fellows think about it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, it's all right!" said all, excepting Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

Fatty Wynn was too busy eating to speak. "Yaas, wathah! It's all sewene!" D'Arcy added emphatically.

"What do you think, Fatty?"

"Oh, it's splendid!"

"Splendid!" said Tom Merry, puzzled. "What on earth do you mean by splendid?"

"This tuck," said Fatty Wynn innocently. "You asked me if it was all right, didn't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the joke?" asked Fatty Wynn. "It's ripping tuck! I shall make a note of the name of this station."

"You fat boulder! I was asking you if you thought it was all right about the packet?"

"Oh, the packet!" said Fatty Wynn. "Yes, that's all right, I suppose. You've got it, haven't you? I wonder if they've got any more meat patties like this?"

"Oh rats! The train's coming in. Hurry up!"

Tom Merry paid the bill, and led the way from the buffet. Fatty Wynn lingered behind, his eyes upon the sausages. Kerr and Figgins seized him by the arm and ran him out upon the platform. The train had stopped.

"I—I say!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn anxiously. "I could take something to eat in the train, you know. They're ripping! I only want a few—say a couple of dozen."

"In you get!"

"Look here, I'll get a dozen——"

"Buzz in!"

"I shall be hungry before we get to Southampton, and——"

"Pitch him in!"

Fatty Wynn was bundled into the train, and the rest of the juniors followed him. The fat Fourth Former's voice was loud in protest as he plumped into a seat. And he did not cease till the train was rolling out of the station.

Then he turned an indignant glare upon the other fellows.

"If I'm ill when we get to Southampton it will be your fault, Figgy!" he said.

Figgins grinned.

"I'll take the blame!" he replied cheerfully.

"I always get specially hungry at this time of the year," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "Any of you fellows put any buns in your pockets?"

No fellow had.

"Got any milk-chocolate or butterscotch?"

"Not a piece!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Grooh!"

And Fatty Wynn, as there was nothing to eat, went to sleep, and did not wake up till the train steamed into Southampton.

Tom Merry & Co. were in high spirits as the train ran in. They had succeeded in getting the packet to its destination, in spite of the fact that the ear-ringed Spaniard had overheard the baronet's plans and that the three rascals had lain in wait for the juniors on the way. They had something to pride themselves upon.

They alighted from the train in the red sunset. Figgins and Kerr shook Fatty Wynn with violent hands, and the fat Fourth Former started up, rubbing his eyes.

"Gerrout!" he murmured. "'Tain't rising-bell."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I believe I've been asleep!" yawned Fatty Wynn.

"Yes; I believe you have. Roll out!"

Fatty Wynn rolled out. Tom Merry & Co. inquired for the Opossum, and in a short time they were in a boat being rowed out to the steamer, which was lying in the harbour. Tom Merry's face was very bright.

"There she is!" he exclaimed, as he caught sight of the name painted in white letters upon a black hull—"The Opossum."

The boat ran up to the side of the steamer, and in a few minutes Tom Merry & Co. were treading the deck of the Opossum, and Tom Merry, having explained his errand to a big-bearded mate, he was taken down into the captain's cabin to deliver his message.

## CHAPTER 15.

### Bound for Africa!

CAPTAIN CRANE, of the steamer Opossum, was a stout, bluff sailorman, with steady blue eyes and rugged features that told of honesty and determination. Tom Merry understood at once Sir Richard's reliance upon him. He was the very man to sail under

sealed orders, and to obey his instructions, as far as they went, to the very letter.

He did not seem surprised by Tom Merry's message. He had had a telegram from the baronet warning him of a messenger, and it only remained for him to open the packet and ascertain whether any reply was to be sent by Tom Merry.

"Thank you, my lad," he said, as Tom Merry laid the mysterious packet upon the table. "Sit down while I see if I have any answer to give you."

"Yes, sir."

Captain Crane removed the outer covering of the packet. Tom Merry watched him with intent eyes. The other juniors were waiting on deck. The hero of the Shell could not help feeling curious about the packet. The mystery of it, and the desperate attempts of the ear-ringed Spaniard and his associates to obtain possession of it, could not fail to have that effect.

Captain Crane read the letter to himself. A slightly surprised look came over his face, and he glanced at Tom Merry.

"Do you know what is in this letter?" he asked.

"No, sir," said the junior.

"Sir Richard told you nothing?"

"Only to deliver to you the packet, and that you would remove the outer covering and find a letter there. I asked him no questions."

"You had better read the letter, then," said the skipper.

"It concerns you."

"Concerns me?" Tom Merry repeated in surprise.

"Yes, you and your friends."

Tom Merry took the letter. He read it, blank amazement in his face. Captain Crane had been prepared for anything, but Tom Merry was not prepared for what he read.

"To Captain Crane, of the steamer Opossum.

"On receiving this you will immediately get steam up and proceed to sea. You will take the boys who bring this message with you, it being my wish and the wish of their headmaster that they should make the voyage and see a little of Africa before they return. You will make for Cape Three Points, on the West African coast, and hand this packet, unopened, to my agent, Mr. Henry Hudson, and also place the boys in his care.—

"RICHARD STANDISH."

Tom Merry gave a long, low whistle.

"I suppose that is a surprise to you," said the skipper.

"My hat! I should say so, sir! Africa—a run to Africa!" Tom Merry's eyes danced. "And are you going to take us with you, sir?"

"I shall obey Sir Richard's orders exactly, of course." He picked up the packet. The inner portion of it was tied and sealed, as the outward cover had been. The skipper of the Opossum unlocked an iron safe and placed the packet in it, together with the baronet's letter. "We shall be under way in half an hour. Have you boys made any preparations for the voyage?"

"None, sir. We hadn't the faintest idea."

"I shall have to go ashore," said the skipper. "I will send on some things that you will want, so far as I can. There will be no time for you to go and get anything."

"We don't mind roughing it, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly. "Could we send a wire to the Head, sir, telling him we've arrived all right? But I suppose that would be giving the secret away, perhaps. Sir Richard said that not a word was to be said. He was very anxious not to let it possibly leak out that we were coming to this ship."

"Better say nothing, my lad. The Head will know you are safe. He will see in the paper that the Opossum has sailed, and he will not suppose that nine boys have been lost without leaving a trace behind."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Very well, sir."

He returned to the deck. The captain went ashore at once to make his final arrangements. Tom Merry joined his chums on the deck, and they all looked at him in wonder.

"What's the news?" asked Monty Lowther.

"We're not going back."

"What?"

"We're sailing in the steamer in half an hour for Africa."

"Gammon!"

"Rot!"

"Bosh!"

"Draw it mild!"

"Come off, you ass!"

Quite a chorus of incredulity greeted Tom Merry's statement, but the hero of the Shell only laughed.

"It's a fact!" he said.

"But it can't be," said Figgins. "What are you getting at?"

(Continued on page 28.)

THERE ARE THRILLS IN PLENTY IN THIS GRIPPING ST. FRANK'S YARN!



BY EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

### Figures in the Fog!

**F**OG, dense and impenetrable, lay over the Sussex countryside. The fine old buildings and towers of St. Frank's were blotted out by the blanket of murk. A silence—that silence which only a dense fog can produce—brooded over the school. During the afternoon the fog had swept inland from the sea, and by nightfall it had spread and thickened; and now, as the hour of midnight approached, it was so incredibly dense that a hand could not be seen before one's face.

It made little difference, perhaps, to St. Frank's, which lay in peaceful slumber; but in the busier world beyond it was to be known as the worst and blackest fog which the South of England had known for many years. All traffic on the roads was brought to a standstill, ships were locked in their harbours, railway traffic was disorganised.

Yet in the peaceful district of St. Frank's this old-fashioned "pea-souper" was to bring its grim excitement.

Vague shapes, just a little blacker than the fog, moved in the Triangle. There were six of them, and for all the sounds they made they might have been phantoms. Although it was impossible to see any of the buildings, the mysterious figures made their way towards West Arch.

The leader, unhurried, with hands outstretched, gropingly found the stonework of the arch. He felt his way through, and the others noiselessly followed.

There was nothing of chance in the leader's movements; he had a definite objective. He felt his way round the inner wall of the square, and then along the line of lower windows of the Ancient House.

The mysterious priests of Taaz were seeking another victim!

Ten boys of St. Frank's, many weeks ago, had gazed upon the face of Raa-ok, the high priest of the Temple of Taaz. They had sought to rescue the yellow men of that strange Tibetan cult from a shipwreck, but the priests had refused their aid. Then, by accident, the muffling robes of Raa-ok had been pulled aside; and it was the law of these men who worshipped the Vulture God that unbelievers who gazed upon the sacred face of Raa-ok should die. But the high priest, knowing that the schoolboys had come on an errand of mercy, had been merciful in his own turn. Providing they answered to Taaz, they should be spared. Each and every one must prove himself worthy of continued existence.

And so, as those grim weeks had sped by, boy after boy had been "called." The summons had come at any hour

of the day or night, and eight had answered. There remained but two—McClure and Nipper. For them the suspense was nerve-racking, for as the number had been whittled down, so those who remained felt the added tension. Even Mr. Crowell, the Remove Form-master, had noticed the change in some of his boys. But they dared not give an explanation, for the "marked ten" had been sworn to silence, on threats of death. Last week it had been Jack Grey's turn, and on that occasion the priests of Taaz had nearly been captured by a great crowd of St. Frank's juniors who knew none of the facts. The affair had even got into the newspapers; but for the great majority of people it remained an utter mystery. Only the marked ten knew all.

In every case hitherto the ruthless yellow men had summoned their victims by an extraordinary concentration of will-power. The selected boy had been drawn irresistibly to the prearranged rendezvous.

But the priests of Taaz had discovered, to their cost, that the system was not without its flaws. For sometimes the victim had been followed by his schoolfellows, and this had led to exasperating complications.

To-night, therefore, Yeza, the chief attendant priest, and his men were coming to the very school to seize their next victim. They were taking no chances. They instinctively knew that both McClure and Nipper were on the alert—and their chums, too. To "will" the boys away would be fraught with danger.

The impenetrable fog had come opportunely. The priests were taking full advantage of it, since it allowed them to venture right into the school without risk.

That they were justified in changing their tactics of working was proved by the fact that Nipper had put a simple but ingenious plan into operation. He had done so in order to allay Handforth's anxiety for his chum McClure. During waking hours for a week past Handforth and Church had never allowed McClure out of their sight. In very much the same way Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson had stuck like glue to Nipper.

But at night it was not so easy. True, Handforth and Church and McClure shared one dormitory, and Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson shared another. Since Grey had had his "turn," it was obvious that McClure or Nipper must be the next victim. Handforth had declared that he and Church would take it in turns to sit up all night, watching by McClure's bedside. This had led to Nipper suggesting a simpler plan, and one which involved no loss of sleep for anybody.

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### THE DEVIL'S MIRE!

At the moment, then, Handforth & Co. were sleeping soundly in their dormitory; but strings, tied loosely but securely to McClure's wrists, passed to his chums—one to Handforth, and the other to Church. Thus, if McClure should be "willed" to rise and dress, he could not do so without awakening his dormitory mates. For the priests of Taaz, for all their strange powers, were not gifted with second sight; they knew nothing of the strings, so they could not will their victim to unfasten them before rising.

But the string idea, ingenious though it was, was no protection against a direct attack.

The very fact that such measures had been adopted, however, was an indication of the tense anxiety which held the ten unfortunate Removites in its grip. These were days and nights of nerve-racking suspense indeed!

Outside, in the blanket of fog which obliterated the West Square, the six raiding yellow men behaved surprisingly. At a whispered word from Yeza, the leader, a priest, bigger than the others, planted his feet firmly apart and braced himself. He was an enormous, muscular, raw-boned Mongolian; a creature of the wild, notwithstanding his priestly robes. He possessed the strength of three ordinary men. Effortlessly, it seemed, he seized another of his fellow priests in his arms and swung him up so that the man's feet were planted on his shoulders. The upper man crouched down, reached, and a third swung upwards into the fog, to stand with his feet on the shoulders of the second man. Yeza himself now climbed that human pillar and stood on the shoulders of the third man.

In three strides the living column was flush with the wall of the Ancient House, and the topmost man was actually level with one of the dormitory windows. He was able, therefore, to step lightly upon the sill, after he had felt for it with his fingers. The window was closed, in order to shut the fog out, but the catch was of the simplest type; and after a minute's silent manipulation Yeza felt the case-work moving under his hand. He swung it outwards, and like a shadow he passed into the dormitory, which was silent, except for the steady breathing of Church and McClure, and the characteristic snoring of Edward Oswald Handforth.

Yeza crept towards the beds, guided by sound alone, for the darkness in the room was as great as the darkness outside.

But that darkness was almost immediately dissipated by a faint greenish light which emanated from a glass tube carried by Yeza. So confined was the radius of the light that it was useless until the glass tube was held within a few inches of an object. Actually the tube contained nothing more remarkable than a number of shimmering, phosphorescent glow-worms.

Yeza held this ingenious "lamp" right over Handforth's face, and the glow, insufficient to awaken the boy, yet enabled Yeza to recognise him. Silently the yellow man took something from his pocket; his hand jerked forward, and it seemed that a little cloud of dust settled over Handforth's face. The burly junior sighed, his snoring ceased, and his breathing became slightly laboured. But there was no other change. On more than one occasion the priests of Taaz had used this secret method of putting people to "sleep."

Yeza moved to the next bed and he recognised McClure. His eyes burned with satisfaction. Silently he passed on to the third bed, and Church received his dose of stupefying dust. For twenty seconds Yeza waited, then he snapped his fingers with the tiniest of clicks. Instantly the beam of a very modern electric torch was flashed on; but it was only a small light, for the glass bulb had been covered by a piece of yellow silk. The result was a soft but penetrating radiance.

McClure, who had been sleeping rather restlessly, now sat up abruptly. He was awake in a moment, his eyes wide open. He could not understand the meaning of the strange yellow glow.

"Handy," he whispered, "there's something funny——"  
"Make any outcry, infidel youth, and you are dead!" interrupted the voice of Yeza.

The Scottish junior gulped. He saw, for the first time, the robed figures on either side of his bed. An ugly dagger had suddenly been thrust forward, and it was pressing gently against the jacket of his pyjamas until he could feel the point in his very skin.

"You—you've come for me!" he gasped, as pale as a ghost and trembling in every limb.

"Even as you say, my son," murmured Yeza. "Seek not help from your friends, for we have dealt with them. They will sleep in peace."

"You've killed them?" breathed Mac in horror.

"Nay; they are unharmed," replied the yellow man. "We could have dealt with you similarly; but you have a long

walk ahead of you, and we are not disposed to carry you. Arise from this bed and dress yourself."

McClure suddenly jerked his arms and the string drew tight, but there was no response from Handforth or Church. The priests saw the strings then and cut them.

"'Tis folly to think you can escape the will of the mighty Taaz," said Yeza. "Arise and dress—and, remember, if you make one shout it will be your last living cry!"

McClure was filled with apprehension. He knew that his time had come, and after the weeks of waiting—weeks of suspense—he was looking and feeling a nervous wreck.

Yeza evidently came to the conclusion that his grim warning was not sufficient, for he suddenly motioned to his companion, who took McClure by the shoulders. Then a silken scarf was deftly bound round his face, so that he was effectively gagged.

"Dress yourself!" repeated Yeza relentlessly.

But for McClure, dressing was not such an easy task; his hands trembled so much that he could scarcely hold his clothing; his limbs shook as with an ague. Yeza and the other priests watched with ever increasing grimness, realising that the boy was in no fit condition to undergo any kind of ordeal. But failure meant death. Small wonder that Handforth had taken precautions—alas, so futile!—to protect his chum.

At last McClure was dressed; he had managed to struggle into his clothes. Now he was led to the window, and with one movement Yeza's companion lifted the junior over the sill and held him out in the thick darkness. Hands reached out as though from nowhere, grasping him. He felt himself lowered to the ground—and then figures were hemming him in. Meanwhile, Yeza and his fellow priests were noiselessly lowered.

They moved out of the West Square, fading like phantoms through the fog. The utter silence there was broken by the distant baying of a hound; but presently it ceased, as though the hound knew in some instinctive way that the intruders were now off the premises.

McClure, in the midst of his captors, found himself at the school wall; he was hoisted over into the lane. He did not know how the yellow men kept their sense of direction, for he himself was bewildered, confused, by the icy fog which hemmed him in like solid walls.

But now he was walking along the lane, his arms gripped on either side by the priests. Yeza and another led the way. Two more brought up the rear. In silence they walked on, and to the trembling McClure it seemed that the journey would never end. It was impossible to see the hedges, or even the grass verges at the roadside. But he knew that they had gone up the lane, and not down. This meant that he was being taken away from the village. In this direction the quiet country road led past the Moor View School for Girls, and then went out across the utter desolation of Bannington Moor.

Still they walked on, no word being spoken. McClure had had time to pull himself together, and he knew by now that he was being taken along the moorland road into the very heart of that dreary, deserted wilderness. There was no house for miles, and the fog rendered road traffic impossible. So it was futile to expect help from any quarter. To scream for help in his extremity—for that silken scarf had now been removed—was equally useless.

Now the party left the road and crossed the moor itself, threading their way in and out amongst the gorse and heather, climbing craggy hills, and descending into dank hollows.

McClure knew that the leading priest had been using a light since leaving the road, and there was no doubt that the man was following a definite trail. The priests must have made their preparations well in advance; they had been here before, no doubt, on moonlight nights and they had marked secretly the path they should take, for there was never any faltering. Without pause they continued their progress, and at last McClure felt the ground under-foot becoming soggy and sticky. At every stride his shoes sank into reeking mud; and from the ground, mingling with the fog, came a horrid dankness.

"Why have you brought me here?" Mac burst out, unable to contain himself longer. "The moor is treacherous with bogs, and you're going into the worst part of it."

"It is even as we have learned," agreed Yeza. "My son, your hour is at hand, for we are at our journey's end."

For some little way they had been walking through coarse grass, and now McClure had been brought to a halt on a kind of a grassy square about the size of a golf tee.

He stared in bewilderment and apprehension; for, although he was still hemmed in by the fog, he could see farther ahead of him. Lurid lights, yellow and flickering, dispelled the gloom. The nearest were in full view; they were great flaming torches held by the priests of Taaz; those farther away flared mysteriously in the fog, but were visible dimly.

Out in this desolate waste there was not the slightest risk of interruption—even with those great flaring torches. For there was no moorland track nearer than half a mile, and at such a distance the torchlights were invisible, hidden utterly by the fog. McClure felt that he and his captors were in a world of their own—cut off from the rest of humanity just as though they were a thousand miles from civilisation.

Then suddenly, in the glare from the torches, McClure realised just where he was.

"The Devil's Mire!" he gasped in horror. "People have been killed here—dragged into the bog. It's the most awful place on the whole moor!"

Yeza pointed.  
"Yet, my son, there is a pathway through this mire," he said impressively. "Death lurks in every foot of ground, but somewhere there is a safe path. Taaz has ordained that you shall walk on alone. If you find the path you will reach safety; if not, the bog will drag you down to inevitable death. You have your chance of life. Walk!"

Arnold McClure stood there shaking from head to foot;

Wolf, whose senses were exceptionally acute, must have heard something unusual; or perhaps instinct alone had warned the great dog that all was not as it should be.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Nipper abruptly.  
The strings about his wrists reminded him of the constant danger from the priests of Taaz. He knew that he was unaffected. But what about McClure?

Deftly he unfastened the strings from about his wrists, for he did not wish to awaken Sir Montie and Tommy without good reason; then he silently slid out of bed, and, without waiting to don dressing-gown and slippers, he went out into the icy corridor. In a moment he had reached the dormitory occupied by Handforth & Co., and he went boldly in and switched on the light. His worst fears were realised. McClure's bed was empty!

"So much for our precautions!" muttered Nipper bitterly. A glance told him that McClure's clothing had gone, too. The strings had evidently been cut, for the loose sections were still attached to Handforth and Church. Nipper seized Handforth's shoulder and shook it.

"Wake up, Handy!" he said urgently.



The priests of Taaz stared in superstitious fear as they saw a creature like a ghost hound bounding out of the fog. It was only Nipper's Alsatian, Wolf, treated with luminous paint, but it was upon the terrifying aspect of the dog that depended the life of McClure, sunk to his armpits in the Devil's Mire!

he nearly collapsed. For he knew the ghastly terrors of the Devil's Mire; he knew that one false step would mean certain death!

**The Alarm!**

**N**IPPER sat up in bed, fully awake. These were uneasy nights, and Nipper, always a light sleeper, had of late slept even more lightly than usual.

He could hear dimly and distantly the baying of a hound. That sound, amid the utter silence which prevailed otherwise, seemed unreal and clearly intangible.

Nipper knew why he had awakened. Ordinarily, he might not have heard the muffled baying, but the deathly stillness of the fog accentuated the dog's voice.

"Queer!" muttered Nipper, frowning in the darkness. "It's the first time I've known Wolf to bark in the middle of the night."

Wolf was the fine Alsatian which Nelson Lee sometimes used when tracking criminals; for Wolf was as keen on picking up any scent as a pure bred bloodhound. Nelson Lee had sent him into the country for a spell, and Nipper kept him in the kennels by the side of the paddock.

But he shook in vain. Handforth lay like a log, and Church was obviously in the same condition. Freshly alarmed, Nipper bent down, sniffing. But there was no trace of any drug. The two juniors were breathing evenly, and there was no cause for alarm. But it was clear that they would not awaken for some time. Nipper remembered the peculiar methods used by the men of Taaz to render their enemies insensible.

"The beggars must have come right into the school this time—and they took Mac away with them," Nipper told himself. "And in this fog, what hope is there?"

He walked to the window, opened it, and stared out. He was met by a wall of impenetrable murk. It pressed in upon him. Then suddenly his eyes blazed with intense excitement.

Only for a moment longer did he pause. Then he hurried to the door, switched off the light, and went back to his own dormitory. Ten seconds later Trogellis-West and Watson were awake, blinking dazedly at their chum, listening in bewilderment to what he was saying.

"So they've got Mac, in spite of everything," said Watson, with a shiver. "How did they get him?"

"It's no time for questions," said Nipper, as he rapidly dressed. "Get into your clothes, both of you. Hurry!"

"Begad! We can't do anythin', can we?" asked Sir Montie.

"We might be able to; it all depends," replied Nipper. "Hustle for all you're worth!"

While he was still half-dressed he hurried out and awakened Vivian Travers. He thought it better to leave Archie Glenthorne asleep. The only other two members of the marked ten were Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, and they boarded in the West House, and were out of reach.

Travers wasted no time in asking questions; he dressed like lightning and joined Nipper & Co. in their own dormitory by the time they were ready.

"The four of us will be enough," said Nipper crisply. "Handy and Church are 'out'; they'll sleep like logs for hours yet. We don't need Archie, and Pitt and Grey are too far off."

"I should imagine that McClure is also too far off," observed Travers. "I hate to be despondent, dear old fellow, but what can you possibly hope to do? You haven't forgotten that there's a pea-soup fog outside, have you?"

"Just what I was thinking," said Tommy Watson. "You can't see a yard in front of your face. If we go out we shall lose ourselves in two minutes. Looking for a needle in a haystack is child's play compared with—"

"Wait for me to explain," interrupted Nipper. "The priests of Taaz did not will Mac to go to them; they came for him themselves. And one of the beggars left this! I found it caught against the stop-catch on the window-ledge."

He exhibited a jagged piece of bluish cotton material, and he had no doubt that it had been torn from a robe worn by one of the yellow men.

"My gov'nor's great Alsatian will pick up the scent from this," went on Nipper. "Wolf is the chap for this job. There's not a bloodhound living with a scent like his."

In the flickering light of the blazing torches, showing weirdly through the fog, McClure stood on the edge of the Devil's Mire, and he knew that the great moment had come.

"Obey the will of Taaz," said Yeza tonelessly, as he pointed. "Walk, my son! Walk confidently and with courage, and you will find the true path. Walk with fear and you will stumble into the embrace of death."

Not for a moment longer did McClure hesitate. As though by magic his terror left him; and as he drew himself up his eyes were bold, and a cynical expression was on his face.

Since the first moment of his capture he had been bluffing his captors, for he had hoped that he might have a chance to escape. There was nothing of the coward in the make-up of this dour Scottish junior. For weeks, it was true, he had been in a state of tension, but the instant he knew that his hour had come, that Scottish blood of his was up.

"I don't know what you did with the other fellows, or how they obeyed your orders; but I'm not taking orders from you, or from Taaz, or from anybody else," he said deliberately. "You don't know this treacherous bog. I do. And I'm not going to walk into it to please a parcel of tricky, yellow-faced, idol-worshipping heathens!"

Yeza stood rigid for a second, and two of the other priests closed in. But before they could take any action McClure whipped a hand out of his pocket and flung it back.

"You're pretty good at throwing dust into people's faces," he shouted—"well, try this!"

There was nothing stupefying in the dust he flung into the faces of his enemies; it was, in fact, nothing but pepper, which he had carried in his pocket for days in readiness for some such emergency.

The effect was electrifying.

Yeza and the two priests with him suddenly doubled up, helpless. They screamed in their agony as the pepper burned into their eyes, completely blinding them for the

## Coming Soon

# WONDERFUL STORY OF THE CHRISTMAS ADVENTURES OF THE CHUMS OF ST. FRANK'S

*Watch Out For Further Details*

"He doesn't smell so bad after he's been washed," said Travers.

"You must have your joke!" said Nipper, with a smile. "Well, come on! I might tell you that Wolf has been barking—and it was his barking which woke me up. That proves he heard something, or sensed something. It's a chance, and we've got to take it. If it fails we might as well return to bed, for there's no other earthly way of getting on Mac's track."

They hastened downstairs, and Nipper made a sudden dash to his study, and he went to the cupboard and put something in his pocket. A moment later he had joined the others. They left the building, went down to the kennels, and found Wolf very wakeful. He whined eagerly when he heard Nipper's whisper, and he was intensely restless.

"Yes, old boy, there's some work for you at last," said Nipper, as he patted the hound's great head. "You've done jolly well already, Wolf. Here's your chance to cover yourself with glory; for if you pick up the scent and can follow it we shan't care two hoots for the fog."

"And all we've got to do is to follow," said Travers cheerfully. "The fog, instead of hindering us, will help us. We'll be able to close right up on those yellow beauties, and they won't even know we're near."

The juniors were almost trembling with excitement when they reached the spot in West Square immediately beneath the dormitory window. So much depended upon Wolf's ability to pick up the scent! All doubts were set at rest within ten seconds; for the great Alsatian, having sniffed eagerly at the fragment of cloth left behind by the raiders, put his nose to the ground, and, whining eagerly, strained at the leash.

"He's got it!" said Nipper breathlessly. "Come on, you chaps! Now for a most exciting hunt."

time being; they coughed and choked and spluttered, and to grab this tricky prisoner was impossible.

McClure was standing no nonsense. Like a hare he ran, knowing that he would be swallowed up in the fog within the space of seconds. He had outwitted the yellow men who were in his immediate vicinity; he was beyond reach of the others.

Beyond arms' reach—yes.

But Arnold McClure had reckoned without the cunning of his hosts. Even as he ran a swish sounded in the fog, and a coil of unseen rope came apparently from nowhere. It fell over him, was jerked tight, and he went crashing to the ground.

### In the Grip of the Mire!

SO sudden was the disaster, so unexpected, that McClure thought at first that he had tripped on an unseen root. But when he tried to struggle to his feet he found that his arms were pinned to his sides. Yellow men sprang upon him and held him. He glared his defiance.

"Well, you've got me!" he panted. "Tricky devils! I thought I had beaten you, too!"

His captors, who apparently could not understand English, remained silent. He was led back to the treacherous edge of the mire. Yeza by this time had partially recovered.

"Infidel dog!" he snarled, his malevolence terrible to see. "You have defied Taaz; you have spoken ill of the great Vulture God. Your reward shall be death!"

Mac stood upright, his shoulders squared, his face full of scornful contempt.

"Go ahead!" he said. "The odds are with you. Ten or twelve yellow brutes against one schoolboy! I can't stop you."

But that stout heart of his felt as though a cold hand had closed over it. He was at the mercy of his fanatical



Mr. E. S. Brooks welcomes letters from readers. Write to him c/o The Editor, The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HERE are the titles you asked me for, Lionel E. Lanyon (Melbourne). All these stories appeared in the Old Series of the Nelson Lee Library. No. 30, "The Mystery of Venice." No. 33, "Amazement Island." No. 37, "The House of Fear." No. 46, "The Last of the Genghis." No. 50, "The Great Club Raid." No. 51, "The Mystery of the Moor." No. 54, "The Mystery of the Mail Van." No. 56, "The Case of the Fatal Fight." No. 57, "Nelson Lee's Lady Assistant." No. 67, "The Crook." No. 549, "The Broken Spell." Sorry you have been kept waiting so long for these titles; but I really think that some of your earlier letters must have gone astray.

It would be possible, of course, for me to get out the junior football teams of Bannington Grammar School, St. Frank's, and the River House School, O. Parish (Dartford). But is it really necessary? In writing of a football match, say, between St. Frank's and the Grammarians, I do sometimes give the complete St. Frank's Eleven; but these

foes. The fog was as dense as ever, and Bannington Moor in every direction was a place of incredible desolation. Only this one spot, round about the Devil's Mire, was visible—and it looked a thousand times more foul than it actually was in the flickering, lurid ruddiness of the torches, as seen through the swirling fog.

The mire stretched practically to Mac's feet, and as he stood there on the patch of fairly firm peaty soil he shuddered, in spite of himself. Just a little way ahead of him tufts of rushes stood out from the quagmire, and here and there were little mounds of grassy earth where one might, with daring, leap. But some of the mounds were deceptive, for they would send the unwary adventurer slithering and sliding into the bog itself.

In answer to a call from Yeza, who was beside himself with fury and pain, four of the yellow men ranged themselves round the helpless McClure. One word was given, and then with a single accord the priests lifted Mac on high, and then sent him hurtling out into the Devil's Mire.

He fell feet first, and instantly he sank to his knees. By a tremendous effort he dragged one leg free, to the accompaniment of a dull gurgling. He struggled forward a pace or two, and the mire gripped him again. This time there was no escape; try as he would he could not get his legs free. It seemed as though an unseen monster was beneath the surface gripping his ankles, dragging him down. Breathing hard, he paused. The priests of Taz were standing on the edge of the safety zone beyond the bog; they were holding their torches aloft, watching—waiting for their victim to be dragged down to his fearful death.

Nipper's face, unseen in the darkness and fog, was almost grey.

His very flesh was creeping, for the thoughts which had come into his head were too horrible for expression. Wolf, never faltering, had brought the rescuers to the moorland road, and then, after following that desolate track for a long way, the great Alsatian had swerved off at a tangent, now taking the open moor itself, dodging and twisting between the gorse.

"You know where this takes us, I suppose?" murmured Travers, after a while.

"Heaven help poor old Mac!" said Nipper hoarsely. "Fog or no fog, I know where I am—just as you do, Travers."

"It's more than I know then!" said Tommy Watson bluntly. "We might go on for miles—"

"Not for miles," interrupted Nipper, his voice harsh. "We're going straight towards the deadliest bog in the South of England—known about here as the Devil's Mire!"

"Begd!!" breathed Tregellis-West. "That's right, old boy, it is, really! It's a frightfully good thing that old Handy and Church aren't with us. They're spared this fearful worry, at any rate."

really no need to give all the names in the opposing eleven, and if I did so it would only confuse the reader. So, you see, as the majority of these names are never mentioned in the stories, there's no need to give them here. I think I mentioned in a previous chat, in answer to some other reader, that Lionel Corcoran has left the school. The same applies to Stanley Waldo. That is why neither of them appear in the Names List.

Names List No. 17. Masters. Ancient House: Mr. Alington Wilkes, Housemaster; Mr. James Crowell, Remove Form; Professor Sylvester Tucker, Science. West House: Mr. Beverley Stokes, Housemaster; Mr. William Pagett, Fifth Form. Modern House: Mr. Arthur Stockdale, Housemaster; Mr. Robert Langton, Sixth Form; M. Honri Jaques Leblanc, French. East House: Mr. Barnaby Goole, Housemaster; Mr. Horace Pycraft, Fourth Form; Mr. Austin Suncliffe, Third Form. Of course, there are other masters at St. Frank's, but their names need not be given here as they have never figured prominently in the stories, if at all.

Very glad to hear from you again, Ralph Clarry (Toronto). I really thought that you had completely forgotten me. Yes, you are quite right about the old times. It's many a moon since I heard from those former stalwarts, Francis H. Burrow, Dora S. Cantor, Fred M. Oates, Ernest S. Holman, Reg. T. Staples—to mention only a few. I sometimes wonder if I shall hear from them again. If they are still reading my yarns I should like to have a word from them. Glad that you enjoyed my stories in the "Boys' Friend Library" so much.

E. S. B.

They pressed on. Wolf needed no urging. The scent was still strong, and he had no difficulty in following it. There was no danger for the schoolboys, for where the priests of Taz had gone, so could the Removites go. The fog hindered them not at all. It helped, in fact, for it concealed their movements.

Nipper was the first to notice an increasing eagerness in Wolf; the splendid hound was beginning to whine, too, and when Nipper felt his back, the fur was all ridged up, and every one of Wolf's limbs quivered.

"Easy now, you chaps!" whispered Nipper. "We're getting near. Wolf knows it, although he can't see."

"Look! There's a light ahead!" ejaculated Watson, with a gulp.

They could see it—a faint, yellowish haze in the fog. Yet, when they had advanced no more than ten feet farther, the light resolved itself into a great flaming torch, held by one of the men of Taz.

Nipper gripped Wolf as a warning, and whispered to the others. They crept on. They could see a strangely clear patch ahead—a kind of circle, ringed by men, standing here and there, holding the flaming torches. Nipper, at least, knew that they were almost on the edge of the Devil's Mire.

And out of the silence a voice came—steady, resolute, unafraid.

"Waiting to hear me cry out for mercy?" came McClure's defiant inquiry. "Well, you'll have to wait a long time! I'm sinking all right, but you'll not get the satisfaction of hearing me yelp. You yellow murderers! You think you're clever, but you'll all go to the gallows for this."

No reply came from the watching priests. Nipper and his companions were unseen in the fog—and Watson and Tregellis-West and Travers had never felt more helpless in their lives. For they knew that if they dashed forward to the rescue they would share the same fate as McClure. The Tibetans were armed with knives, and they outnumbered the schoolboys.

"Wait! There's a chance!" breathed Nipper. "I read something once, in a story. I came prepared—I fetched this out of my study before we left the school. Hold Wolf, Travers! Hold him tight!"

He took a bottle from his pocket, uncorked it, and poured something on his hands which seemed like a thin paste, and which glowed. In a moment, Nipper smeared the stuff all over the Alsatian's head and shoulders, and then over his body and legs. The effect was startling, for it seemed that Wolf had been turned into a devil-hound.

"What—what is it?" whispered Travers, between horror and amazement.

"A preparation of phosphorus—a kind of luminous paint I made last week, just for a lark," muttered Nipper. "But it might work. Now, Wolf! On, old boy—on! Fetch them!"

It was enough. Nipper snapped the leash free, and Wolf, with a mighty bay, bounded forward. He went loping towards the Devil's Mire, and at the sound of his bay the priests of Tanz stared in sudden astonishment. To them, the spectacle was, no doubt, terrifying. They saw a creature like a ghost hound bounding out of the fog.

Wild shouts arose on the night air, for the yellow men, superstitious to the core, could not understand this sudden apparition. They took it to be a very spectre of the night, and with one accord they flung their torches down and fled across the moor, the fog swallowing them up on the instant. The torches lay where they had fallen, still blazing.

"Wolf—Wolf!" shouted McClure urgently. In that instant hope came to him. Wolf would not have stayed but for that call; he was hurtling after the priests, ferociously intent upon bringing one of them down. But at Mac's call the great hound swerved and turned. The light from the dropped torches revealed Mac to him—sunken to his armpits in the mire.

"This way, Wolf!" gasped McClure. "Good dog!" It seemed that Wolf possessed almost human intelligence; with three mighty bounds he went from grass tuft to grass tuft and half plunging into the bog, he set his great teeth into the back of McClure's coat, which he could just reach, and dragged hard.

Then Nipper and the others came, now openly using their electric torches. Every step they took was perilous, but they did not hesitate; they sprang over the quivering ground, avoiding the worst danger spots. And thus, at last, they reached Wolf, and willing hands reached out, seized McClure by the shoulders, and dragged him from the gurgling, sucking mire.

The priests of Taaz did not return. Eventually the boys reached the moorland road again, and they went at the double towards St. Frank's—the very exercise being sufficient to set Mac into a warm glow.

"I thought it was all up with me, you chaps," he said, for the sixth time. "But I'm mighty grateful to you all and Wolf. But where's Handy and Churchy?"

"They're safe, but those yellow blighters put them to sleep," explained Nipper. "Good old Mac! You kept a stiff upper lip to the very end. Well, you're No. 9, and as far as you're concerned, it's all over."

"And you're No. 10," said McClure impressively. "The last one!"

(What will Nipper's ordeal be? See "THE SCARAB OF DREAD!"—next week's great yarn.)

UNDER SEALED ORDERS!

(Continued from page 22.)

"It's true, I tell you. Sir Richard's letter to Captain Crane contains instructions to take us with him to the West Coast of Africa. It was Sir Richard's wish and the Head's. I suppose you want to go—eh?"

"Well, rather!" "Bai Jove! Yaas! But—but this is a great surprise!" "Sir Richard must have arranged this with the Head, of course," said Tom Merry. "What a glorious run for us! We've been to America, but Africa—why, it's great!"

"But we shall want some clothes and things for tropical climates," said Blake. "Captain Crane is going to send on board a lot of things for us," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus rather excitedly. "I weally must go ashore and buy some clobber, deah boys."

"If you go ashore, my son, you go alone, and you'll lose the voyage," said Tom Merry.

"Wats! I shall put it straight to Captain Cwane when he comes on board."

Arthur Augustus did put it straight to Captain Crane when he came on board. The captain was rasping out orders, however, and unfortunately did not hear a word that Arthur Augustus was saying. By the time he listened to the swell of St. Jim's, the Opossum was well under way and gliding out to sea. And so Arthur Augustus had to make do with the clothes he had.

The juniors, in high spirits, watched the foam curling away behind the steamer in the deepening sunset. All of them looked forward to the voyage in wonderful spirits, and they little dreamed the sensation their sudden departure would cause at St. Jim's. As the Opossum glided on and the shadows of night sank upon the sea, St. Jim's seemed very far away indeed, and all the thoughts of Tom Merry & Co. were turned towards Africa.

THE END

(Next Wednesday: "THE ST. JIM'S EXPLORERS!"—telling of the thrilling adventures of Tom Merry & Co. in wildest Africa.)

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